Security Studies for the Next Millennium: Quo Vadis?

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The sudden and unexpected implosion of the Soviet Union and the abrupt end of the Cold War prompted a probing, if not always fruitful, debate about what is—or what should be—security studies. This journal in its previous incarnation as Arms Control played a leading and constructive role in this searching review. Part of the explanation for its name change can be traced to this debate. Contemporary Security Policy signals more than a wider range of interests falling under the rubric of security versus arms control. It also serves as a way to elicit views from a broad group of analysts and practitioners to respond to this enlarged understanding of security and to service a larger and more varied readership and constituency whose notions of security are more encompassing, if hardly convergent or always coherent, than those associated with traditional treatments of the subject.

This change in nomenclature testifies to the constraints imposed on strategic studies by Cold War concerns and just how much the nuclear competition of the superpowers and their intervention around the globe dominated the field. It was enough to worry about arms control as a priority rather than open the discussion to the full panoply of security problems with which other states and groups were grappling. The passing of the U.S.–Soviet bipolar rivalry has now permitted the enlargement of the security studies agenda. The explosion has been so marked that it is indeed impossible to make a comprehensive assessment of this expansion in the short space allotted for this discussion. Rather than attempt such an enterprise, which risks slighting or ignoring many important perspectives and contributions, the discussion will focus, rather, on some general indicators of what security studies has become and where it might—or should—be going.

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first identifies some of the principal results of the debate about security studies and their implications for the choices which analysts and policymakers are obliged, implicitly or explicitly, to make before they address a particular security issue. Because the notion of security has now become so contested, contributors to the field are harder put than ever before, as a part of their professional responsibilities, to be more precise in defining what they mean by security, in clarifying the assumptions on which they are proceeding, in identifying the particular audiences to which they are targeting their interventions, and, where relevant, in exposing the policy biases they harbor. The competing choices posed by these considerations and the larger canvass on which security studies now works puts those in the field on their mettle to justify their choices. Whether these added burdens of transparency will actually lead to progress in the field, however defined, remains to be seen, but there is no gainsaying that those working in security studies can no longer assume that others share their views about what security is and how to study it.

Part two offers one solution to the problem of security sprawl in the form of a question which, putatively, is central to the study of security in the post-Cold War era from whatever perspective the field is addressed: What security system or order is likely to be best calculated to bring about world peace? The touchstone for this question and the subsequent discussion is the assumption of an ever enlarging interdependence among the peoples and states of the world. This condition is defined by an ever accelerating increase in the number, accumulating density, and real-time impact of exchanges of all kinds between them. Embedded in these enlarging exchanges are incentives to use or threaten force to elicit the cooperation actors want from others. When and where these properties of threat arise in the strivings of actors to have their say and way, the issue of security then immediately appears as a separate and distinct problem, quite apart from the competing outcomes.

1 This manuscript originally appeared in Contemporary Security Policy 20 (3) (December 1999).
3 See the April and December 1992 issues of Arms Control.
sought by the contestants to a desired stake. Two parallel forms of politics arise. First there is the exchange under contest—a dispute over territory, the enforcement of contracts or the protection of property, competition for enhanced status, access to resources, or what-have-you. The second form of politics, what is the focus of our interest here, is the politics of security, covering the rules and institutions of coercion supporting a particular regime or order. The politics of security and the outcomes of this ceaseless process are, in turn, tributary to a larger and richer political tapestry, namely the politics of governance of the emerging world society of peoples and states.  

A security order principally addresses the use of threats of force or violence to arbitrate preference conflicts; it is a necessary element of any global system of governance, but it is, as the discussion below suggests, also bound or limited by the constraints of this larger process of regulatory politics. Such a projection or vision of security studies does not imply a world moving toward peace; it is more a problem in which the condition is stipulated that none of the actors can truly be isolated from the decisions and actions of others in pursuing their security interests, notably those governing their ongoing and future exchanges sanctioned by force or threats, nor can actors, however materially powerful and endowed, expect to impose their preferred system of order on others, given the decentralization of power across states and peoples. Nor, finally, can security be separated from the politics of governance more generally than extends to crucial domains, principally the material welfare of populations and their conceptions of legitimate authority; security systems obviously have much to say about how these imperatives are addressed, but by its very nature a security system alone cannot supply solutions for the competing social choices generated by these other critical domains of governance.

