

*Geopolitics Quarterly, Volume: 6, No 4, Winter 2010*

*PP 228-241*

## Broadening the Concept of Security: Identity and Societal Security

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Received: 11/01/2010

Accepted: 26/12/2010

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### **Abstract**

This article concentrates on the evolution of the concept of security from its traditional 'Realist' base through to more 'broadened' approaches. This study, therefore, moves beyond the conventional realist paradigm, and conversely looks at the concept of security using a 'broadened' perspective on security studies. In doing so, this paper asks: are the traditional concepts of security studies, particularly realism, in the post Cold War era still relevant? It is this question that forms the focus of this study. Most of the academic literature has far dealt with national security issues from an international and realist point of view. This has often neglected the internal dynamics of state's security dilemma. This article studies the impact of societal security on state's national security, this argument, however, has previously received little academic interest. This article thus contributes to a better understanding of the literature by clarifying conceptual approaches to societal security, and by applying these approaches in order to argue that the most pressing threat to state's national security is within; and not from realist international pressures. The primary goal of this research is to contribute to academic debate regarding the concept of security by employing critical discourse analysis. Therefore, this study builds upon an array of secondary qualitative sources, both in order to construct the theoretical argument and to back this theory up with historical and social scientific data.

**Keywords:** Realism, Identity, Security, Societal Security, Securitisation.

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**Introduction**

During the Cold War era, security was overwhelmingly a matter of the state's sovereignty, its territorial integrity and its political autonomy. Since the late 1980s, however, the focus of security studies as a discipline has been broadened and deepened. It has moved away from merely military concerns and has had to include economic, societal, political and environmental issues, focusing on people rather than positing a state-centric perspective in security studies (Sheehan, 2005, 44).

By the end of the 1980s, however, a decline in a militarised thinking was becoming apparent and consequently the theory of realism fell out of favour. Realists failed to anticipate the end of the Cold War, which put 'realism and realists on the intellectual defensive' (Cox, 2007, 168). Rapid transformation in world politics, Booth argues, led to: the end of the Cold War, the new significance of non-state actors, the growth of interdependence, the declining significance of military power, the revised security challenges, and the increased salience of environmental issues.

Decline of military concerns, however, led to emergence of other types of threats. Barry Buzan argues that there occurred an 'increasing securitisation of two issues that had traditionally been thought of as low politics: the international economy and the environment' (1997, 7). These developments caused a 'rapid collapse of virtually the whole military-political security agenda that had dominated the world for over forty years' (Ibid, 8). In the 1990s most of the armed conflicts in the world had been of an intrastate nature rather than being interstate. Of the fifty-seven major armed conflicts occurring from 1990 to 2001, only three were interstate conflicts. In addition, the expansion of the market economy, the integration of global finance, investment and production, the intensified process of globalisation and the enhancement of modern communication technologies increasingly challenged traditional state-centric thinking.

Meanwhile, it came to be understood that the traditional approach to security was inadequate and that broader and more multi-sector approaches designed to identify other security domains were needed. This paradigmatic shift that took place during the 1980s broadened the concept of security in two different ways. First, security was not to be limited to military discourse, but should instead incorporate the economic, the societal, the environmental, and the political domains which are both causes and effects of security. Second, the issues that needed to be addressed should not only be in reference to the state, but also to peoples, nongovernmental sectors

and the international community. Critical theorists, therefore, needed to go 'beyond realism' (Shaw, 1994, 62).

### **Realism and Security**

Realism focuses on interstate violence. Traditionally, the term security as used in the theory and practice of international relations focuses on issues such as war, peace and the balance of power. Throughout most of the Cold War, security was conceived as being coterminous with military security as against other states' military power (Booth, 2005, 2). Realism identifies military power as the primary and main tool in the maintenance of a given state's sovereignty and national security. The term identity refers to that which defines an individual or a community. Identity allows individuals or collectivities to seek authenticity and validity in relation to others. Furthermore, identity defines the rights and expectations of an individual or a group within a certain society.

