



## International Security in a Globalized World: An Exploration of Critical Issues

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### Abstract

Since it took hold in the 1950s, the study of International Security (IS) has been at the heart of international relations studies. This paper emphasizes that it grapples with questions about war and peace, life and death, safety and survival. Traditionally its terrain has focused on concerns about the stability of the state system, the use of force, nuclear proliferation, military strategy, intelligence and the distribution of resources. Its content has expanded over the years. Today it covers a variety of interconnected issues in the world that affect survival. Concerns about climate change, migration, poverty, health, privatization, organized crime and international terrorism are also on the agenda. This paper introduces different ways of conceptualizing security in international relations.

**Keywords:** International Security; National Security, Security; Globalization; Bipolarity

### Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, observed that the developments in military technology of the first half of the twentieth century were rendering the state an anachronism: it could no longer assure the military security or economic well-being of its citizens. As a solution to this dilemma, suggested divorcing 'international security' from its association with national frontiers and national sovereignty: the achievement of what he called 'pooled' or 'common' security would require some kind of world security organization with a standing international force at its command. Carr proposed a system of overlapping and interlocking units appropriate for different purposes, a world organized along functional rather than national lines. National units, however, should be retained to satisfy people's need for identity which, he believed, represented the constructive side of nationalism [1].

Nationalism and After was written at the end of a major war, a time of heightened sensitivity to insecurity when the quest for new models for achieving international security is usually a major preoccupation. In many respects, Carr's vision was quite similar to contemporary 'common security' thinking, although Carr's world security organization involved more centralization of power than contemporary advocates of common security are willing to entertain. However, this

vision was soon to be lost as the onset of a superpower Cold War seemed to demand alliance-oriented, 'realist' prescriptions. Assessing the limitations of national security was postponed; collective security, a step on the road to Carr's world security organization, was dismissed as 'unrealistic' in a world of self-interested and power-seeking states. With the ascendancy of the realist paradigm in the post-war period came realist claims that it was the failure of utopian schemes for collective security and Western policy-makers' unwillingness adequately to pursue their national security interests in the 1930s which were responsible for the Second World War [2,3].

Students of international politics deal with some of the most profound questions it is possible to consider. Among the most important of these is whether international security is possible to achieve in the kind of world in which we live. For much of the intellectual history of the subject, a debate has raged about the causes of war. For some writers, especially historians, the causes of war are unique to each case. Other writers believe that it is possible to provide a wider, more generalized explanation. Some analysts, for example, see the causes lying in human nature, others in the outcome of the internal organization of states, and yet others in international anarchy. In a major work on the causes of war, Kenneth Waltz considers what he calls the three 'images' of war (man, the state and the international system) in terms of what thinkers have said about the origins of conflict throughout the history of Western civilization. Waltz himself put particular emphasis on the nature of international anarchy ('wars occur because there is nothing to stop them from occurring'), but he also recognizes that a comprehensive explanation requires an understanding of all three. In his words: 'The third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy, the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results [3].

### The Concept of Security

Most writers agree that security is a 'contested concept'. There is a consensus that it implies freedom from threats to core values (for both individuals and groups) but there is a major disagreement about whether the main focus of inquiry should be on 'individual', 'national', or 'international' security. For much of the Cold War period, most writing on the subject was dominated by the idea of national security, which was largely defined in militarized terms. The main area of interest for the both academics and states people tended to be on the military capabilities that their own states should develop to deal with the threats that faced them [4]. More recently, however, this idea of security has been criticized for being ethnocentric (culturally biased) and too narrowly defined. Instead, a number of contemporary writers have argued for an expanded conception of security outward from the limits of parochial national security to include a range of other considerations. Barry Buzan, in his study *People, States and Fear*, argued for a view of security which includes political, economic, societal, environmental as well as military aspects and which is also defined in broader international terms. Buzan's work raises interesting and important questions about whether national and international security considerations can be compatible and whether states, given the nature of the international system, are capable of thinking in more cooperative international and global terms [4,5].

At the same time, there are other writers on globalization who stress the transformation of the state (rather than its demise) and the new security agenda in the early years of the new century. In the aftermath of what has become known as '9/11' in September 2001 and the new era of violence which followed it, Jonathan Friedman argued that we are living in a world 'where polarization, both vertical and horizontal, both class and ethnic, has become rampant, and where violence has become more globalized and fragmented at the same time, and is no longer a question of wars between states but of sub-state conflicts, globally networked and financed, in which states have become one actor, increasingly privatized, amongst others. For many of those who feel like this, the post-September 11 era is a new and extremely dangerous period in world history. Whether the world is so different today from in the past is a matter of much contemporary discussion. In order to consider this issue we need to begin by looking at the way 'security' has been traditionally conceived [6].

