THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY: 
The Pros and Cons of Expansion and Contraction

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‘When I use a word’, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less’. ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that's all’. (Lewis Carroll: *Through the Looking Glass*)

I. SECURITY IN THE INTER-DISCIPLINARY BATTLE

Until fairly recently, the term ‘security’ was almost monopolized by the academic discipline of International Relations (IR). IR theorists employed it in a rather narrow sense which happened to correspond to the way politicians tended to use the word, i.e. as almost synonymous with military power. The more military power, or rather the more favourable the military balance, the more security.

Surprisingly little was, however, written about security by the IR theoreticians, in the works of whom ‘national interest’ and/or ‘power’ were preferred, sometimes as alleged synonyms of security. In his seminal work on Realism, Hans Morgenthau thus hardly bothered to define ‘security’. Arnold Wolfers was one of the few who ventured a definition of the term:

‘security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.’

In contrast to IR, peace research in general, and Johan Galtung in particular, have for decades endeavoured to develop meaningful conceptions of peace, security and violence. Both Galtung's term ‘positive peace’ and the late Kenneth Boulding’s ‘stable peace’ could thus be seen as precursors of the emerging, expanded security concept. For ‘security’ to be meaningful and durable, it would have to amount to a positive or stable peace structure. This would imply considerably more than negative peace equated with an absence of war, as merely one particular form of ‘direct violence’. Genuine peace and security would presuppose an elimination of, or at least a reduction of, ‘structural violence’, i.e. the relative deprivation of large parts of the world population.

Belatedly, members of the IR community have come to accept the challenge of developing broader conceptions of security, with Barry Buzan and his collaborators at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, COPRI (but not the present author) belonging to theoretical vanguard by virtue of their analyses of national and ‘societal’ security. However, while acknowledging the need for shifting the focus from the (now defunct) East-West conflict and military matters, most members of the ‘strategic studies’ (now often re-labelled ‘security studies’) community continue to fight a rearguard battle against what they regard as an inappropriate expansion of the concept of ‘security’. Even though a consensus thus seems to be emerging on the need for a certain widening, disagreement persists about where to draw the line.

As will be argued in the following (and in line with Humpty Dumpty's linguistic philosophy) there is no ‘correct’ answer to questions such as this. It is a matter of definitions,
which may be more or less useful or relevant, but neither right nor wrong. To expand the notion of security too far—say, to include the absence of all types of problems—would not be practical, since it would merely create the need for an additional term for ‘traditional security’, now relegated to being merely one species of the genus ‘security’. Not to widen the concept at all might, on the other hand, relegate ‘security studies’ to a very marginalized position, if (as seems likely) traditional security problems will be perceived as having a sharply diminishing salience.

Moreover, constructivists are probably right in rejecting as futile the quest for concepts that are ‘correct’ in the sense of corresponding to reality, if only because this ‘reality’ is itself socially constructed, *inter alia* by means of concepts such as ‘peace’ and ‘security’. What the analyst, who is part of the game himself, can do is to analyze how concepts are used, and how the security discourse is evolving. As argued by Ole Wæver and others to thus analyze the entire security discourse as a complex ‘speech act’ challenges the analyst to explore the ‘securitization’ of issues, which may have political implications. Among other advantages, this approach induces caution with regard to elevating too many problems to the status of ‘security problems’. In the political discourse, to call something a ‘security problem’ may be (ab)used for a ‘tabooization’ of issues and marginalization of ideological opponents. To label something as important to national security is often almost tantamount to declaring it ‘off limits’, i.e. not a legitimate subject for political or academic debate. Hence, a relevant political goal might be a ‘de-securitization’ of pertinent issues, which may allow for a more open and fruitful debate.

**II. THE NARROW CONCEPT OF SECURITY AND ITS EXTENSIONS**

What characterized the traditional IR approach to ‘security’, especially during the era of almost unchallenged dominance of Realism, was the focus on the state as the referent object of security. Even though the preferred term was ‘national’ security, this was thus a misnomer when applied globally and only appropriate in those exceptional cases where nation and state happened to be (almost) coterminous.

