

Thomas Gil

## **Security Matters**

Online veröffentlicht auf dem institutionellen  
Repositorium der Technischen Universität Berlin (2018):  
DOI 10.14279/depositonce-6727  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14279/depositonce-6727>

Diese Veröffentlichung – ausgenommen Zitate –  
ist unter der CC-Lizenz CC BY lizenziert.  
Lizenzvertrag: Creative Commons Namensnennung 4.0  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## Contents

Preface	3
1. What is Security?	4
2. Broadening and Deepening the Notion of Security	6
3. Theorizing Security	8
4. How do we achieve it?	10
Bibliography	12

## Preface

Security is a relational good which has many conditions and presuppositions. There are different types of security: social security, cybersecurity, legal security, financial security, political security, and international security among many others. The type of security I am going to concentrate upon is international security. Originally, it was conceived of in a restrictive sense as national, state, or military security. But different circumstances, events, and the theorizing about them have led us to broaden and to deepen the conception of international security grasping all the relevant dimensions, aspects and variables involved in it or implied by it. We can now with certainty say that international security is a matter of military, political, economic, societal, environmental, and human security. If we want to achieve international security in a durable and sustainable way we should not neglect any of these variables and dimensions.

## 1. What is Security?

Security is a relational good highly appreciated. The quality of security seems to refer to the quality of certain relations and conditions for possible interactions and, in general, communication.

In daily life and daily language “security” evokes the world of professional politics, international summits and conferences, and not least of wars and conflicts. Images of nuclear and other kinds of weapons, of soldiers, police services, and geopolitical struggles are conjured up when we speak about international security. Other images bring to our minds refugee camps, child soldiers, migrants drowned or floating at sea, pirates, and terrorists. Security has also something to do with threats and means of protection and adequate response. Looking hard enough, we notice that our everyday lives are increasingly intertwined with matters of international security, from the proliferation of surveillance systems and border controls to the different and various consequences of our single actions, interactions, and transactions in an age of globalized networks.

For a long time, international security was conceived of as the security of national States. During the Cold War, the period of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union (the East-West conflict), the balance of power, nuclear proliferation, and military strategy dominated the international security agenda. That was a limited view of international secu-

rity. International security conflated with national security. To a large extent the agenda was driven by the policy problems facing mainly the United States. With the end of the Cold War the sense of urgency that had attached to deterrence theory, containment policy and extended deterrence began to decline. However, it was the Cold War that set the template for international security to which all further development related in different ways. The Cold War agenda showed a considerable and noteworthy robustness so that there has been during the 1990s an impressive amount of continuity in the agenda of international security despite the loss of the Cold War organizing frame. In the end a plurality of driving forces and developments facilitated the expansion of international security conceptions beyond the restricted and rigid state-centric, military-political perspective.

## **2. Broadening and Deepening the Notion of Security**

The traditional security conception associated with the Cold War was increasingly challenged. The military and political perspectives which had been dominant did not disappear but they were complemented with other perspectives: the economic, the societal, the environmental and the human. All of them contributed to the understanding of security in its interdependent nature. Then it became clear that more military power did not beget more security.

The military and the political perspectives went on being important as security has something to do with the organization stability of states and governments, and the offensive and defensive capabilities of nations. But the military-state centrism was pertinently challenged so that security studies expanded well beyond the military and the state-centric. Sustained access to resources, financial means, and markets became an important topic of security concerns. Cultural, religious, and identity attachments were also taken into consideration, and the need to maintain the local and planetary biosphere on which all human enterprises depend was recognized in all its urgent indispensability.

Humans were placed also at the heart of debates about international security as it became clear that traditional questions concerning national interest, territorial sovereignty, and nuclear deterrence were

far removed from the security concerns faced by ordinary people like questions of hunger, disease, repression, education, housing, and employment. The “Quality of life” became like that a focus of interest of security studies. “Quality of life” was then understood following Amartya Sen and Martha C. Nussbaum as the ability of agents, persons or groups to do valuable acts (“functionings”) or reach valuable states of being. The valuable acts and states of being were supposed to comprise elementary things as escaping morbidity and mortality, being adequately nourished, having mobility, etc., and complex ones such as being happy, achieving self-respect, taking part in the life of the community, etc. (Nussbaum, Sen, 36).