Realists argue that the main responsibility of the state is to protect its citizens against internal and external threats. However, realists seek to serve and satiate the national interest and national security through military might. Military power, therefore, is seen as a political instrument through which strength can be demonstrated, counter threats can be exercised, domestic security can be guaranteed, external attack can be deterred, territorial integrity can be maintained, peace can be preserved, and prestige can be acquired. Military power is also used as an instrument in diplomatic negotiations, and as political propaganda. It can be vital in the fulfilment of economic aims. In other words, 'war and military violence are seen as being rational tools of foreign and security policy' (Sheehan, 2005, 44).

Amongst the advocates of a broadening of the concept of security, feminists, critical theorists, and postmodernists also argued that traditional approaches to comprehending the concept of security were 'inadequate'. They maintained that realism serves to impose interpretations of human nature and the objective world which are in fact the distinct property of particular dominant groups within Western society. Such theory thus serves only the interests of the dominant groups at the expense of others' interests, therein 'underpinning a fundamentally unjust political and economic order' which consequently causes discontentment within societal groups (Sheehan, 2005, 45). In sum, realists' understanding of the concept of security has been 'related more to states than to people.' The end of the Cold War, however, led students of security studies 'to focus away from the state and

military dimension of security to individuals and social groups and their needs' (Bilgin, 2005, 203-207).

### **Broadening the Concept of Security**

In his book *People, States, and Fear*, Buzan points out the limitations of realist security discourse, dominated as it is by a state-centric orientation and the predominance of military power as an instrument of state policy in the international context. Buzan, in opposition to the realist thesis, argues that people are affected by threats in different areas other than military ones, such as in political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors. He maintains that individuals, states, and the international system all play significant roles, and all facets of life including economic, societal and environmental ones must be regarded as being as important as military and political ones. Buzan goes so far as to define the five security sectors that affect human collectivities:

*Military security* concerns the two-level interplay between the armed offensive capacity and the defensive capabilities of states and their perceptions of each other's intentions.

*Political security* concerns the organisational stability of states, their systems of governance, and the ideologies that provide them with legitimacy and authority.

*Economic security* regards the level of access the state has to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power.

*Societal security* concerns the sustainability of traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, national identity and customs.

Environmental security regards the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system upon which all other human enterprises depend (1991, 19-20).

These five sectors do not operate in isolation from each other. Buzan adds that: 'Sectors might identify distinctive patterns, but they remain inseparable parts of a complex whole. The purpose of selecting them is simply to reduce complexity to facilitate analysis' (1998, 8). Thus, security studies attempts to identify real threats as being existential and ascertains 'how best to deal with them' in order to define political priorities and security dilemmas which justify the use of force and reactions which are 'beyond rules' on the part of the state.

Buzan, in attempt to define securitization, explains: 'that the issue is

presented as an existential threat requiring emergency measures, and actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure'. Buzan gives some examples of existential threats: in the military sector 'the referent object is the state'; in the political sector existential threats regard issues of sovereignty, 'but sometimes also the ideology of the state'; and in the societal sector, 'the referent object is the large-scale collective and the extent to which it can function independently of the state, such as the nation or religions' (1997, 17).

M. Sheehan argues that: 'Securitization is about constructing a shared understanding of what are to be considered security issues' (2005, 62). Traditionally, to securitise an issue meant to legitimise the use of force that permits the state to take coercive measures. The securitisation of an issue does justify the state's taking of action in order to address the problem. In a sense, an issue becomes a security issue not necessarily because of the real existential threat, but because the issue can be construed as existential, and is then politicised.

Traditionalist's security thinking focuses on militarily issues and the use of force. This undermines a proper understanding of security 'when security is moved out of the military sector' (Sheehan, 2005, 6). For instance, the security concerns of individuals, which focus on issues regarding inadequate health care, poor education, political oppression, human rights, poverty, and minorities' rights, do not feature prominently enough in the traditional military security agenda. Indeed people must be treated as ends in themselves and not as means, and in turn the state should be regarded as a means not an end. In other words, the individual becomes the central focus of attention for those who wish to broaden definitions of security. In short, the multi-sector approach to security studies sees security as being a matter which is beyond the traditional focus on military and state security and which branches out to new areas and spheres of life that are the property of peoples and individuals.