What the Realists were really referring to was the security of the territorial (rather than nation-) state, which was indeed the principal actor in their ‘Westphalian’ universe. It was presumed (if only ‘for the sake of the argument’) to be both universal and perennial, when in fact it was neither. This international system was supposed by anarchic and to consist of sovereign states, each pursuing its ‘national’ interest, ‘defined in terms of power’ or, somewhat more modestly, in terms of security in the sense of survival. Furthermore, this universe was characterized by strife, since the aforementioned national interests inevitably collided, hence the pervasiveness of competition, conflict and war. Since states were thus inherently insecure, they were well advised to make sure their power would suffice to parry threats from other states to their sovereignty. As far as the system as such was concerned, the best safeguard of peace would presumably be a ‘balance of power’. As such balance is difficult to define and well nigh impossible to achieve or preserve, the system had an inherent propensity of for a competitive
arms build-up without any natural saturation point. To the extent that ‘balance’ was believed to be unattainable, nuclear deterrence was believed to serve as an equalizer, capable of providing a balance of sorts.

As became increasingly obvious, this was not merely a very bleak (and probably incorrect) view of the world, but also one that pointed to a strategy that might all too easily become counterproductive. At the end of the day, nobody (except the military-industrial complex) benefitted from the armaments dynamics, but everybody suffered: in their role as taxpayers ordinary people suffered under the burden of military expenditures, and in their role as citizens they had to live under an ever-present (yet non-quantifiable) risk of nuclear holocaust.

As a predictable reaction, a partial innovation occurred in the early 1980s, connected with the term ‘Common Security’. The term was coined by Egon Bahr, and promulgated in the Palme Commission's 1982 report *Common Security. A Blueprint for Survival*. Its main message (besides a number of concrete recommendations for arms control measures and the like) was that security under conditions of anarchy and high levels of armaments required ‘mutual restraint and proper appreciation of the realities of the nuclear age’, in the absence of which ‘the pursuit of security can cause intensified competition and more tense political relations and, at the end of the day, a reduction in security for all concerned’.

Furthermore, ‘the security—even the existence—of the world [was acknowledged as] interdependent’, hence the admonition that ‘security can be attained only by common action’. Common Security was thus envisaged as a way of solving (or perhaps better: circumventing or transcending) the well-known ‘security dilemma’, about which so much has been written by IR scholars, not least by Realists.

The growing number of references to Common Security (occasionally called ‘security partnership’, ‘mutual security’, ‘reciprocal security’ or ‘cooperative security’) in political statements as well as in the academic literature was, unfortunately, not matched by any rigorous theoretical analysis of the implications of the concept. Some (including the present author) advocated a rather ‘austere’ concept of Common Security, tantamount to little more than what might be called a ‘mutual restraint imperative’, presupposing neither an abandonment of competition or conflict in favour of cooperation (desirable though this might be), nor any institutionalization or codification. Thus conceived, Common Security would be little more than an special instance of ‘cooperation between adversaries’, i.e. a form of ‘regime’, entirely compatible with the teachings of both ‘soft Realism’, ‘liberal institutionalism’, and the so-called ‘English School's’ notions of ‘international society’.

Thus conceived, ‘Common Security’ does not automatically entail any broader notion of security, but may signify little more than the same type of security, only to be achieved by other, less confrontational means. The state remains the referent object of security and the focus remains on threats from other states, including (or perhaps even primarily) military threats, against which military counters continue to be deemed warranted. The associated concept of ‘non-offensive defence’ (NOD) may thus best be understood as a military strategy intended as a functional substitute for prevailing military strategies, only without their negative repercussions.
It is intended as an instrument for states acting within an international system resembling that of the Realists: dominated by territorial states which are presumed to be pursuing their national interests within an anarchic setting and in (at least latent) conflict with each other. By abstaining from offensive capabilities, however, the security dilemma may presumably be evaded and, as a longer-term perspective, transcended. War might thus eventually become inconceivable, thus also rendering NOD obsolete, along with all other military strategies. xxii