### The Traditional Approach to National Security

From the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 onwards states have been regarded as by far the most powerful actors in the international system. They have been 'the universal standard of political legitimacy' with no higher authority to regulate their relations with each other. This has meant that security has been seen as the priority obligation of state governments. They have taken the view that there is no alternative but to seek their own protection in what has been described as a self-help world.

It is probably not coincidental that this re-analysis of security is taking place at the same time as a 'third debate' in international relations which is questioning the theoretical foundations of the field more generally. These critical perspectives are claiming that an understanding of security more appropriate for the contemporary world requires a fundamental rethinking of the framing assumptions of realist analysis: in a highly interdependent world facing multiple security threats, critics of realism claim that state-centric analysis, which focuses exclusively on the political/military dimensions of security, is no longer adequate [7].

According to this view, national security, or insecurity, is largely the result of the structure of the international system (this is why these writers are sometimes called 'structural realists'). The structure of anarchy is seen as being highly durable. The implication of this is that international politics in the future is likely to be as violent as international politics in the past. In an important article entitled 'Black to the Future' written in 1990, John Mearsheimer argued that the end of the Cold War was likely to usher in a return to the traditional multilateral balance of power politics of the past in which extreme nationalism and ethnic rivalries would lead to widespread instability and conflict. Mearsheimer viewed the Cold War as a period of peace and stability brought about by the bipolar structure of power which prevailed. With the collapse of this system, he argued that there would be a return to the kind of great power rivalries which had blighted international relations since the seventeenth century.

Performed a prospective randomized study using topical tetracycline post hernia repair, but this approach was also not effective in treating postoperative seroma compared with the control group.

### Expanding the Definitional Boundaries of National Security

The realist preoccupation with cross-border conflict and military power defined in terms of the interests and security of the great powers has come under a great deal of criticism from those who argue that its worldview is a poor fit with contemporary reality. The declining likelihood of war between the great powers as well as the erosion of the usefulness of military power as a factor in national security enhancement. Yet as Luard's study confirms, proponents of new security thinking who focus on the decline of military conflict run the risk of perpetuating the ethnocentrism that has long plagued the field of security studies. To applaud the absence of war among the great powers at the core of the system is to ignore approximately 127 significant wars that have occurred since 1945, all but two of them in the South [8].

### Re-Visioning Security

Realist re-visions of security offer two contrasting perspectives which parallel the state-centric and common security definitions outlined above. First, there are realists who are analyzing security in terms quite similar to the post-1945 era but adapted to the post-Cold War world. Assuming the state as a unitary actor, their definition of security prioritizes international order and stability to be achieved by a modified version of Pax Americana which includes co-operative collective security arrangements among the great powers. Acknowledging that US pre-eminence cannot last and that the US can no longer act alone, associates security with the re-creation of a concert of powers in the North: Northern states should also support attempts to create regional power balances in unstable areas of the South such as the Middle East. In similar terms propose a new version of collective security consisting of the major powers, similar to the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe. Defining security in terms of systemic stability, the Kupchans claim that universal collective security organizations are doomed to fail because they require an unacceptable loss of sovereignty and do not reflect power realities; one of the functions of the security group of the militarily powerful is to ensure that peripheral conflicts, examples of which are all taken from the South, are 'fenced off or resolved'. William Odom equates security with a new Pax Americana in which US military dominance in key strategic regions keeps the peace. He urges that US military forces increase their capabilities for rapid interventions in the South [9].

### The Difficulties of Cooperation between States

For most contemporary neo-realist writers there is little prospect of a significant change in the nature of security in the post-Cold War world. Pointing to the, the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and parts of the former Soviet Union, continuing violence in the Middle East, and the Iraq War in 2003, it is argued that we continue to live in a world of mistrust and constant security competition. Cooperation between states occurs, but it is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to sustain. There are two main factors, it is suggested, which continue to make cooperation difficult, even after the changes of 1989. The first is the prospect of cheating; the second is the concern which states have about what are called relative gains [10].

## The Opportunities for Cooperation Between States

One of the main characteristics of the neo-realist approach to international security is the belief that international institutions do not have a very important part to play in the prevention of war. Institutions are seen as being the product of state interests and the constraints which are imposed by the international system itself. It is these interests and constraints which shape the decisions on whether to cooperate or compete rather than the institutions to which they belong.

## Alternative Views on International Security

At one level, many Constructivists, like Alexander Wendt, share a number of the major realist assumptions about international politics. For example, some accept that states are the key referent in the study of international politics and international security; that international politics is anarchic; that states often have offensive capabilities; that states cannot be absolutely certain of the intentions of other states; that states have a fundamental wish to survive; and that states attempt to behave rationally. Some, such as Wendt, also see themselves as structuralists; that is to say they believe that the interests of individual states are in an important sense constructed by the structure of the international system [11].