The state is based on the possession of a fixed territory and formal membership with an administrative body, whereas society on the contrary is about identity, and the way in which communities and individuals identify and perceive themselves. Societal insecurity, therefore, emerges when communities feel that their identity is being targeted or threatened. Buzan argues that 'the organizing concept in the societal sector is identity. Societal insecurity exist when communities of whatever kind define a development or potentiality as a threat to their survival as a community' (1998, 119).

**Societal Security**

Barry Buzan, with regard to interstate relations, argues that the traditional concepts underpinning national security studies are increasingly irrelevant, especially in the post-Cold War era. He argues for the importance of introducing notions of societal security dilemmas in terms of ethnicity, nationalism and religious identities. He further explains that the dangers that societal insecurities pose to a state's stability are more serious than external threats. Buzan argues that societal security is one of the five dimensions in which security dilemmas can occur.. He further argues that societal insecurity is one of the key threats to the state. The other dimensions, as mentioned before, are military, political, economic, and environmental security. Buzan goes on to define societal security as being defined by 'the sustainability within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom' (1991, 19). Whereas the state's responsibility is to protect the society from external threats, Waever argues that when the state power grows it may itself become a source of threat to its own people.

Waever emphasises the juxtaposition of the state and societal security, and explains that state security concerns are about threats to its sovereignty whilst societal security is about the threats to a society's identity. Both Waever and Buzan contend that societies are fundamentally about identity. In Waever's words, 'society is about identity, about the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community' (1993, 25).

Buzan, however, is uncertain as to quite when societal security should be considered to be threatened: 'Are threats real or imagined?' He argues that 'what is perceived as a threat and what can be objectively assessed as threatening, may be quite different'. Real threats may not be real, and may nevertheless still have very real effects. Buzan maintains that: 'Security can be approached both objectively (there is a real threat) and subjectively (there is a perceived threat), and nothing ensures that these two line up' (1997, 18).

If one society attempts to strengthen its own societal security, the other society or societies react, invoking a societal security dilemma. As R. Jervis aptly puts it, 'many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others' (1978, 169). This indicates that just as is the interstates security dilemma wherein difficulties may occur in distinguishing between defensive and offensive positions, such dilemma might occurs between societies. The difference here is that the threats here

target identity rather than the state. Societies, therefore, like states, may use arms to defend their identity.

Yet little effort has been made to discern how state identity may be perceived as threatening to societies or minorities within the state. Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* outlines just how state and non-state communities' identities are constructed. The importance of this book lies in its explanation of how group identity distinguishing the 'self' from the 'other', and how this distinction can lead to conflict with 'others' as well as the ways in which these sentiments are manipulated by elites. For instance, 'the anti-German sentiment of the last decades of the eighteenth century deeply influenced the notions of 'We' and 'Them' in Denmark in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Engelhard, 2007, 214). It is not only the state, however, which constructs and promotes a national identity, societal actors also play an important role in shaping and creating the collective identity 'in intense alliances with the state'.

Nations, according to Anderson, are a political project of identity creation, used in nation building, achieving a coherent collective identity, and in the mobilisation of people within a particular territory to kill or die for an ideal. This model is identified by C. Tilly as 'state-led Nationalism' or as 'state-building nationalism'. This enables the state to 'use nationalism as a tool to consolidate their rule over the society' (Aslan, 2007, 247).

Tension between the state and its societal sub-groups undermines, for instance, the territorial integrity and political autonomy of the state, as well as the identity of the society. As argued before, states survive by maintaining their sovereignty and the society survives by maintaining its identity. As a result, like the state, societal groups may defend their identity by militarising their members. In other words, societal confrontations destabilise the political security and undermine the legitimacy of the state. In explaining how states can be threatened by societal insecurity, Waever expresses the way in which societal insecurity can weaken and threaten the functioning of the mechanisms of a government, and indeed can hinder its concomitant ideologies which 'give governments and states their legitimacy'.