Other Common Security proponents, however—among whom most of the staff of Egon Bahr’s peace research institute in Hamburg—have sought to subsume a very broad panoply of proposals under Common Security as an ‘umbrella concept’ encompassing collective security, disarmament, and the like, and being almost tantamount to a virtual denial of international conflict. Such advocacies have typically also emphasized the need for broader concepts of security, which should include e.g. Third World development, ecological security, etc. Laudable though such endeavours may be in principle, only little has been accomplished so far in terms of rigorous theoretical analysis xxiii.

Another extension of the traditional concept of security, which has been around for decades, yet seems to be attracting growing attention in the post-Cold War era, is that of ‘Collective Security’ which is both more and less radical than (some versions of) CS. Less radical in the sense of being conceived of as a counter to the traditional state-versus-state military threats, yet more radical by envisaging a transfer of powers from the state to international authorities, i.e. a partial relinquishment of sovereignty. Whereas collective security was until recently dismissed as irrelevant by most of the IR community (because of its poor achievement in the inter-war years) xxiv, it has been taken increasingly seriously in the post-Cold War era xxv.

Moreover, to the extent that United Nations forces (or those of other international organizations, say the OSCE) are not ‘merely’ employed for restoring peace between states, but also within states, or for safeguarding human rights there, they might point towards a new international system: a ‘new world order’ that is no longer based on sovereign states with impermeable borders, but a truly global one in which ‘international politics’ is superceded by ‘domestic politics of a global scale’ (‘Weltinnenpolitik’). xxvi However, it remains to be seen whether the isolated instances of ‘humanitarian interventions’ the world has seen so far are in fact harbingers of such a new order, or merely aberrations from ‘business as usual’ attributable to the confusion of the present transitional period. In either case, however, the theoretical implications are being analyzed extensively within the IR, peace research and strategic studies communities xxvii. To the extent that such interventions can be legitimized as promoting security, it is surely no longer the security of the state, but of some other entity, which leads us directly to the next question:
III. WHOSE SECURITY?

A central premise for the question whether or not to expand the notion of security is whose security one is talking about, i.e. the referent object of security.

Some confusion arises from the fact that ‘security’ is both a *terminus technicus* of the academic discipline of IR as well as other academic disciplines, and a word in common usage. Whereas in the latter field it is regarded as natural that people, i.e. individuals, are either secure or insecure, the dominant brand of IR theory, i.e. Realism, has neglected this dimension and treated the state as the only appropriate referent object of security. The State, however, is an entity *sui generis*, which is often either portrayed as endowed with certain almost metaphysical characteristics or personified, i.e. treated as if it were an individual ‘writ large’xxviii. Neither the interests nor the will of the State are thus reducible to those of its citizens, but likewise *sui generis*. The State's security is, in the final analysis, only definable in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity.xxiv

This state-centred approach has been charged with neglecting the people, i.e. individual security, which is basically about well-being and, in the last analysis, survival. Thus conceived individual security may indeed be placed in jeopardy by an unrestrained quest for state security, say if the latter should involve war. Hence, for instance, the uncomfortable ‘Red or dead’ dilemma that haunted NATO (and especially Germany) for decades: should one sacrifice the survival of the population for such intangible values as sovereignty? Furthermore, is it ethically justifiable to kill other individuals for the sake of state interests, as would have been the implication of a breakdown of deterrence? According to a ‘cosmopolitan’ ethicsxxx, what really matters is the survival and well-being of the individuals, e.g. as the utilitarians formulated it: ‘the greatest happiness principle’xxxi. This may of course be compatible with, but only rarely presupposes, a defence of sovereignty. Moreover, for principled proponents of this view, state security can merely be a relevant goal to the extent that the state derives its powers from *la volonté générale*. If and when it ceases to represent the interests of its citizens, say when state security places individual security in jeopardy, the latter takes precedencexxxii.

