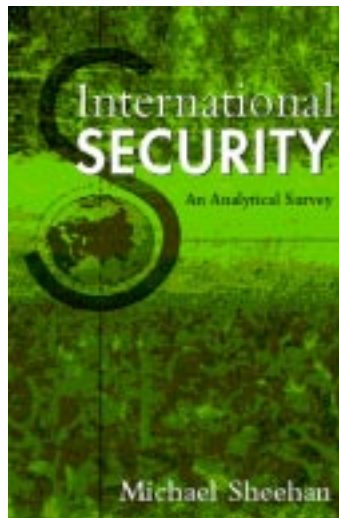


EXCERPTED FROM

**International Security:
An Analytical Survey**

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ISBNs: 1-58826-273-1 hc 1-58826-298-7 pb



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

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Boulder, CO 80301

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Lynne Rienner Publishers website
www.rienner.com

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Introduction

The subject of security has been at the heart of the study of international relations for the past fifty years. Its political significance has been enormous during this period. It helped shape the way in which the Cold War was contested by the two superpowers and their allies, and in the post-Cold War era it has remained central to the debates over government policy agendas and the priorities they should reflect. At the same time it has been pivotal to the way the scholars of international relations have thought about the core purpose of the discipline and the location of its boundaries. For many students of international relations, it is the security aspect that makes the study worthwhile, for in the final analysis, the study of international relations is “the art and science of the survival of mankind” (Deutsch, 1968: ix).

“Security” is a term widely used in both the analysis and the practice of international relations. Issues such as war and peace, the balance of power, arms races, arms control, and disarmament have been at the heart of the university discipline of international relations since its inception at Aberystwyth in 1919. Indeed, it can be argued that the central concern with these issues, and particularly with the origins and conduct of war, was both the cause of the creation of the field and the defining core that subsequently enabled international relations to continue to distinguish itself from related disciplines such as history, economics, geography, and international law. Moreover, the concept of security has proven to be an extraordinarily powerful one: “no other concept in international relations packs the metaphysical punch, nor commands the disciplinary power of ‘security’” (Der Derian, 1995: 24–25).

It might be expected therefore that, given the traditional academic obsessions with precision and definition, the core concept of “security” would have been analyzed and defined *ad nauseam* over the decades since 1919. Curiously, this has not been the case. Barry Buzan has argued that “security” falls within the category of an “essentially contested concept” characterized by “unsolvable debates about [its] meaning and application” (1991a: 7). Yet it

would be more accurate to argue that, historically, security has patently failed to be subjected to such debate. When thinking about the meaning of security, it is necessary to be very aware of “the conspicuous silences of what is not being said, but is being taken for granted as part of the discourse” (Klein, 1988: 295). The beginning of a genuine debate about security and perhaps its emergence as an essentially contested concept are developments that have only occurred since the early 1980s, to a significant extent as a result of the writings of Buzan himself.

As late as 1975, Richard Smoke could argue that the field had “paid quite inadequate attention to the range of meanings of security” (Smoke, 1975: 259). This was the key point. Despite its willingness to agonize over the possible definitions of other concepts such as sovereignty, limited war, and nationalism, and to explore alternative interpretations, the meaning of “security” was treated as a given. Security theory became based on an unacknowledged consensus about what constituted legitimate knowledge about the social world. This had implications both for the way the subject was thought about, and for the policy prescriptions that could flow from it, and these in turn had fundamental consequences for people in the real world.

During the Cold War period the prevailing Western conception gradually shifted from “national security” to “international security.” The former was oriented around the development of policies designed to allow states to increase their military security, either through unilateral force improvements or through membership of alliances. As the Cold War evolved toward the superpower *détente* of the 1970s, the prevailing terminology was increasingly that of international security. This reflected the belief that in the context of the mutual nuclear hostage relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the massive military capabilities of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, it was necessary to seek ways of enhancing one’s own security without necessarily threatening to reduce that of the potential adversary, and to seek also to maintain the overall stability of the international system. For most of this period however, the *content* of security was seen as being fixed—military security against the military power of other states.

Since 1991, security has become a contested concept in international relations in a way that was not the case during the Cold War period of realist hegemony in security discourse. The traditional realist conceptualization has come under sustained attack from a number of directions, both because it was increasingly seen as unsatisfactory in its own terms, and because it was ignoring important aspects of an emerging international policy agenda.

