
Comparisons between traditional notions of security and more recent broader concepts

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From the Treaty of Westphalia to the Cold War, security studies were dominated by the idea of military security. Both politicians and scholars focused on military capabilities to deal with threats of the same nature. Because only states could develop such capabilities, they were de facto the central actors.

This traditional conception of security was pushed to an extreme degree during the Cold War because of the division of the world into two opposed blocs. The military and nuclear obsessions imposed a narrowing of the field of security studies during this period. Security was directly related to survival.

The rise of the economic and environmental agendas in international relations during the 1970s and the 1980s, the rise of concerns with identity issues and transnational crime and a decline in the number of armed conflicts during the 1990s have led to a widening of security studies to issues not centred on the threat or use of force. Nevertheless, scepticism about the prospects for coherent conceptualisations of security have triggered a reaction from traditionalists arguing that security studies is about the phenomenon of war and that widening the agenda could be a threat to security itself.

At present, two views of security studies are now on the table, the old military and state-centred view of the traditionalists and the new one of the wideners. The purpose of this paper is to compare these two views of security and to set out possible implications for key policy-makers at the state level. This work is based on the work performed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde in *Security: a New Framework for Analysis*.

It has become common in international relations to qualify the identity of systems in terms of particular sectors of activity within them, as in ‘the international economic system’ or ‘the international political system’. Considering a wider security agenda means we need to consider what sectors are in the security realm. Buzan¹ set out sectors in security analysis as follows:

Generally speaking, the military security concerns the two-level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and states’ perceptions of each other’s intentions. Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. Economic studies concerns access to the resources, finance and market necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Societal security concerns the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom. Environmental security concerns the maintenance of the local and planetary biosphere as the essential support on which all other human enterprises depend.

In the traditionalist approach to security, the military sector is the only one involved in security issues; everything within it is about security and the state is the central actor. With the end of the Cold War, traditionalists have altered their statements by agreeing, in various degrees, to look more widely at non-military causes of conflict in the international system or to question the centrality of the state. But most of them allow other sectors to come into security issues only as they relate to military issues.² Stephen Walt gives perhaps the strongest statement on the traditionalist position. He argues that security studies is about the phenomena of war and that it can be defined as ‘the study of

the threat, use and control of military force'. Against those who want to widen the agenda outside this strictly military domain, he argues that doing so 'runs the risk of expanding "Security Studies" excessively; by this logic, issues such as pollution, disease, child abuse, or economic recessions could all be viewed as threats to "security". Defining the field in this way would destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions to any of the important problems'³

According to the wideners, security issues affect all the sectors listed above. Ullman⁴ (1983) Buzan (1991—chapter 3), although sceptical about the prospects for coherent conceptualisations of security in the economic and environmental sectors, has widened the definition of threat away from a purely military to a more general formulation. For wideners, not everything in the military sector is necessarily about security. For some states, an increasing number of security functions are not security issues at all: the participation of European forces in peacekeeping operations in Africa has nothing to do with threats to these countries. For states living in security communities, a substantial part of their activities may concern the political sector. The relative weight of the security issues in each sector depend on the level at which security measures must be taken. For instance, at the global level, security issues in the environmental and economic sectors are dominant whereas the military is such at the regional level.

To cope with more and more complicated and interrelated security issues in a globalised world, the state cannot rely on controls through its borders anymore. It must develop a pluralistic strategic thinking to identify the threats in all the security sectors and implement policies to secure them while avoiding the intellectual incoherence the traditionalists point out. The success of this policy will depend on three main factors: the ability to shift focus from short-term criteria towards long-term perspective; the deployment of the right intelligence structures; a better governance through an extension of knowledge and understanding and a more efficient mobilisation and a full control of information flows within the state's administration.

This begins with closer cooperation between law-enforcement and national-security agencies. It also requires full cooperation from many governmental departments including the military. The major businesses, which operate beyond national boundaries, must be involved in this process. In fact, the complexity of the problem calls for an integrated and top-down approach involving diplomatic, military and economic elements. In the end, all the departments must give up their self-centred interests and adapt themselves to a common security approach. For instance, the military would have to carry out a wider range of missions from deterrence to population relief as well as adjust its equipment, structures and training. The inability of US forces to enforce law and order in Iraq is a good example of the need for such a close cooperation in the nation building process after a military intervention.

As far as long-term views are concerned, the main difficulties lie in the political short-term mandates and the media pressure on governments requesting an immediate response. The decision-making process within the Bush Administration in the days following the September 11 attacks⁵ is a good example of the difficulty for governments to define new long-term strategies under the pressure of events. Regarding the second point, till now key government departments and the military have their own intelligence or analytical divisions and rely heavily on service-level or bilateral agreements to pass certain information. This may work but the September 11 events demonstrated that it is not an adequate response. One can notice that the US was not able to prevent a major unconventional attack on its soil despite its huge intelligence system. Moreover the Bush Administration so far has failed in setting up a new agency that has both law-enforcement and intelligence functions at home and abroad.⁶

As the most powerful state proved to be unable to take up such a challenge, it is obviously the case for those which cannot rely on the same resources. For almost all of the states, the only way to deal with such complicated issues seems to go beyond cooperation by pooling their resources at regional level. This can be achieved in the military, environmental, economic, societal and political sectors as shown by the multilateral agencies and organisations progressively set up since the end of WWII. But, in attempting to create an effective framework, the question of greater global governance must be addressed. Indeed, a global security strategy ultimately needs some form of global supervision, which means to give an institution the resources, the structures and above all the authority to effectively handle the problem.

This is nowhere the case, even in the European Union, though it is the most integrated global organisation at present, because the constituent states still disagree about the authority they may confer on its central body, the European Commission. For instance, in spite of all the attempts in many areas, progress to centralise information gathering and operations has been either slow or non-existent. In fact, politicians remain doubtful about granting a part of state sovereignty in the security realm. Moreover, the idea of centralism is feared by the new European states, which have just escaped from communism and recovered a true sovereignty.

In conclusion, because of a lack of governance, it seems difficult to provide a global answer to security issues through all the sectors of activity within the international relations system, as wideners suggest. For the foreseeable future, politicians will certainly continue to cope with the problem focusing on military security, the easier to handle and the most politically profitable. This is clearly an inappropriate and inefficient way that may increase instability. Because security can no longer be confined to the military, the international community must reform the international regime to provide the less powerful states with the means they need to cope with security issues in the other sectors. It must help failed states and bring rogue states back to the community of nations as well as limit the impact of globalisation. The involvement of the United States in this process will be decisive for its success.

Endnotes

1. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: an agenda for International Security Studies in the Post Cold War Era*, 1991, pp. 19–20.
2. Stephen Walt, ‘The renaissance of Security Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 1991 pp. 227.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 212–213.
4. Richard Ullman, ‘Redefining Security’, *International Security* 8:1, 1983, pp. 129–153.
5. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2003.
6. Morton Halperin, ‘Safe at Home’, Center for American Progress., <http://www.truthout.org/docs_03:112903E.shtml>.