Whereas Realists and neorealists would tend to deny the importance of individual security, some of them would go as far as to acknowledge the relevance of an intermediary level, namely that of collectivities, such as ethnic groups or nations, even when they are not coterminous with the state. Hence the notion of ‘societal security’, more on which in due course. Suffice it at this point to mention that it is about ‘identity’.

Whether to limit ‘security’ to the state level, or extend the term to the individual and/or societal level is a matter of arbitrary definition. Neither is more correct than the other, even though one definition may be more useful than others. In the following, I shall regard the three levels as equally important, but above all separate in the sense that neither can be reduced to the othersxxxiii.
IV. Dimensions of Security

In what follows I shall attempt a survey of various ‘dimensions’ of security in the wider sense, namely political, economic, societal, and environmental or ecological security, whilst bypassing the military dimension dealt with above. As will become apparent, the various threats listed under these heading do not apply (at least not to the same extent) to the three levels. As the concluding section will show, however, all of them are included in the new political discourse on security.

A. The Political Dimension

The political dimension of security has several different aspects, some of which concern the relationship between the state and ‘its’ citizens, while others have to do with the political aspects of international relations.

Even though the state was presumably ‘created’ for the sake of its citizens’ security, it can also constitute a threat to their security. In Hitler's Germany or Pol Pot's Kampuchea, the life of man was certainly at least as ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’ as it was in the proverbial ‘state of nature’ before the erection of any state structures.xxxiv Too strong and oppressive ‘Leviathans’ may thus constitute security threats in their own right, as acknowledged by at least some IR writers, even by some of the Realist or neo-realist persuasion.xxxv

The main security problem today may, however, not be an excess but a deficit of strength. Most states in the Third World are thus ‘weak states’ in which there is a ‘dissonance between the loci of authority and power’ (Mohammed Ayoob), and where society and state boundaries are far from coterminous, inter alia as a reflection of the colonial legacy. Hence the lack of legitimacy of the state and regime and the perpetual struggle for control of the state apparatus and for autonomy or cessation—xxxvi—a struggle which all too often assumes violent forms. The resultant armed conflicts may already be the most prevalent form of war (say, measured in terms of numbers of violent deaths) and will most likely become so in the coming years, where ‘Hobbesian wars’ (‘bellum omnium contra omnes’) may almost supercede the ‘Clausewitzian wars’ fought by states against other states.xxxvii
As far as the interstate level is concerned, it has long been claimed by proponents of a traditional approach to security that the security problem is neither about weapons nor about military matters at all. This claim has, more often than not, been used as an attempted rebuttal of the critics of nuclear deterrence. However, even though the claim is of course correct, it does not follow that weapons are of no importance. Be that as it may, according to these ‘traditionalists’ the real conflict was one of values, i.e. an ideological confrontation between the incompatible value systems of capitalism (equated with democracy) and communism (equated with totalitarianism). It should therefore come as no surprise that the anti-communist, democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (followed by the dissolution of the latter) spurred a renewed interest in the old notion that democracy serves as a powerful inhibition against war. Even though the simplistic thesis that ‘democracies are peaceful’ does not stand up to closer scrutiny, the qualified formulation that ‘democracies do not wage wars of aggression against other democracies’ seems well-founded, and is at least consistent with historical facts—- with the American Civil War standing out as the only major exception from the general rule not accounted for.\textsuperscript{xiii}