How We Got where We Are

The post-Cold War debate would appear to have had three disquieting outcomes for the field. First, it is now clear that no one paradigm can embrace what actors whose behavior is to be explained mean by security. This is scarcely news, but the implications of this explosion in multiple meanings that are being associated with security threats, ranging from direct military attacks on states or peoples to the deprivation of basic material necessities, has to be confronted if some coherence is to be made of the field. Denying this complexity and these contradictions either by dismissing the claims of actors who genuinely feel threatened by being outside the boundaries of security studies—say in claiming that a state or its people are threatened as a consequence of market rules—serves little purpose if, indeed, the claims are the source of incentives for actors to resort to violence to address them or, conversely, coercion has to be used to preclude such appeals. The Iraqi grab for oil in invading Kuwait or the Indonesian economic meltdown and the latter’s disruptive implications for ethnic and communal violence suggest that actors, not analysts, will decide what a security problem is and how it is to be handled. A principal, if not exclusive, responsibility of security analysts, let alone policymakers coping with security problems, is to understand and explain the perceptions, thinking, decisions, and actions of actors in pursuit of their security interests, however perverse or misguided they may appear.

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4 This analysis rests on the empirical observation that, as the English school persuasively argues, states have imposed constraints on themselves and these have been relied upon as rules or norms not only regulating the exchanges between states, but as criteria by which they are recognized by other states as sovereign and authoritative over the territories which they govern. These norms inform the very make up of a state’s identity. Its moral equality and its membership within the society of states, quite apart from the material power it disposes, rests on adherence to these norms. As an ideal model, norms and their self-enforcement converge. The conception of order presented here owes much to the English school, although I prefer to nest Bull’s notion of order which revolves around the structure of force and violence regulating human exchanges to include notions of legitimacy and the production and distribution of wealth. See Hedley Bull, The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics (London: Macmillan, 1977); Hedley Bull, ed., Intervention in World Politics (London: Oxford, 1984); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., The Expansion of International Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 117–26; Adam Watson, “European International Society and Its Expansion,” The Expansion of International Society, ed. Adam Watson and Hedley Bull (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 13–32; Adam Watson, The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis (London: Routledge, 1992); and Samuel J. Barkin, “The Evolution of the Constitution of Sovereignty and the Emergence of Human Rights Norms,” Millennium 27 (2) (1998): 229–52.
Evidence of the expansion of the scope of security threats in the perception of actors around the globe may be found by looking at the explosion in governmental and non-governmental institutes concerned with security over the last two decades and the diversity of subject matter and methods pursued by these agencies. A glance at the International Affairs Directory of Organizations, while not exclusively built of a survey of units concerned with security, does represent much of a cross-section of what is going on worldwide with respect to security studies. What is interesting to observe is the exponential growth in the number of organizations in international affairs, and specifically in security matters, since 1970. Of the 865 organizations canvassed, seventy percent or 596 were created after 1970 and nearly half of these were founded after 1980. While the bulk of these are located in the developed north, increasingly these organizations have mushroomed within the developing states. Organizations, like the Regional Center for Security Studies in Sri Lanka, have been formed on so-called neutral ground to specifically study South Asian security issues by bringing together regional experts and practitioners whose home states precluded such contacts on security grounds. Arms control, confidence-building measures, and cooperation in economic and cultural exchanges to foster non-violent solutions to security problems are no longer the province, if they ever were, of the great powers or aspiring global hegemonists competing for ascendancy. New research and teaching studies groups have also proliferated within the institutional makeup of regional giants like China and India, not to mention their respective rivals, Taiwan and Pakistan, to address a wide number of security problems that go well beyond traditional agendas.

Between 1988 (one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall) and 1992, a dramatic shift could already be detected in research and teaching priorities. If concerns about military strategy or the benefits, costs, and risks of new weapons systems continued to be security studies staples, these topics were increasingly supplanted by economic, environmental, and human rights concerns over traditional foreign policy and military problems. This shift was characteristic of both developed and developing states. Interestingly enough, nuclear strategy and deterrence as well as nuclear proliferation which had before dominated the concerns of United States-based organizations fell off the chart of the ten most important topics when regional and topical subjects were combined.

