

analysis and solutions that IR cannot provide alone. Students should therefore look for insights in a wide variety of disciplines, and not only those within the humanities or social sciences. For example, analysing issues related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) requires a degree of scientific and technical knowledge, understanding the causes of terrorism will involve a psychological dimension, assessing health risks requires some access to medical expertise, understanding environmental degradation involves engaging with biology and environmental history, while combating transnational crime will necessarily involve a close relationship with criminology. We therefore need to think very carefully about who the real ‘security’ experts are in world politics and where we might find them.

In sum, while security studies has its professional roots in the discipline of IR, today’s world poses challenges that will require students to engage with topics and sources of knowledge traditionally considered well beyond the IR pale. As a consequence, it is unhelpful to think of security studies as just a subfield of IR. Instead, this book begins from the assumption that security studies is better understood as an area of inquiry revolving around a set of core questions.

Defining a field of inquiry: four fundamental questions

If we think about security studies as a field of inquiry, arguably four basic yet fundamental questions stand out as forming its intellectual core:

- What is security?
- Whose security are we talking about?
- What counts as a security issue?
- How can security be achieved?

Let us briefly examine what is entailed by posing each of these questions.

What is security?

Asking what security means raises issues about the philosophy of knowledge, especially those concerning epistemology (how do we know things?), ontology (what phenomena do we think make up the social world?) and method (how we should study the social world). If we accept the notion that security is an essentially contested concept then, by definition, such debates cannot be definitively resolved in the abstract. Instead some positions will become dominant and be enforced through the application of power.

With this in mind, security is most commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values; especially those which, if left unchecked, threaten the survival of a particular referent object in the near future. To be clear, although security and survival are often related, they are not synonymous.

Whereas survival is an existential condition, security involves the ability to pursue cherished political and social ambitions. Security is therefore best understood as what Ken Booth (2007) has called, ‘survival-plus,’ ‘the “plus” being some freedom from life-determining threats, and therefore some life choices’.

Put in rather stark terms, it is possible to identify two prevalent philosophies of security, each emerging from fundamentally different starting points. The first philosophy sees security as being virtually synonymous with the accumulation of power. From this perspective, security is understood as a commodity (i.e. to be secure, actors must possess certain things such as property, money, weapons, armies and so on). In particular, power is thought to be the route to security: the more power (especially military power) actors can accumulate, the more secure they will be.

The second philosophy challenges the idea that security flows from power. Instead, it sees security as being based on emancipation; that is, a concern with justice and the provision of human rights. From this perspective, security is understood as a relationship between different actors rather than a commodity. These relationships may be understood in either negative terms (i.e. security is about the absence of something threatening) or positive terms (i.e. involving phenomena that are enabling and make things possible). This distinction is commonly reflected in the ideas of ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’. Understood in a relational sense, security involves gaining a degree of confidence about our relationships that comes through sharing certain commitments, which, in turn, provides a degree of reassurance and predictability. This view argues that it is not particular commodities (such as nuclear weapons) that are the crucial factor in understanding the security–insecurity equation but rather the relationship between the actors concerned. Thus while US decision-makers think Iran’s possession of nuclear weapons would be a source of considerable insecurity, they do not feel the same way about the nuclear arsenals held by India or Pakistan. Consequently, in the second philosophy, true or stable security does not come from the ability to exercise power over others. Rather, it comes from cooperating to achieve security without depriving others of it. During the Cold War, such an approach was evident in Olaf Palme’s call for ‘common security’, particularly his suggestion that protagonists ‘must achieve security not against the adversary but together with him’. ‘International security’, Palme argued, ‘must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on the threat of mutual destruction’ (Palme 1982: ix). In practical terms, this means promoting emancipatory politics that take seriously issues about justice and human rights.

As the chapters in this book make clear, different perspectives and particular security policies subscribe to these philosophies to varying degrees. In practice, the differences are often stark with advocates of the former philosophy prioritizing military strength while supporters of the latter emphasize the importance of promoting human rights.

Whose security?

Asking whose security we are talking about is the next important and unavoidable step in the analytical process. Without a referent object there can be no threats and no discussion of security because the concept is meaningless without something to secure. As a result, we need to be clear about the referent objects of our analysis. In the long sweep of human history, the central focus of security has been people (Rothschild 1995). As noted above, however, within academic IR, security was fused with 'the state'. Even more specifically, it was fused with a particular conception of 'the national interest' as set out in the US National Security Act of 1947. This helped promote the rather confusing idea that security in international politics was synonymous with studying (and promoting) 'national security'. In fact, it is more accurate to say that what was being studied (and protected) was 'state security', not least because many states were often hostile to particular nationalities contained within their borders.

There are many plausible answers to the question 'Whose security should we be talking about?' Not surprisingly, therefore, debates continue to rage over who or what should constitute the ultimate referent object for security studies. For many decades, the dominant answer was that when thinking about security in international politics, states were the most important referents. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, this position has come under increasing challenge. In contrast, some analysts argued for priority to be given to human beings since without reference to individual humans, security makes no sense (e.g. Booth 1991a, McSweeney 1999). The problem, of course, is which humans to prioritize. This position has underpinned a large (and rapidly expanding) literature devoted to 'human security'. According to one popular definition, 'Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity. In the last analysis, it is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed' (Haq 1995: 116). A third approach has focused on the concept of 'society' as the most important referent object for security studies because humans do not always view group identities and collectivities in purely instrumental terms. Rather, to be fully human is to be part of specific social groups (Shaw 1994). Another perspective approached the question as a level of analysis problem; that is, it offered an analytical framework for thinking about possible referent objects from the lowest level (the individual) through various sources of collective identities (including bureaucracies, states, regions, civilizations), right up to the level of the international system. In this schema, the task of the analyst was to focus on the unavoidable relationships and tensions between the different levels of analysis (Buzan 1991, 1995).