### 3. Theorizing Security

Calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg. Language does not create or change materially what there is. However, seeing is not understanding what we see, or grasping reality. Reading W. V. O. Quine we get acquainted with the extremely amazing details about the complexities of getting from stimulus to science, from sensory inputs to theories. It is a subtle process of getting from sensory stimulations to observational sentences, observational categoricals (as generalized expressions of expectation), reification, quantification and abstract objects, i.e. the amazing story of how we get from the sensory impacts of rays and particles on our receptors to theories of the external world.

Thinking about security is critically experiencing situations and relations which have a specific quality, the quality of security. Security is a much appreciated good, but security is not a thing. Security is a quality of relations and interactions. When we theorize about it we do not create it. Theorizing about it we grasp the many aspects, dimensions and variables involved in the nature and the dynamics of security.

Theories do not create their objects. They make proposals to understand things and events constituting like that epistemic objects that can be examined and analysed. Epistemic objects come about in a process of abstraction that is a process of selective concentration on certain aspects and ignoring others. Theories as aggregates of descriptions, explanations and predic-



tions help us see, understand, and conceptually grasp things, events, and the qualities of things and events. They open our eyes and minds to different aspects, features and traits of the things and phenomena that surround us. As a consequence of that, if we want to achieve something, if we want to change things or transform reality we have to let theories guide us.

In International Security Studies there have been several significant changes of theoretical perspective or theory changes. The terminology used to refer to such theory changes has not always been completely satisfactory, especially if and when “postmodern”, “constructivist” jargon was employed. Using wisely that terminology, it can deliver insights in how conceptions and theoretical preferences actually changed.

#### 4. How do we achieve it?

In order to achieve international security we need descriptions, explanations and prescriptions different theoretical approaches and perspectives may offer us.

If, as it is by now sufficiently evident, the nature of wars and warfare has substantially changed we must adapt to the new realities if we really want to reach our goals. Traditionally, war involved states pitted against each other in armed combat over conflicting interests. Since the Cold War's end this traditional state-centric character of warfare and its conduct has been challenged by three highly significant developments: the apparent decline of inter-state warfare in comparison to the proliferation of intra-state conflicts; the impact of technological developments; and the increasing reliance on private security companies in military campaigns.

How we explain the new realities of wars and warfare is fundamental, when making peace, since how we view the nature and causes of violent conflicts impacts significantly on what we are likely to think should be done about them. Developments in military technologies (in particular the development of increasingly sophisticated electronic sensors, the increasing use of satellite technologies, and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, the so-called drones) have radically transformed the nature of warfare and the single military operations of intelligence gathering,

surveillance, instant battlefield communications, and the delivery of precision-guided munitions.

If international security matters are not only military and warfare issues, and if they involve substantially development and living conditions issues, trying to achieve security will have to include perspectives and strategies which go beyond the state. Poverty, hunger, disease, and natural disasters will have then to enter into the agenda. Questions of social justice and of fair distribution of resources become prominent. Security cannot be achieved if we systematically neglect things like having a secure and stable income, the ability to access educational and health services, and living in unpolluted environments.

Not every imaginable problem is a security issue. But many problems that have been neglected in the past have a serious impact on the stability and security of existing political structures and ruling regimes. So climate change and geostrategic conflicts played out in the competition for scarce resources (like water, oil, minerals and land) pose serious threats that cannot be ignored any more.

The increase in migration and the phenomenon of terrorism are two further challenges to global security. Responding to these challenges is no easy matter. A broad range of options is available crossing the spectrum from passive to increasingly active, and legal to extra-judicial and exceptional measures.

## **Bibliography**

Buzan, B., Hansen, L., *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Collins, A. R. (Ed.), *Contemporary Security Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Quine, W. V., *From Stimulus to Science* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Nussbaum, M. C., Sen, A. (Eds.), *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

Schelling, T. C., *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960).