Multi-ethnic states are more likely to face intra-societal conflicts. Arms may be used and an endemic continuation of conflict may cause the state to collapse. It may also lead to foreign intervention and ethnic cleansing, and transpire in the spread of terrorism, refugees, arm races, environmental damage, and economic decline, such as was the case with the Kurds under

Saddam in the 1990s. A state may pursue a nationalistic approach in order to establish a nation-state and to gain legitimacy by imposing its own ideas on its subject people. This can be deployed, for instance, through the medium of ideological predispositions such as communism. Buzan emphasises that 'such states may be threatened by separatism'. Buzan adds that the state's territorial integrity can be threatened by internal separatist movements which may seek independence or reunion with other states.

Societies, initially, are unlikely to use military means in order to defend and assert their identity; rather, they are likely to deploy defensive mechanisms in order to strengthen their societal identity. O. Waever suggests that 'for threatened societies, one obvious line of defensive responses is to strengthen societal identity. This can be done by using cultural means to reinforce societal cohesion and distinctiveness, and to ensure that society reproduces itself effectively' (1993, 191). The society therefore defends its identity against a dominant backdrop by recourse to its own culture, replete with its indigenous myths and symbols. In other words, they create a cultural form of nationalism, aimed at strengthening the internal identity of the ethnic minority. This often uses language, religion, culture, and history as its main reference points.

Marry Kaldor, in her attempt to flesh out quite what is meant by a security dilemma and by threats to national security, suggests that there are two kinds of wars: old wars and new wars. She defines old war as being conflict over territory and sovereignty and usually as conflict between states. She defines new wars as a matter of fragmentation and/or integration, and a matter of the homogenisation or diversification of society. Prior to the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the societal understanding of security tended to be along the lines of traditional military-security conceptual underpinnings. The ultimate causes of the new wars, in her view, are the end of the Cold War, the process of globalisation and the weakness or failure of many states.

Kaldor clarifies that the new wars are not ideological conflicts, but are in fact conflicts of identity, and they are often accompanied by ethnic cleansing, rampant and excessive solidifications of identity, fervent criminality within the conflicts, and civil war. Kaldor argues: 'The political goals of the new wars are about the claim to power on the basis of seemingly traditional identities - nation, tribe, religion' (1999, 69). This view is supported by Buzan in so far as religion and nationalism are seen by him as the main movements which can politically mobilise people's



identity. These forces can create 'fear and hatred' in order to underline the distinguishing ethnic factors, emphasising therein the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' in order to mobilise people's political identity within the state. Elie Kedourie explains that nationalism in mixed areas can result in unpleasant and tense relationships between the different inhabitant sub-groups. It tends to disrupt and thwart the characteristics which are in fact shared between the groups. He concludes that 'nationalism in mixed areas makes for tension and mutual hatred' (1960, 115). It can thus be suggested that 'all wars involve a clash of identities'. In short, the most important facet of ethnic and nationalist conflict is the struggle over identity, recognition and power.

The threats therefore posed to states are not merely external. Societal factors and agencies play important roles in the field of national security. If the state fails to reconcile the relationship between itself and its society, conflict and confrontation are likely to occur. If a given society recognises that its identity is threatened, it may react either passively and culturally or militantly and coercively in order to defend itself. Both these methods can consequently deepen and strengthen the qualitative potency of societal identity in the community and can lead to ethnic suppression or civil war. The two major societal actors pertinent to this thesis are: ethno-national identities; and religious identities. These two factors are most likely to produce violent conflicts between the variegated units of a society.

With regards to security, though the state plays an important role, it is nevertheless not a sufficient actor. Limiting the state's power and strengthening the social basis of the state in order to gain security is essential. Equally, if a government - a representative of the society - is unable to implement the people's demands, a weak state and a powerful society may emerge. There are other significant factors which define and shape national security: the struggle between the various elites; and the regime's international prestige and prosperity. The notion of national security can be divided into two levels in terms of objectives - its decisive aims and its secondary aims. Prosperity, territorial integrity, national security, economic might, and the independence and autonomy of the state are the decisive factors in the security of the state. In addition, the creation of international organisations, the struggle to become a regional power, efforts to weaken enemies and support alliances, and the identification of friendly countries, as well as the securing of human rights, are other factors that play essential roles in discourses surrounding national security.