In recent decades, a fifth approach has gained increasing prominence, calling for greater attention to be paid to planet Earth rather than this or that group of human beings who happen to live on it. This perspective argues that at a basic level, security policies must make ecological sense. In particular, they must recognize that humans are part of nature and dependent on ecosystems and the

environment (Hughes 2006). After all, as Buzan (1991) put it, the environment is the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend. Without an inhabitable environment, discussions of all other referents are moot.

What is a security issue?

Once an analyst has decided on the meaning of security and whose security they are focusing upon, it is important to ask what counts as a security issue for that particular referent. This involves analysing the processes through which threat agendas are constructed. In other words, who decides which of a referent object's cherished values are threatened, and by what or whom?

In one sense, every thinking individual on the planet operates with a unique set of security priorities shaped, in part, by factors such as their sex, gender, age, religious beliefs, class, race, nationality as well as where they are from, where they want to go, and what they want to see happen in the future. In spite of our individual concerns and anxieties, most of life's insecurities are shared by other individuals and groups. This means that when studying security it is important to pay attention to how representatives of particular groups and organizations construct threat agendas. It is also important to recognize that not all groups, and hence not all threat agendas, are of equal political significance. Clearly, what the US National Security Council considers a threat will have more significant and immediate political consequences for world politics than, say, the threat agendas constructed by Ghana's National Security Council, or, for instance, the concerns of HIV/AIDS sufferers living in one of Africa's many slums. The huge inequalities of power and influence that exist across individuals and groups in contemporary world politics raise significant methodological issues for students of security. Should we focus on the agendas of the powerful or the powerless or both? And where should an analyst's priorities lie if these agendas conflict with one another, as they almost always do?

One recent illustration of the politics of constructing threat agendas was the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004), comprising sixteen eminent international civil servants and former diplomats. After much debate, the Panel's report, *A More Secure World*, identified six clusters of threats exercising the world's governments: economic and social threats, including poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation; inter-state conflict; internal conflict, including civil war, genocide and other large-scale atrocities; nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons; terrorism; and transnational organized crime (UN High-level Panel 2004: 2). It quickly became apparent, however, that there was no consensus as to which of these clusters should receive priority: some, mainly developed Western states, considered threats from terrorism and WMD to be most pressing, while many states in the developing world thought that most resources should be devoted to tackling armed conflict and economic and social threats.

Arguments about what should count as a security issue also animate the academic field of security studies. One perspective argues that security analysts

should focus their efforts on matters related to armed conflict and the threat and use of military force (e.g. Walt 1991b, Brown 2007). From this point of view, not only is armed conflict in the nuclear age one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity but the potentially endless broadening of the field's focus will dilute the concept of security's coherence, thereby fundamentally limiting its explanatory power and analytical utility.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that if security is supposed to be about alleviating the most serious and immediate threats that prevent people from pursuing their cherished values, then for many of the planet's inhabitants, lack of effective systems of healthcare are at least as important as the threat of armed conflict (e.g. Thomas 1987, 2000). After all, the biggest three killers in the developing world are maternal death around childbirth, and paediatric respiratory and intestinal infections leading to death from pulmonary failure or uncontrolled diarrhoea. To combat these killers, the world's governments have been urged to focus on building local capacities to achieve two basic but fundamental goals: increased maternal survival and increased overall life expectancy (Garrett 2007). In a world in which a girl born in Japan in 2004 has a life expectancy of 86 years compared to 34 years for a girl born during the same year but in Zimbabwe, such issues are increasingly viewed as a legitimate part of the global security equation. Security analysts have traditionally focused on the challenges posed by war and the careers and needs of soldiers, who now number over 53 million globally (IISS 2005: 358). Perhaps in the future they should pay more attention to the challenges posed by sickness and the careers and needs of healthcare workers, which according to one estimate, the world needs at least four million more of (Garrett 2007: 15).

How can security be achieved?

In the final analysis, studying security is important because it may help people – as individuals and groups – to achieve it. Asking how security might be achieved implies not only that we know what security means and what it looks like in different parts of the world, but also that there are particular actors which, through their conscious efforts, can shape the future in desired ways. In this sense, how we think about security and what we think a secure environment would entail will unavoidably shape the security policies we advocate. Most analysts reject the idea of total or absolute security as a chimera: all human life involves insecurities and risks of one sort or another. The practical issue is thus: What level of threat are actors willing to tolerate before taking remedial action? As the US government's response to the 9/11 attacks demonstrates, tolerance levels can vary significantly in light of events and as circumstances change.

In contemporary world politics, the agents of security can come in many shapes and sizes. IR students are usually most familiar with the actions of states and the debates about how they formulate and implement their security policies. Similarly, the actions of international organizations have long been a staple of security studies courses. Less attention has been devoted to analysing a wide