

How Has the Nature of Security Changed In the 21st Century?

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to present a tour d’horizon of the shift from traditional, state-centric conceptions of security, to contemporary conceptions which emphasise the aspect of ‘human security’. This essay argues that although contemporary security issues have undoubtedly widened the conceptual scope of security and how we study it - traditional security threats, relating to hard power are still very much alive and well in the twenty-first century. This essay proceeds as follows. First, the paper examines the ‘definitions and redefinitions’ (Fierke, 2015, p.15) of security since the Cold War period. The second section examines the analytical utility of ‘human security’ as a concept for academic research and policymaking. The final section then examines the impact of 9/11 and the challenges of dealing with contemporary insecurities in a highly globalized world.

Definitions and Redefinitions

In order to understand how the ‘nature’ of security has changed in the twenty-first century, one must first reconcile what ‘security’ actually is. The first section dedicates a lot of time to the theoretical conceptions of security and the subsequent schools of thought that follows. Being able to map out this ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956) will help situate the contemporary insecurities facing states in the latter half on the essay. Smith in his analysis of security studies claimed “security is a genuinely contested concept” (Smith 1999, p.96). The phrase ‘essentially contest concept’ refers to a “concept that generates debates that cannot be resolved by reference to empirical evidence because the concept contains a clear ideological or moral element and defies, precise, generally accepted definition” (Fierke, 2015, p.34).

The study of security was previously limited to the domain of ‘strategic studies’, a subdiscipline of international relations. Stephen Walt, reviewing the field in the 1990’s,

defined security studies as the “study of threat, use and control of military force” (Walt, 1991, p.212). Schulz echoed similar sentiments, outlining that the traditional conception of security is concerned with the threat, use and management of military force (Schulz et al., 1993, p.2). Essentially, a prioritisation is placed on military means and its ability to acquire security by and for the state (Crawford, 1991, p.286). This realist, state-centric epistemology maintains that, “the state is both the object of security and the ultimate provider of security” (Burgess and Grans, 2012, p.89). Placing strategic studies within the context of the Cold War helps to explain why its focus of security was so narrow. Although the likes of Quincy Wright and his *Study of War* (Wright, 1942) began to explore the broader meanings to security, such conceptions of security were marginalised as a result of the growing tensions between the US and the USSR. The growing possibility of a major conflict between the US and the Soviet Union narrowed strategic studies’ focus to nuclear weapons and the threat of global nuclear war. According to Snyder,

Strategic studies flourished in this period because nuclear deterrence was, by its very nature theoretical rather than practical. The major questions raised at this time were arms control and limited war. As a result, the Cold War security agenda was conceptualized through the concept of deterrence. The complexity of the rivalry between the two ideologically based blocs was simplified to questions of alliance management and nuclear stability (Snyder, 2012, p.7).

This focus on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) being used as a policy instrument, emphasised the military tools, and subsequently the military aspect of national security’ at the expense of other historical, cultural and political aspects (Baldwin, 1995, p.123). The Cold War affected the research of strategic studies in the sense that it focused “attention away from the broader questions of how security policy fits into larger foreign policy goals and toward technical and theoretical aspects of nuclear weapons and strategies” (Snyder, 2012, p.8).

The end of the Cold War saw a radical undermining of strategic studies' "clarity of purpose and unity of intellectual endeavour" (Dannruether, 2007, p.1). Uncharacteristic of security studies, there is near consensus within the field as to the implications of the end of the Cold War. Of which, three implications can be identified. First, the role of military power was scrutinised (Snyder, 2012, p.9). The collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsequent military power, called into question the "strategic centrality of the militarized and nuclearized bipolar confrontation" (Dannruether, 2007, p.1). Traditional strategic scholars had no choice but to cede to the wider political and economic context of force within the international system. Secondly, "there was a need to 're-examine' the way in which we thought about security" (Snyder, 2012, p.9). Similar to the first point on the diminution of military power - the failure of strategic studies in predicting the end of the Cold War highlighted the changing security environment and strategic studies conceptual inability to grasp it. This leads to the final implication that the end of the Cold War had on security studies and relates to the ontological meaning of security. While state-centric military threats were by no means eliminated, "a shift from 'strategic' to 'security' studies and from 'national' to 'international' studies" were underway (Freedman, 1998, p.52). For some, "this meant expanding the definition to include the effect of domestic issues of the national security agenda and for others it meant treating non-military threats to the national well-being as security threats (Snyder, 2012, p.9). These new emerging threats included terrorism, climate change and more broadly the idea of 'human security' (Baldwin, 1995, p.118).

Security studies scholarship since the post-Cold War period witnessed a proliferation in literature seeking to question this 'traditional' understanding. The result of which being that the subject matter of security studies has said to have undergone a process of 'broadening' and 'deepening' (Krause and Williams, 1996; Wyn Jones, 1999).