### **A Critique of Societal Security**

It should be acknowledged, however, that the concept of societal security is not without its detractors. Critical security theorists have a number of criticisms they direct at the notion of societal security, the most common being that societal security tends to give unmerited priority to the identity of society. Because of the juxtaposition of societal identity with national identity, the approach has been accused of reshaping understanding of society and its identity in ways which philosophically lack rigour and which are potentially dangerous. B. McSweeney asserts that societal security defines society as a having a single identity, and that this presents a risk of supporting the rise of intolerant identities that in fact can make inter-ethnic conflict more likely (1996, 88-93). Paul Roe, commenting on this issue suggests that the concept of societal security has been 'problematic' for the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. He maintains that 'the problem lies in whether identity, and thus society itself can be seen as either an object or a process; that is whether identity is something solid and constant or whether it is something fluid and changing' (1999, 183). Thus, societal security is accused of creating an imagined and excessively holistic identity for society, the same way that traditional security studies had indeed created a monolithic and ideal type of the state. In short, it is argued that the identity of a society does not exist prior to the identification of threats, and rather the identification of threats in fact serves to create the basic elements of societal identity.

Critical security theorists' criticisms of the concept of societal security is that, by 'inserting societies into the study of security in place of the state merely reifies the identity of a society, the same way such traditional security studies have reified the state.' Pinar Bilgin, criticising the concept of societal security argues that 'clashes over identity are not the cause but the outcome of a process through which conflicts over economic and political interests are reframed and presented in terms of identity.' He adds that it would be difficult according to the concept to know who the aggressor is and who the victim (2005, 213).

The most frequent criticism of the concept of societal security is that it is 'unmanageably broad'. Walt argues that broadening the concept of non-military security may perceive issues such as poverty, pollution, drug abuse, child abuse, and diseases as a threat to security. He adds 'Defining the field in this way would destroy its [security's] intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions to any of these important problems' (1991,

213). This raises the question of whether, by expanding the concept of security, the security study becomes the study of everything, and anything can, subsequently, become a referent object of security (Floyd, 2007, 41). In short, this would widen the concept of security significantly, insofar as it includes 'latent conflicts and unobservable structural causes of insecurity.'

Buzan has therefore been criticised for not being able to give a clear definition of the concept of security. In Smith's words, 'Buzan's approach makes it difficult to deduce what security is, what empirical referent it relates to. What does it mean to say that someone or something is secure? My point is that different views of how to determine what security means will lead to different definitions of what the concept entails' (1991, 333-334). Critics of the widening the meaning of security argue that the concept of security need to 'retain its value as a specific concept within international relations it needs to have a restricted meaning.' By widening the concept of security, critics argue that the concept becomes incoherent and the concept of security becomes 'overloaded'. Sheehan argues that broadening the approach to the security studies would make the concept of security 'unworkably broad'; he comments, 'Security can be defined very broadly so that it means anything that affects the well-being of human beings. But this would force the inclusion of things such as natural disasters and illness. Volcanic eruptions and cholera epidemics are obviously serious problems, but are they security issues?' (Sheehan, 2005, 59).

However, this debate has provoked further questions of "whose security?" and 'whether individuals should replace states as a primary referent of security' (Bilgin, 2003, 208). Critics of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies argue that their approach is still state-centric and 'that is little different from mainstream approaches to security such as realism'. For instance, Waeber says that 'the concept of security belongs to the state'. Ken Booth gives the highest priority to individuals and to human emancipation as a referent object of security (1991, 313-326). This emancipation-orientated approach to the study of security raises another question of how broadening and not deepening the concept of security can address the needs and interests of individuals. Sheehan argues that,

For Booth and other critical security proponents, the objective should be not just "broadening" the understanding of security by extending its logic to new sectors. It should also be about "deepening" the meaning of security. Deepening involves challenging existing conceptions that limit its application and instead exploring the implications of working with a richer

concept of security that would alter the practice of politics itself (2005, 58).