This observation has led what one might call the ‘triumphalists’ or ‘endists’ (most prominently Francis Fukuyama) to foretell an ‘end of history’ as a result of the universalization of the ‘western’ values of democracy, pluralism and market economy.\textsuperscript{xxxix} Others have been less sanguine and have pointed out the various flaws in democracy as practiced by the triumphant Western states, and have demanded additional democratization.\textsuperscript{xl} Be that as it may, few would contest the notion that democracy is a powerful antidote to bellicosity, and that a thoroughly democratic Europe (such as the one that we may well be approaching, even though we are not quite there yet) will most likely be peaceful. \textit{A fortiori,} a democratization of the rest of the world would undoubtedly go a long way towards a more peaceful world. However, a caveat may be needed, lest the triumphalists have their way and attempt to export democracy and accompanying western values to the rest of the world, perhaps only in a well-intended quest for democratization. Logical though it might seem at first glance, to go to war for the sake of imposing democracy would be most unwise, indeed merely a new variety of the well-known phenomenon of the alleged ‘war to end all wars’.\textsuperscript{xli}

B. THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

‘Economic security’\textsuperscript{xlii} may mean (at least) two rather different things. Either, it may be understood narrowly as the economic foundations of military power; or, it may be seen as an aspect or dimension of security in its own right.

The former interpretation is based on the common sense observation that economic power is eminently ‘fungible’ in the sense that it may be transformed into almost anything, depending of course on the time perspective and preconditioned on a functioning world market. Money may buy a state weapons from abroad, and it may increase productivity, thus allowing
for a transfer of labour from the civilian sphere into that of arms production or armed service. In
the final analysis, wealth is thus tantamount to mobilization potential, if not in the short term
then at least in the medium to long run. According to this line of reasoning, the economic power
of a nation inevitably constitutes a latent threat to its adversaries\textsuperscript{xlvi}, hence the advisability of not
contributing to the economic development of one's enemies or opponents, if need be even of
embargoing trade with them. This was a very widespread view in the USA throughout the Cold
War period, including the détente of the early seventies\textsuperscript{xlv}. Paradoxically, this view stands in
sharp contradiction with the liberal view of international trade (Smith, Ricardo, etc.) which
presumed trade to have beneficial effects on the war-proneness of the international system\textsuperscript{xlv}

On the other hand, actual militarization (including the maintenance of standing armed
forces, and of a ‘follow-on system’ of military production\textsuperscript{xlvi}) inevitably comes at the expense of
the civilian economy. Paradoxically, excessive militarization now may thus damage
mobilization potential at a later stage, since the latter ultimately reflects the state of the economy
as a whole. According to several analysis, the high level of military expenditures in both the
former superpowers, albeit most radically in the former Soviet Union, was counterproductive
and, in the long run untenable. More generally, this would seem to affect great powers in the
phase of decline that is inevitable sooner or later, but which becomes more painful and costly
because of ‘overextension’, both politically and militarily\textsuperscript{xlvi}.

The latter interpretation, in its turn, comes in at least two different versions. First of all,
economic warfare may be a functional substitute for the use of military power, just as military
power may serve to cripple an adversary's economy, as in the case of blockades. However, even
without the use of military might, starvation is a very powerful means of ‘compellance’ that
might be (indeed has been) used with success to enforce a (bloodless, yet far from painless)
surrender. As a reflection thereof, many states have striven for economic self-sufficiency as a
means of security: by stockpiling ‘strategic materials’ as well as ordinary goods they may make
themselves less vulnerable to economic warfare, hence more secure\textsuperscript{xlvii}.

Secondly, ‘economic security’ may mean invulnerability to economic hazards which
need not be created deliberately by an adversarial state, but could well be ‘structural’, i.e. caused
by the workings of the system, rather than by a specific (in this case malevolent) actor. There are
at least three different approaches to enhancing economic security in this sense: autharky (a
special species of the genus mercantilism), diversification and interdependence (including
integration).

Autharky might conceivably enhance economic security, as preached by classical
mercantilism. This was e.g. the strategy chosen by the USSR who regarded the world market as
unsafe, not merely because it was controlled by hostile capitalist powers, but also because of its
capitalist nature. Certain peace researchers (Galtung and others) have also advocated economic
self-sufficiency as a (strictly defensive, hence preferable) for of defence, providing for
invulnerability\textsuperscript{xlviii}.
Diversification, in the sense of a deliberate spreading of a state's dependencies between as many other states, and across as many fields, as possible, has been another traditional means of economic security. States that are dependent on one single (group of) supplier(s) for essential commodities, such as raw materials for its industry, are vulnerable to a cut-off of these supplies. States in the global ‘periphery’, which often have only one significant commodity to export, are, for instance, especially vulnerable to fluctuations of world market prices, as well as to political manipulations thereof, to say nothing of boycotts by their main customers\(^1\).