During this period there has gradually emerged a consensus that the classical approach to security is inadequate and that a broader, multisectoral approach to security is preferable to the traditional understanding of seeing security concerns as relating only to issues of militarized relations between

competing states. This is reflected at both the academic and the policy levels. A survey of contemporary international relations literature reveals that it is now conventional for international relations books on development, the environment, gender, and so on, to routinely include a chapter on security, and for books on security to include at least a genuflection in the direction of gender analysis, environmental security, and other features of a wider approach.

International organizations such as the United Nations and NATO now also operate with a definition of security that is multisectoral and embraces the broader agenda, and not just the military dimension. This represents a major change from earlier decades where the emphasis was on force projection, deterrence, and the maintenance of the balance of power. This reflects an increasing recognition by bodies such as the UN that, while the focus on military power during the Cold War was understandable, by defining security in purely military terms and giving it privileged status as “high politics,” there was a massive failure to address human suffering in other areas, such as poverty, and a failure to counter environmental degradation.

The debate during the 1980s and 1990s opened up the concept of security to processes of widening and deepening, including exploration of its meaning and application to a broader range of areas. Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen school pioneered the widening aspect, in terms of identifying a number of new domains that it is appropriate to think of in terms of security, such as the economic and environmental realms. Ken Booth, Richard Wyn Jones, and others in turn explored the deepening aspect—that is, the epistemological and ontological implications of an extended security concept.

Critics of the traditional approach were keen not only to see a wider range of issues addressed as part of the security agenda, but also to see them prioritized by governments with the same sense of urgency and the same commitment of national resources that had previously been reserved for the military security sector. This inevitably triggered a profound debate over whether such an expansion of the concept was needed, and in what directions and to what extent it should be taken. The debate was centered on the question of what links certain threats, so as to make it reasonable to assume that they could all be discussed under the common rubric of security. What kinds of threats are simply “problems” deserving government attention and what are specifically “security issues”? Why are some issues “securitized” in this way, while others are not? For the advocates of a much broader approach to security, such as Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, this process of securitization has a “metatheoretical” function, because it makes clear that what counts as a security issue is always a result of political and social discourse (2003: 86).

There are now a wide variety of ways of thinking about and implementing security in international relations. The purpose of this book is to survey and critique these approaches and to analyze their similarities, differences, and relative utility. The objective is not to produce a final synthesis from the

different approaches. This is ultimately not possible, because many of them are underpinned by epistemological and ontological differences so fundamental that they cannot be reconciled. Rather, the purpose is, first, to bring together for analysis the various traditional and postpositivist approaches, as well as the sectoral studies of security, in order to make possible a deeper understanding of the meaning and political purpose of the concept of security itself.

A second objective is to contribute to the debate about where the boundaries of an understanding of security might lie. Other than realism, all the approaches studied in this book are “critical” in the sense that they critique the traditional approach to security and put forward alternative ways of thinking about and operationalizing the concept. However, by no means all of them represent a fundamental break with traditional realist ways of interpreting the subject. Several embody an approach that engages with a sector in such a way that, while it is capable of being developed in novel and even postpositivist ways, it is equally capable of being discussed in a framework that is little, if any, different from a neorealist approach. This vulnerability to colonization by neorealist analysis and policy recommendation means that the multisectoral approach need not necessarily represent a decisive break with traditional security thinking, so that certain sectoral areas, such as the economic and environmental domains, remain battlegrounds between those with very different ways of thinking about security.

The book therefore looks at what meanings have traditionally been attached to security and the implications of various alternatives. Realism and realist-derived approaches are explored both because realism remains a powerful construction for thinking about security and because the various alternative understandings continue to define themselves to a large extent in contradiction to the traditional realist interpretation.

The “broader” agenda is then analyzed, both in terms of its own theoretical origins in the Copenhagen school and by way of the various sectoral approaches to security that have reflected this approach in the economic, societal, and environmental domains. The strengths and weaknesses of the postpositivist approaches to security are then examined in terms of their ability to constitute a genuinely alternative form of security analysis. The final chapter draws conclusions about which approach has the most to offer for the study of international security.