The worst fears of many security analysts have now come to pass. When such seemingly disparate issues as economic development, environmental threats, or identity politics are introduced into the set of objects marked “security,” many are alarmed that the field will lose its focus and discipline. As one prominent scholar who has made substantial contributions to security studies argues, “Once anything that generates anxiety or threatens the quality of life in some respect becomes labeled a ‘security problem’ the field risks losing all focus.” Worse, as he worries, security risks are likely to be run by states because distracted policy makers will lack the clear guidance offered heretofore presumably by security analysts: “Practitioners are likely to reach inappropriate conclusions if they insist on squeezing issues that vary so widely into one, unsuitably broad, conceptual framework geared toward coping with military threats.”

One can wonder whether the decisions taken by Cold War policy makers avoided “inappropriate conclusions” in building vast nuclear forces that they could not use and which, since the end of the Cold War, they have had enormous difficulty disposing of. On the other hand, did decision makers draw the appropriate conclusion in intervening around the globe—say Afghanistan for the Soviet Union or Vietnam for the United States—at the behest of their security advisors? From the point of view of the actors engaged in pursuing their multiple and conflicting security agendas what is “inappropriate” after all in coping with security threats? Why shouldn’t actors place security issues and their resolution within a larger context to evaluate whether they are disciplined to political aims and moral purposes? And whether, too, they are cost effective? The limits of military force might well become more apparent if they are evaluated against a larger conceptual and political canvass.

Second, if no one paradigm can embrace what needs to be known about security as actors understand what they are perceiving, thinking and doing in the name of security, there also is no one discipline or method appropriate for its study. Those prominent in the security community, certainly in the United States in the first

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7 Ibid.
generation after World War II—what many call the “golden age” of security studies—were optimistic, however much they might have otherwise disagreed, that a pure and powerful theory of strategy could be developed to explain the behavior of armed opponents and to guide policy making in preferred and winning ways, whatever the specific security issue under discussion.\(^8\) Borrowing almost wholesale from microeconomic theory of markets, based on the assumption of egoistic, value maximizing actors, nuclear deterrence was portrayed as a rational process of decision making. In much the same way that actors in markets respond to relative prices, always preferring more over less as the driver of their choices, so adversaries engaging in a coercive exchange were expected to react favorably to differences in the damage that could be visited upon them relative to the gains they sought and risks run in challenging a rival. Deterrence revolved then around the capacity of a postulated unified state, conceived as a rational actor, to project credible threats to ensure costs and risks of challenging deterrence would exceed expected gains. The aim of adversaries was to establish the terms of the calculus of deterrence to manipulate coercive threats in ways to elicit the cooperative behavior of the opponent. This conceptual framework was subsequently applied to the behavior of adversaries in armed conflicts throughout the developing world. Strategists assumed that calibrated applications of violence, coercive threats, and a deliberate movement up an escalation ladder whose precise rungs were defined deductively by strategic theory and applied by informed policymakers would induce—even compel—adversary cooperation.\(^9\)

That this optimism was already on the wane as early as the middle 1960s, could be detected in the reaction of analysts and practitioners to the failed application of prevailing strategic theory in Vietnam. Neglected was the Churchillian dictum that the enemy should be taken into account in war. American strategists, theorists and policymakers could not convince their Vietnamese adversaries to conform to the roles and expected behavior assigned to them—any more than the German general staff in World War I was able to maneuver allied forces to cooperate in their own defeat in executing what proved to be a disastrously flawed Schlieffen Plan.\(^10\) The Soviet Union had to learn this same hard lesson in Afghanistan. As in Vietnam, a poorly equipped and economically impoverished enemy defeated a militarily more powerful adversary. From the perspectives of Washington and Moscow, strategic theory dictated that their respective opponents were acting irrationally in accepting sub-optimal outcomes in resisting overwhelming superpower military force; they would come around once the right amount of directed violence were applied to convince them of these errant choices. The latter, however, continued to prefer to have their soldiers and civilians “killed, maimed, and hurt”\(^11\) rather than abandon their putatively sub-optimal strategies and payoffs. It is difficult to construct a pure theory of strategy, applicable to all adversaries and circumstances, when rivals march by their own drum down paths of their own choosing towards destinations which diverge from those of their opponents.