The furthering of interdependence, even to the point of integration, is the third, and in several senses most ‘modern’ way of enhancing economic security. This is, e.g., the approach taken by the EU countries ever since the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Communities\(^{li}\). The underlying understanding has been that a web of mutual interdependencies would serve as a powerful inhibition against war, in perfect conformity with the aforementioned tenets of ‘classical’ liberalism, as well as with the writings of Norman Angell, and modern analysts of ‘complex interdependence’ (Keohane and Nye, among others)\(^{lii}\). One might, indeed, call this the ‘common security approach to economic security’, since it is tantamount to a transcendence of the national boundaries with regard to the subject of security: The whole system is to be made more secure, hence also its members, who could not achieve the same level of security through their individual efforts\(^{liii}\).

**C. THE SOCIETAL DIMENSION**

Whereas Realists have focused their attention on the level of the state as the only proper referent object of ‘security’, ‘Idealists’ (including a large part of the peace research ‘movement’) have maintained that people, i.e. individuals, are what really matters in the final analysis. State security may be worth striving for, but only to the extent that it contributes to the security, i.e. survival and well-being, of people. The state is, at most, a means but never an end in itself. To thus focus on the lowest level, somewhat paradoxically, inevitably also draws attention to the highest level, namely that of Mankind as a whole, i.e. the great community of individuals, irrespective of citizenship. Individual and global security are thus two sides of the same coin, as argued by proponents of ‘human security’\(^{liv}\).

As mentioned above, some have taken an intermediate position, wishing to deny the field of security studies to the proponents of individual/global security (also because it would tend to blur the contours of security studies as an academic discipline), while agreeing with them that the state level is too narrow. Hence the need for a collective, yet non-state referent object of security, conceived of as collectivities, the security of which is termed ‘societal security’. In the seminal, work on the topic societal security is defined as

> ‘...the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats. More specifically, it is about the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for

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evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom.\textsuperscript{lv}

Thus defined, it becomes obvious that much of the recent discourse about ‘risks’ (as opposed to ‘threats’ is really about societal security. Of course, the various societal developments referred to also impinge on the state level in various ways, yet to make this their ‘admission ticket’ into the field of ‘security problems’ often becomes far-fetched.

Run-away population growth has been singled out by some authors as perhaps the most serious security problem for the decades ahead\textsuperscript{vi}, if only because of the ‘Malthusian’ implications of a growing discrepancy between the available resources for consumption and the much faster growing number of would-be consumers. This might be a security problem in its own right, particularly of course for the losers in the competition for scarce resources, but also with security implications for the winners.

It might, for instance, become a societal security problem for the North if resource depletion in the South should lead to a tidal wave of migration to the North\textsuperscript{lvii}. Whereas it strains the imagination to envision, say, countries such as Denmark being more than marginally affected by this, countries in the borderland between North and South (such as the entire Mediterranean region) might well be more seriously affected. Migration may also flow in the East-West direction, not so much as a reflection of a population surplus, as because of a deficit of resources, say if the economic transformation embarked upon since 1989 should fail completely. One might, e.g. envisage migration from the former USSR to Poland, and/or from the latter or the Czech republic to Germany\textsuperscript{lviii}.

Another societal security problem is represented by the forces of nationalism that were unleashed by the democratic revolutions of 1989 and 1991 in the former East and South-East of Europe\textsuperscript{lix}. To the extent that this leads to violent strife between ethnic and/or religious or cultural groups (a phenomenon of which there have already been dozens of examples) it certainly constitutes a serious societal security problem. It also threatens to become a political security problem affecting the already weak states in the countries in question, if and when if nationalism is manifested in a struggle for secession. This is often exacerbated by the so-called ‘matrozka effect’, which promises fragmentation down to very small, and often not survivable, political units\textsuperscript{lxi}.