## Critical Security Studies

Despite the differences between Constructivists and Realists about the relationship between ideas and material factors, they tend to agree on the central role of the state in debates about international security. There are other theorists, however, who believe that the state has been given too much prominence. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams have defined critical security studies in the following terms: 'Contemporary debates over the nature of security often float on a sea of unvoiced assumptions and deeper theoretical issues concerning to what and to whom the term security refers what most contributions to the debate thus share are two inter-related concerns: what security is and how we study it. What they also share is a wish to de-emphasize the role of the state and the need to re-conceptualize security in a different way. Critical security studies, however, includes a number of different approaches. These include critical theory, 'feminist' approaches and 'post-modernist' approaches.

## Global Society and International Security

The opportunity to pursue changes in the international system is shared by scholars who point to new trends that are already taking place in world politics. In the past, the state has been the centre of thinking about international relations. This state-centric view, however, is now increasingly challenged. Writers from the global society school of thought argue that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the process of globalization (which has been developing for centuries) has accelerated to the point where the clear outlines of a global society are now evident. The emergence of a global economic system, global communications, and the elements of a global culture have helped to provide a wide network of social relationships which transcend state frontiers and encompass people all over the world. This has to the growing obsolescence of territorial wars between the great powers. At the same time, so the argument goes, new risks associated with the environment, poverty, and weapons of mass destruction are facing humanity, just at a time when the nation-state is in crisis [11].

## The Continuing Tensions between National and International Security

At the centre of the contemporary debate about international security dealt with above is the issue of continuity and change. This involves questions about how the past is to be interpreted and whether international politics is in fact undergoing a dramatic change as a result of the processes of globalization, especially after 9/11. There is no doubt that national security is being challenged by the forces of globalization, some of which have a positive effect, bringing states into greater contact with each other. As Bretherton and Ponton have argued, the intensification of global connectedness associated with economic globalization, ecological interdependence, and the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction, means that 'co-operation between states is more than ever necessary. It has also been argued that the increased need for interdependence caused by globalization will help 'to facilitate dialogue at the elite level between states, providing significant gains for international security. At the same time, however, globalization also appears to be having negative effects on international security. It is often associated with fragmentation, rapid social change, increased economic inequality, and challenges to cultural identity which contribute to conflicts within, and between, states. This ambivalent effect of globalization, in turn, reinforces the search for national security, unilateralism, and pre-emptive strategies, and at the same time often leads other less powerful states to seek greater multilateral and global solutions as they are less able to provide security for their citizens.

## Discussion

The end of the Cold War has certainly brought new patterns of international security and insecurity. The major confrontations of the previous fifty years gave way initially to a period of cooperative security (albeit of a tentative nature) between the Cold War great power antagonists. The expansion of NATO and EU opened up the possibility of the development of a major new security community in Europe. The spread of democracy appeared to be the basis of a dynamic new emerging international order. At the same time, however, with the discipline of the Cold War gone, new security problems associated with clashes over identity (as in the former Yugoslavia), the search for regional dominance, and the disintegration of failed states (especially in Africa) all helped to undermine the prospects for a more peaceful world. The international system was increasingly unipolar, with America leading 'coalitions of the willing' in a number of campaigns to bring about a Western-inspired international order. The aim of bringing Western democracy to areas like the Middle East, however, has itself been a source of conflict. Nuclear proliferation is an increasing problem and US pre-eminence seems likely to be challenged in the years ahead by the rise of powers like China.

This is not to argue that there is no room for peaceful change or that new ideas and discourses about international relations are unimportant in helping to shape choices that have to be made. Opportunities to develop greater international security will always exist [12].

## Conclusion

The end of the Cold War, marked by the sudden collapse of one of the two superpowers and the continuing conflict in the peripheries of the international system, demands new frameworks for thinking about international security. Multiple threats that defy military solutions

have caused some neo-realists, as well as many of their critics, to search for a broader definition of security that encompasses not only freedom from physical violence but also the material well-being of individuals and the environmental health of the entire planet. While recognizing that the end of the Cold War does not necessarily signify a more peaceful world or a world where military issues will not continue to occupy the security agenda, those who argue for this broader definition do so on the grounds of heightened interdependence between these various security issues. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the growing militarization of certain regions of the South have highlighted the trade-off between the cost of sophisticated weapons of war, whose use is circumscribed by their potential for mass destruction, and the economic welfare of individuals. The Gulf War of 1991 demonstrated that modern warfare is also a serious threat to the ecosystem. For these reasons there is a growing sense among many contemporary scholars, and even some policy-makers, that preparing for war is becoming too costly and may actually detract from the achievement of national security: even those who continue to prioritize military issues often advocate collective rather than unilateral security arrangements.

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