'Broadening' refers to the consideration of non-military security threats as mentioned above such as environmental scarcity and degradation, overpopulation terrorism (Brown et al., 1995; Ullmann, 1983, pp.129-153). 'Deepening' refers to the shift in the field which place the 'individual' as the referent object of security, not the state (Buzan, Waever, Wilder, 2003; Kaldour, 2000). The term security was 'pried' from the grips of military and strategic studies "and appended to a number of modifier that suggested a more inclusive, less violent politics: human, environmental, societal, water and critical security" (Mutimer, 2015, p.69). This break off of security studies from strategic studies in the early post-Cold War period, led to the development of literature which can be broadly categorised under the rubric of 'Critical Security Studies' (Mutimer, 2015, p.67). Critical Security Studies (CSS) rather than examines 'what is security', seeks to break down security into two parts: "*whose* security is at issue and *how* is the referent object to be secured?" (Mutimer, 2012, p.45). Mutimer's survey of the CSS literature suggests CSS can be broken into four camps: social construction, securitization, Critical Security Theory (capitalized), and post-structural security studies" (Mutimer, 2012, p.66). Mutimer acknowledges that some of the camps would not accept the CSS label. He does so because they respond to the same set of questions: *whose* security is at issue and *how* is the referent to be secured?

The first body of scholarship was borne out of the theoretical tradition of constructivism in IR. It outlines "a research agenda on the construction of threats, referent objects and the transformation of the security environment (Mutimer, 2012, p.67). The seminal example from this body of literature would be *Critical Security Studies* (Krause and Williams, 1997), which follows closely the path outlined above.

The second body of scholarship Mutimer refers to is 'securitization studies'. Securitization studies grew out of the Copenhagen school, a school of academic thought in IR. Notable scholars associated with this label include Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilder – incidentally, a primary book of the Copenhagen school is, *Security: A new Framework for Analysis* (Buzan, Waever and de Wilder, 1998). Securitization studies "explores the ways and consequences of the securitization and de-securitization of parts of global political life" (Mutimer, 2012, p.67). Securitization studies is included within this taxonomy because they respond to the same set of questions as CSS, which were: *whose* security is at issue and *how* is the referent to be secured? Proponents of securitization claim differentiation from the banner of CSS however. In Buzan and Wilders own words,

An emerging school of "critical security studies", (CSS) wants to challenge conventional security studies by applying postpositivist perspectives, such as critical theory and poststructuralism (Krause and Williams 1996, 1997). Much of its work, like ours, deals with the social construction of security (cl. also Klein 1994; Campbell 1993), but CSS mostly has the intent (known from poststructuralism as well as from constructivism in international relation[^] of showing that change is possible because things are socially constituted. We, in contrast, believe even the socially constituted is often sedimented as structure and becomes so relatively stable as practice that one must do analysis also on the basis that it continues (Buzan and Wilder, 2012, pp.34-35).

Ken Booth and his colleagues from the Aberystwyth school form the third body of literature. The 'Welsh School' (Smith, 2005), also "distinguishes itself from the constructivism of Krause and Williams and securitization studies, but claims the critical security label for its work" (Mutimer, 2012, p.67). Ken Booth set out to establish a narrower conception of the work by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. *Theory of World Security* (Booth, 2007), is Booth's attempt to set out a singular critical theory.

The final body of work "that is generally captured by the critical security moniker is that informed by an eclectic body of literature generally termed 'post-structuralist'" (Mutimer, 2012, p.68). Post-structural writing, inspired by the likes of Michel Foucault's

work on biopolitics has become very influential and widespread following the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent US war on terror. The “ethics and politics of security that flow from post-structural thinking are never finished, and so the work challenges us never to cease asking the central questions of security, and of politics”

Human Security

In line with the theoretical developments of security studies in the 1990's, the concept of 'human security' emerged, primarily concerned with developing a “fuller and more adequate accounting for human well-being and economic development under the umbrella of security studies” (Burgess, Grans, 2012, p.89). Today the most widely cited and considered ‘most authoritative’ definition of human security is the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR, 1994, p.22)

“The concept of security must thus change urgently in two basic ways: From an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security. From security through armaments to security through sustainable human development. The list of threats to human security can be considered under seven main categories: (1) Economic security; (2) Food security; (3) Health security; (4) Environmental security; (5) Personal security; (6) Community security; (7) Political security” (UNHDR, 1994, p.22).