Finally, problems such as the above may also have repercussions for the relations between states, i.e. develop into ‘traditional’ security problems. Communal strife thus has a certain in-built propensity for internationalization, especially in those (numerous) cases where a suppressed, exploited or otherwise disadvantaged ethnic group has a ‘paternal’ state.\textsuperscript{lxii} Also, nationalism implies the risk that the numerous unresolved territorial disputes may be reinvigorated. Were this to happen, especially during a period of political weakness, ‘old-fashioned’ war for territorial conquest may, once again, become conceivable.
D. THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

That the environment is degrading was discovered several years ago. However, the awareness of ecological challenges was especially boosted by the publication in 1987 of the report of the Brundtland Commission on *Our Common Future*, which inspired a flood of books on ‘environmental’ or ‘ecologic security’\(^{lxii}\). However, to recognize environmental decay as a problem was, of course, one thing, to elevate it to the status of a *security* problem something else which remains disputed. There are, at least, three different senses in which the environment might become subsumed under an expanded notions of security:

- First of all, environmental problems could be caused by war, or preparations for war, of such severity as to count among the most serious indirect war effects. A precursor of the current environmental awareness in ‘peace circles’ was, for instance, the debate in the early 1980s on the ‘nuclear winter’ hypothesis, according to which even a ‘small-scale’ nuclear war could have caused a climatic and ecological disaster, the casualties of which would not ‘only’ be the warring states, but the entire globe\(^{lxiii}\). The more recent discoveries are, however, in a sense more profound since they imply environmental catastrophe as a result of ‘business as usual’, constituting what will automatically happen ‘unless people stop to think’ (to quote L.F. Richardson).
- Secondly, wars might accrue from environmental problems, e.g. in the form of resource wars. An obvious example might be wars over scarce water supplies, say between states sharing the same river, as has been very close to happening in the Middle East\(^{lxiv}\).
- Thirdly, environmental problems might, according to some analysts, constitute a security threat directly, i.e. whether or not weapons and physical force ever enter into the picture\(^{lxv}\). In extreme cases, the physical basis of a state could be placed in jeopardy by nature. For instance, countries such as Bangladesh or the Netherlands would almost disappear in the case of severe global flooding. In most cases, however, the concept of environmental security presupposes taking individuals (or Mankind) or collectivities rather than states as the referent objects of security. In this case it certainly makes sense to acknowledge that the survival and well-being of people is threatened by environmental problems, which may be conceived of as a form of ‘structural violence’, resulting e.g. in shorter life expectancies, higher infant mortality rates and a deteriorating general health situation.

V. ‘SECURITY’ IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH\(^{lxvi}\)

The entire security discourse has, like the IR discipline as a whole, all along been ethnocentric to the extreme.\(^{lxvii}\) This is particularly obvious when it comes to the connection between security
and development: a topic which has usually been approached from the angle of the North (and especially the West) in the following manner:

Either economic and social underdevelopment in the South will breed political instability, hence may cause wars which may ‘spill over’ to the North\textsuperscript{xviii}. Or they may lead to a militarization implying that countries of the South may come to constitute military threats to the North (\textit{vide} the debate on ballistic missile and nuclear proliferation\textsuperscript{xix}). In the present author's assessment, these alleged threats should be taken \textit{cum grano salis}: ballistic missiles are no more (probably less) threatening than aircraft and only constitute threats when paired with nuclear weapons; the North constitutes a far more serious threat to the South than vice versa; and only few regions in the North are within reach of ballistic missiles (or aircraft for that matter) from the south—the Mediterranean region constituting one such potentially vulnerable spot.