Buzan is, also, criticised for concentrating 'his analysis of security on the state, with the international system and individuals taking a secondary role' (Smith, 1991, 327). Martin Shaw says that Buzan's broadened concept of security 'is still fundamentally a statist one which suffers from central contradictions in its understanding of the state-society relationship'. Critiques of Buzan, therefore, ask: 'is it state, or is it people?' and 'Whose security comes first?' McSweeney, for instance, argues that for Buzan the referent object is the state and that his 'answer to the question 'Who or what is being secured?' is the state' (1999, 55). Shaw, however, argues: 'when we discuss security, it is not just a question of the security of individuals versus that of the state, but of a complex, multilayered analysis, in which the security of individuals may be a starting place, but in which we have to examine security issues which affect social groups (below the state level) as well as issues of state security.' (1994, 99) Sheehan maintains that, 'the Buzan/Waever development of "societal" security is not entirely successful, because it can be accused of making the same mistake with society that was earlier made with the state – that is, to treat it as a single, fully formed, unproblematic entity.'

### Conclusion

This article argues that the concept of societal security is critical in examining a significant range of threats that cannot be understood through the realist state-centric/military-centric security positions. Societal security suggests that identity groups are concerned with survival through preserving ethno-national identity, whilst states seek to maintain their sovereignty. This leads to a dilemma in which traditional security concepts fail to appropriately address the substate-state security problem (Smith, 2000, 83). Moreover, increases in a state's security can lead to increases in the insecurity of certain societal groups. From the point of view of the state, however, any defence of societal identity by the groups may be perceived as a threat to the state's legitimacy, sovereignty, and such groups can also be construed as 'harbouring secessionist goals.' (Roe, 1999, 199) In short, societal security is a opposing referent object of security to the state.<sup>1</sup> Whilst acknowledging that realism advocates the state as a mere referent object of

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1. *Referent objects* refers to things such as: individuals, social/societal groups, states, regions, or the world, that are perceived to be 'existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival.' B. Buzan, *op. cit.*, (1997), p. 36.

security, this article, however, argues that such a view is 'too narrow' and inadequate in answering the question of identity and societal security dilemma. Steve Smith in criticizing the realist's security views argues that, 'The state is no longer the only or core actor, and as a result it is less privileged than before.' He adds that, 'the concept of security studies is more widely defined as before.' (2000, 77) P. Roe argues that, 'societal security is particularly effective for understanding the security concerns of multi-ethnic states: the relation between the regime (majority group) and the country's minority groups.' (2007, 179) This research, therefore, employs the concept of societal security as a referent object of security to examine internal insecurities in multi-ethnic states, and maintains that the state is not the sole referent object of security.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the nature of conflicts occurring in Europe and Africa brought societal security concerns to the forefront of the international security agenda. In fact, many modern societies are multi-ethnic, multiracial, and multi-religious. The presence of minorities in conflicts which span the borders of two or more countries and which identify with their ethnic-kin in formally opposing states increases the likelihood of interstate conflict and societal insecurity, such as the war in the former Yugoslavia. This is one reason why societal security should be brought to the forefront of security studies. It provides a way of thinking about security issues in which the referent object is not the state, but the people.

Societies possess a sense of shared identity, and this identity enables its members to employ the word 'we' in reference to themselves. This helps to generate a sense of 'belonging together' amongst societal groups, at the national level, the civilisational level, and in terms of religious identities, 'where people are prepared to kill or die in its services'. When national and religious identities are threatened, the effect on a 'very large' part of society can be intense. When a society perceives that its 'we' identity is under threat, societal insecurity occurs. In other words, societal insecurities occur when a society feels its identity to be targeted and endangered. In sum, when people's identity and their state's ideology do not coincide, people react so as to defend themselves. Any attempt to increase the security of a nation not embodied by the state, inevitably increases the insecurity of the state. Buzan argues that the threat posed therein to society occurs because of the state's repressive attitude towards certain societal groups.

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