Although certain countries have offered ‘customised’ or restricted formulations of the UNHDR's definition, by and large the “slightly narrower conceptualization of human security is [still] sweeping and open-ended” (Paris, 2001, p.91). Paris (2001) presents a damning case against the ambiguity of human security. He claims the ambiguity in fact serves a purpose. It permits a fractious coalition of actors “an opportunity to capture some of the more substantial political interest and superior financial resources” associated with the traditional military conceptions of security (Paris, 2001, p.95; King and Murray, 1998, p.4). This reasoning is congruous with what critical security scholars refer to as the ‘politicization’ of security at the end of the Cold War (Fierke, 2012, p.34).

The problem is, “not everything can be a matter of national security, with all of the urgency that this term implies” (Paris, 2001, p.92). From a practical stand point, human security is “too broad and vague a concept to be meaningful for policymakers, as it has come to entail such a wide range of different threats on one hand, while prescribing a diverse and sometimes incompatible set of policy solutions to resolve them on the other” (Owens and Arneil, 1999, p.2). This is not to say that ‘human security’ is beyond disrepute, far from it. Paris makes a wise suggestion that ‘human security’ could serve a useful taxonomical role in labelling “a broad category of research in the field of security studies that is primarily concerned with nonmilitary threats to the safety of societies, groups, and individuals, in contrast to more traditional approaches to security studies that focus on protecting states from external threat” (Paris, 2001, p.97). Although the boundaries of the quadrants are not absolute (Paris, 2001, p.101) the matrix produced by Paris, allows not only the field to be mapped in a manner which differentiates between traditional and non-traditional approaches to security studies, but also between the non-traditional (CSS) approaches themselves.

Figure 1. A Matrix of Security Studies

		<i>What is the Source of the Security Threat?</i>	
		Military	Military, Nonmilitary, or Both
Security for Whom?	States	<u>Cell 1</u> National Security (conventional realist approach to security studies)	<u>Cell 2</u> Redefined security (e.g., environmental and economic security)
	Societies, Groups and Individuals	<u>Cell 3</u> Interstate security (e.g., civil war, ethnic conflict, and democide)	<u>Cell 4</u> Human security (e.g. environmental and economic threats to the survival of societies, groups, and individuals)

Source: (Paris, 2001, p.98)

Having outlined the changing 'nature' of security studies since the Cold War period, the final section looks to contemporary insecurities facing states in the twenty-first century. In line with Paris' matrix, and understanding the quadrants are not absolute, the final section is seeks to explicate the security challenges in line with Cell 1 and Cell 2.

Seeking Security In An Insecure World

This Final section seeks to move away from the theoretical debates to an examination of the contemporary insecurities that state have faced since the end of the Cold Period till today. Two distinct features characterise the understandings of contemporary insecurities; they surpass the boundaries of the nation state, and they are interlinked through the process of globalization. Before examining the effects of globalisation, this essay turns to one of, if not, the most pivotal moment in twenty-first century security – the events of September 11th, 2001.

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan

This final section deals with the exacerbation of contemporary insecurity due to globalization. It was previously mentioned how by the turn of the twenty-first century, the world was becoming increasingly interdependent. Naturally it follows that as states become more interdependent, issues that were affecting one state could now plausibly affect another. A large part of this can be attributed to the phenomenon of globalization.

Using Heywood's (1997) definition, globalization is...

“...a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decision that are made, at a great distance from us. The central feature of globalisation is therefore that geographical distance is of declining relevance, and that territorial boundaries, such as those between nation-states, are becoming less significant” (Heywood, 1997, p.14).

Heywood's definitions does a good job of highlighting globalizations ability to increase the permeability of state borders. However recent, highly publicised ongoing territorial

disputes within the South China sea as well as the Crisis in Ukraine, somewhat blunts Heywood's observation that territorial boundaries between states are become less important. While globalization has exacerbated contemporary issues, traditional security issues, specifically relating to territorial sovereignty, are still alive and well in the twenty-first century. None the less, the phenomena of globalization in the twenty-first century has had sizeable effects on the 'nature' of security.

Among traditional security threats, new emergent threats such as environmental security (Dyer, 2001), energy security (Nuttal, 2008) and cybersecurity (Eriksson & Giacomello, 2006) become increasingly important security challenges, which require multilateral responses.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to demonstrate the changing nature of security since the Cold War period till present day. Changes in our theoretical understandings of security, compounded by changes in the international environment have expanded our understanding of the nature of security. This essay also sought to show that in the twenty-first century, the pivotal events of 9/11 significantly changed the context for terrorism, international intervention, and international security more generally. From a 'human security' standpoint, the increasing technological advancements exacerbated by the phenomena of globalisation have only sought to place increasing importance on issues such as transnational crime, environmental degradation and terrorism. The nature of security can be said to have changed in the sense that additional contemporary security challenges have been added to traditional security threats. Ultimately, whether it be state or individual - everyone is still seeking security within an inherently insecure world.