More importantly, however, it tends to be forgotten that countries of the South are referent objects of security in their own right, i.e. experience security problems. Just as is the case in the North, some of these are endogenous to each country, whereas others are a function of regional conflicts between southern countries. Occasionally, however, the North is perceived as a threat to the security of the South, e.g. manifested in the threat of intervention as well as the (not yet quite abandoned) practice of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ and various forms of ‘covert operations’. Furthermore, most countries of the South are very vulnerable to economic means of ‘compellance’, such as economic sanctions, an economic security problem that has been further aggravated by the debt crisis.\textsuperscript{xx}

The security problems of the South differ considerably from those of the North in several respects:

- Intra-state strife tends to loom larger than inter-state threats.
- Political security is generally low because of ‘weak states’: with fragile support in the population, questionable legitimacy, little or no democratic traditions. Such weak states may even collapse completely, i.e. be reduced to ‘virtual’ or ‘failed’ states.
- Regime security is often sought by means of large military expenditures, mostly for internal purposes.
- The level of militarization tends to place great strains on the civilian sector of the economy, hence to jeopardize development.
- Economic underdevelopment causes or exacerbates communal conflicts.

VI. COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY: SYNERGIES AND VICIOUS CIRCLES

The above account of Third World security problems illustrates the way in which the various security problems tend to exacerbate each other, locking the country in question into vicious circles—a phenomenon which it also prevalent in the North, especially in the former East:
An emphasis on military security places great strains on the economy, hence tends to undermine economic security.

Economic problems tend to cause political instability as well as to contribute to a neglect of urgent environmental protection measures.

Political instability tends to spur a search for ‘scape-goats’, more often than not in the form of external foes, hence may lead to further militarization.

There is therefore a need for a comprehensive concept of security as a guideline in the urgent quest for a multi-pronged security strategy, lest endeavours along one dimension tend to block the quest for security along others.

On the other hand, one should also guard against excessive ‘securitization’, as this may entail risks:

- A danger of militarization, as the armed forces tend to assume that ‘security is their business’. In times of impending cut-backs in military expenditures, the military tend to be quite eager to embrace expanded notions of security in the hope that this will protect them against further reductions.

- A danger that a desecuritization of issues may lead to a neglect of them. If security concerns, for instance, are accepted as the primary rationale for development assistance, development aid may decline once it is realized that countries of the South constitute no danger to the North.

The above account of new thinking on security has, hopefully, demonstrated that new ideas do exist. However, the history of mankind shows that it may take years, decades, centuries, or even millennia, for such new ideas to become generally accepted and adopted as guidelines for action. In this section, I shall therefore briefly survey the political field in various countries for signs that the above ideas have actually achieved this status, or are approaching it.

VII. ENDNOTES


Cooperation and Conflict


xvii ibid., pp. 5, 7 and 9.


On the notion of raison d’être, see e.g. Meinecke, Friedrich: Machiavellism. The Doctrine of Raison d’Etat and Its Place in Modern History (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1984). Besides Machiavelli, other ancestors of modern Realism come close to a personification of the State, e.g. Hobbes, Thomas: Leviathan, Edited With an Introduction By C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), who e.g. describes the Common-Wealth (i.e. the ‘Leviathan’) as ‘the multitude so united in one person’ (p. 227).


For a critique of ‘reductionism’, see e.g. Kenneth Waltz’s classic: Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).


See e.g. Holsti, Kalevi J.: ‘International Theory and War in the Third World’, in Job (ed.):


lxv See e.g. the discussion in Ball, Desmond & David Horner (eds.): Strategic Studies in a Changing World: Global, Regional and Australian Perspectives, Series ‘Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence’, vol. 89 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific
Studies, the Australian National University, 1992), especially Sean Lynn-Jones: *loc.cit.* (note 5) who argues for a broader, yet still national security-oriented, agenda with a focus on military matters; and Gwyn Prins: ‘A New Focus for Security Studies’ (pp. 178-222) who is in favour of a complete shift of focus to the environment. An even more extreme, ‘eco-centric’, view is that of Eckersley, Robyn: *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (London: UCL Press, 1992).