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9 This is not to say that other approaches were not available; rather they were subordinate to the dominant rational actor model and the positing of a maximizing security value to explain and predict adversary behavior. See, for example, Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); idem, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) and Edward Mead Earle, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943). While the authors in these works are more historical and pragmatic in their approach to strategic theory, they largely are sympathetic to a rational actor model. For an early critique of this approach, see Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).


11 The phrase is of course Schelling’s in *Arms and Influence*. 
If the optimism and assumptions of first-wave strategists have been brought up short, it does not necessarily mean that the notion of developing a theory of strategy has lost all credibility or, worse, to conclude that strategic analysis has no policy utility. It is precisely because of the enormous complexities associated with use of force or threats to control the behavior of a resourceful and willful adversary that serious and continuing thought must be assigned to this problem. It is pointless and not a little mischievous to abandon a rational actor model as a powerful tool of analysis. That said, the experience of the Cold War and the factors bearing on its end and the breakdown of the Soviet Union and empire, suggest that reliance on simple notions of rational behavior, uniformed either by the socioeconomic, domestic political, and normative context within which actors must act is likely to produce surface and shallow models of actor behavior and limited policy options in getting adversaries—or allies—to cooperate in preferred ways. As the challenge offered by psychological and social psychological approaches to strategic decision making suggest, these contextual factors affecting policy options are compounded by the cognitive and perceptual impediments to stipulated modes of rational behavior. Understanding the shortcomings of first wave thinking is less a reason to reject outright its mode of analysis and its implicit reliance on traditional realist assumptions than to recognize that this dual alliance must now compete with psychological or cognitive theories of actor decision making, institutionalist theory, cultural and sociological approaches, historically driven explanations of actor behavior, and a wide spectrum of quantitative research techniques under the general heading of peace studies.

Third, and following from the first two observations about paradigms and disciplinary methods, the security debate has also underscored the point that there is no one dominant policy solution appropriate for the resolution of security issues. The inclination of Cold War strategists to advance countervailing threats or force as the preferred, even exclusive, solution to security problems has lost a great deal of its policy relevance and theoretical power. The collapse of the Soviet Union at the height of its military and police powers and prowess has seriously challenged this circular reasoning. A great power, contrary to the experience of fading powers, has seriously challenged this circular reasoning. A great power, contrary to the experience of fading powers before, relinquished its claim to hegemonic status without firing a shot. If Western military technology and capabilities may be said to have induced many Soviet planners to seek accommodation with the West and to reform Soviet political and economic institutions, the military dimension of the East–West competition does not appear to have been determinative in explaining either the timing, speed, and wholesale unraveling of the Soviet state and empire. Other powerful systemic forces associated with the attractive pull of global markets, and its implicit reliance on traditional realist assumptions than to recognize that this dual alliance must now compete with psychological or cognitive theories of actor decision making, institutionalist theory, cultural and sociological approaches, historically driven explanations of actor behavior, and a wide spectrum of quantitative research techniques under the general heading of peace studies.

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13 See Patrick Morgan’s trenchant critique of classical deterrence theory. Pointing out the faults of a rational actor approach does not mean that the approach is to be discarded. It has to be modified by prudence and knowledge of the context within which it is applied. Morgan succeeds in this balance quite admirably although his lead has unfortunately not been followed to the degree it warrants. Patrick M. Morgan, Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis, 2d ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983).


15 See the 1995 summer issue of International Security for a symposium that contrasts realist, neo-realist, liberal, and constructivist conceptualizations of security.


18 For example, consult the articles in Journal of Conflict Resolution and Journal of Peace Studies.
the West’s lead in science and technology, and its open processes of governance were, arguably, decisive in
dissolving the Soviet security system without the need for a mutually devastating military clash to decide the
contest. Put within this larger theoretical framework, the parameters of security defined by the narrow terms of
countervailing coercion are inconclusive and misleading in explaining these seismic events. These parameters or
analysis are permeable and cannot be protected simply by resort to the ceteris paribus clause. Actors with
powerful interests to pursue are not inhibited by these conceptual limits.