Bibliography

- Baldwin, D. A. (1995). Security Studies and the end of the Cold War. *World Politics*, 48(1), 117–141. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1995.0001>
- Baldwin, D. A. (1997). The concept of security. *Review of International Studies*, 23(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210597000053>
- Booth, K. (1991). Security and emancipation. *Review of International Studies*, 17(4), 313–326. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210500112033>
- Booth, K. (2007). *Theory of world security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boyle, M. (2012). Terrorism and Insurgency. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (pp. 241–264). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, M. E., Lynn-Jones, S. M., & Miller, S. E. (1995). *The perils of anarchy : contemporary realism and international security*. Mit Press.
- Burgess, P., & Grans, J. (2012). Human Security. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (pp. 89–103). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burke, A. (2001). Caught between National and Human Security: Knowledge and Power in Post-crisis Asia. *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change*, 13(3), 215–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13239100120082693>
- Buzan, Barry (2007) *People, states and fear: an agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era*. ECPR classics. (2nd). ECPR Press, Colchester. ISBN 9780745007199
- Buzan, B., Ole Waever, & Jaap De Wilde. (1998). *Security a new framework for analysis*. Boulder, Colo. Lynne Rienner.
- Camilleri, J. A. (2001). GLOBALIZATION OF INSECURITY: THE DEMOCRATIC IMPERATIVE. *International Journal on World Peace*, 18(4), 3–36. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20753327>

- Christie, R. (2010). Critical Voices and Human Security: To Endure, To Engage or To Critique? *Security Dialogue*, 41(2), 169–190.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010610361891>
- Coldicott, D., & O'Brien, T. (2012). Environmental Security. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (pp. 72–88). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crawford, N. C. (1991). Once and Future Security Studies. *Security Studies*, 1(2), 283–316.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419109347469>
- Dannreuther, R. (2007). *International security : the contemporary agenda*. Cambridge Polity Press.
- Dyer, H. (2001). Environmental security and international relations: the case for enclosure. *Review of International Studies*, 27(03). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210501004417>
- Eriksson, J., & Giacomello, G. (2006). The Information Revolution, Security, and International Relations: (IR)relevant Theory? *International Political Science Review*, 27(3), 221–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512106064462>
- Fierke, K. M. (2015). *Critical approaches to international security*. Polity.
- Freedman, L. (1998). International Security: Changing Targets. *Foreign Policy*, 110, 48.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1149276>
- Gallie, W. B. (1956). *Essentially contested concepts*. Aristotelian Society.
- Geoffrey, T. (2012). The Evolution of Strategy and the New World Order. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security Studies* (pp. 147–174). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grabosky, P. (2007). Security in the 21st Century. *Security Journal*, 20(1), 9–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.sj.8350036>
- Heywood, P. (1997). Political Corruption: Problems and Perspectives. *Political Studies*, 45(3), 417–435. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00089>

- Kaldor, M. (2000). Europe at the Millennium. *Politics*, 20(2), 55–62.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00112>
- King, G., & Murray, C. J. L. (2001). Rethinking Human Security. *Political Science Quarterly*, 116(4), 585–610. <https://doi.org/10.2307/798222>
- Krause, K., & Williams, M. C. (1996). Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods. *Mershon International Studies Review*, 40(2), 229.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/222776>
- Krause, K., & Williams, M. C. (1997). *Critical security studies : concepts and strategies*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mathews, J. T. (1989). Redefining Security. *Foreign Affairs*, 68(2), 162.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20043906>
- Mutimer, D. (2012). Beyond Strategy: Critical Thinking on the New Security Studies. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (pp. 45–71). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Newman, E. (2010). Critical human security studies. *Review of International Studies*, 36(1), 77–94. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40588105>
- Nunes, J. (2012). Reclaiming the political: Emancipation and critique in security studies. *Security Dialogue*, 43(4), 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010612450747>
- Owens, H., & Arneil, B. (1999). The human security paradigm shift: A new lens on Canadian foreign policy? *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 7(1), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.1999.9673195>
- Paris, R. (2001). Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air? *International Security*, 26(2), 87–102. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092123>
- Quincy Wright. (1942). *A Study of war*. The University Of Chicago Press.
- Richard Wyn Jones. (1999). *Security, strategy, and critical theory*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Smith, S. (1999). The increasing insecurity of security studies: Conceptualizing security in the last twenty years. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 20(3), 72–101.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13523269908404231>

Snyder, C. A. (2012). Contemporary Security and Strategy. In C. A. Snyder (Ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (pp. 1–15). Palgrave Macmillan.

Walt, S. M. (1991). The Renaissance of Security Studies. *International Studies Quarterly*,

35(2), 211. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600471>