Security capabilities in the form of coercive threats, military forces, and weapons certainly are central to
security studies. But these elements are, depending on circumstances defined by the implicated actors, subject
to decisive determination by what Joseph Nye calls soft power, but what I would refer to as broader, more
systemic, under the rubric of the imperatives of welfare and legitimacy. The soft power structures with which
these imperatives are associated generate their own incentives for decision and policies at odds with those
relying solely on coercion as the principal response to security concerns. In a nutshell the Soviet Union could
not compete with the solutions advanced by the Western coalition of market democracies for the demands of
populations, including those of Russian elites and masses, for “more now.” Nor could the Soviet empire and
the universalist Marxist ideology on which it rested for its legitimacy compete with the attractive pull of
nationalism and, though less compelling as the politics of the former Soviet republics reveal, with the
imperatives of democratization. The failure of the Soviet system to harmonize its external security policies
with internal demands for welfare and competing alternatives to legitimate authority other than Communist rule
destroyed its security edifice almost overnight.

Since we do not have a definitive and conclusive understanding and explanation for the end of the Cold
War (claims by contesting experts for exclusionary rights to define the field to the contrary notwithstanding),
it is no wonder that we do not have a universally acknowledged conceptual touchstone, much less monitoring
and measuring tools, to tell us what security is, how to study it, or how to resolve the policy dilemmas it
poses. This parlous state in which few can agree on what precisely security studies is or should be prompts a
fourth and concluding generalization about the outcome of the security debate. Not without irony, it no longer
seems as important as it was in the early aftermath of the end of the Cold War to pose the question. By default,
security studies is what diverse actors decide and do about security rather than what security scholars say it is.
The Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War was apparently swept into the dustbin of history with little help
from the security community and its self-subscribed members.

From A Theory of Strategy to a Theory of Security and Global Governance

When Gertrude Stein was on her deathbed, she asked her long-time companion, Alice Toklas, “Well, what are
the answers?” Toklas replied; “There are none.” “Then,” Stein retorted, “What are the questions?” The same
approach may be helpful in attempts to give some coherence to security studies. In light of the fallout of the
security debate, sketched above, the question to be posed to guide security analysis should meet at least two
conditions. First, it should cover all exchanges between actors in which the use or threat of force is threatened
or used by one or all of the actors to produce a desired outcome from the transaction. This condition is

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20 This argument is elaborated in Edward A. Koledziej, “Order, Welfare, and Legitimacy: A Systemic Explanation
21 Some sense of the confusion of this debate can be garnered by examining, inter alia: Pierre Allan and Kjell
Goldmann, eds., The End of the Cold War: Evaluating Theories of International Relations (Dordrecht, Holland:
Martinus Nijhoff, 1992); Jeffrey Checkel, Ideas and International Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of
the Cold War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry “Who Won the Cold
War?” Foreign Policy 87 (Summer 1992): 123–38; Nils P. Gleditsch, “The End of the Cold War: Evaluating Theories
of International Relations,” Journal of Peace Research 30 (August 1993): 357; Charles W. Kegley, Jr., “How Did the
Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse–Kappens, eds., International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War (New York:
Realism,” International Organization 48 (2) (Spring 1994): 249–78; and William Wohlforth, “Realism and the End
consistent with traditional realist and contemporary theorists of strategy. Generalizing about the behavior of actors using threats of violence would parallel the assumptions of microeconomic analysis that actors always prefer more not less wealth; similarly, actors would prefer, if this were the only condition on which to pose the question of security, more security than less. Conceived in these terms, security studies would focus on narrow professional problems of interest to what Samuel Huntington characterized as "managers of violence;" they would also extend to broader and more central concerns such as the creation of deterrence and arms control regimes or the military strategies to be pursued by states and alliances in war and peace. All security issues would be within the set or domain posed by the question.

However, the security debate and the collapse of the Soviet Union and empire have cast profound doubt on phrasing security and order questions in such circular and circumscribed terms in which all threats and uses of force by adversaries—or even allies—are addressed by countervailing material power. Whether an opponent will resort to violence or threats in what forms under what circumstances at what times cannot be explained, much less manipulated by other actors to their advantage, solely by reference to counteracting, reflexive force. This qualification is at the heart of the difficulty of attempts to develop a pure theory of strategy driven by a maximization principle defined by the manipulation of threats or simply getting ordinance on target. Security, as pursued by actors, extends to a much wider and not fully determinate range of socioeconomic, political, not to say psychological and cultural considerations. Consequently the question to be defined to guide security studies would not only be concerned with what is in the set labeled "security," but it would also be informed by the limits established by those factors and forces shaping the outer conceptual frontiers or parameters of the security set itself in which decisions related to force and threats were impacted. These will either constrain or enlarge the domain of actor exchanges falling within security or order studies. For example, nationalism might be counted upon to surmount class and communal divisions within a state as a principle of state rule based on popular sovereignty, but it can also incite wars as French expansion under Napoleon and the spread of European empires illustrate. Conversely, a liberal state, animated by a nationalism dedicated to constitutional limits on the authority and power of the state can constrain violence and relax security dilemmas.

Much of Cold War strategic thinking treated security exchanges primarily from within the security set as if its elements were—or could be—isolated and insulated from the perturbations outside the set. This analytic move was justified either by the claim that high politics—questions of geopolitical aims and military strategy—always trumped low polities (so why be concerned about the latter) or by the convenience of a ceteris paribus assumption which fended off the need for reality tests. These defensive moves have lost their deterrent power under the drum fire of critics of Cold War security studies. The security analyst is certainly obliged to explain and predict the behavior of adversaries by reference to models built around the mutual exchange of threats and force, the stuff of military planners and strategists, but these models are subject to the impact of demands whose satisfaction cannot be assured by military force; these have had—and continue to have—a powerful and discernible effect on the security thinking, decisions, and behavior of competing actors.

This dual perspective from within and from outside the set of exchanges involving force and violent threats, as Charles Tilly suggests, places enormous strains on theory building. Static models about security behavior, resting on a stipulated set of assumptions are not easily abandoned; they have the virtue of clarity and seeming certainty since they control for influences outside the sphere of actor behavior under examination. But what if the phenomena under investigation, the security behavior of actors, resists these conceptual controls? This dynamic condition not only defines how the game of security is played but the rules of the game itself. Both the game and game rules are under stressful change today although the rate and scope of these changes are not simultaneous or synchronous.

If this is the true security situation confronting actors, as the Soviet experience suggests, then how can these changes be captured; how can accurate values be assigned to the impact of these forces on security; and how can these changes be updated without unduly disrupting the making and implementing of military and strategic policies? Hypotheses and generalizations deriving from static models must be constantly checked to assess whether the parameters within which they are cast are stable and holding. Unless ways are found to

capture these shifting terms of actor behavior, analysts and policymakers can expect to be continually surprised by events, not unlike those that beset Soviet leaders who were undone by their own reforms. In the Soviet case, the failure of the Soviet regime to address welfare and legitimacy imperatives and, more broadly, the governance problems they engendered arose precisely from the success of the regime in amassing an enormous military arsenal on a par with its Western rivals. The Soviet state collapsed under the material weight of its own security order erected to preclude the regime’s demise.

If the resolution of security imperatives are contingent on solving larger governance problems in adjusting peoples and states to their increasing interdependence, then what are the sources of the incentives which are eliciting or inducing actors to use or threaten violence in the post-Cold War era? What solutions are available to check and contain these incentives? The dilemmas confronting security analysts and policymakers is that the very solutions adopted by the divided populations of the world society to resolve their governance problems are also the principal sources of the incentives prompting violence. The solutions of the nation-state, self-determination, democratization and human rights, and global markets—advanced to quell and control the incentives leading to violent exchanges—are the sources of the world’s discontent. The dilemmas posed by these forces lie deep within what might be cautiously characterized as the emergence of a world society of states and peoples for the first time in history. These forces generate incentives, alternatively, to resolve armed conflicts and hostilities and yet induce actors to resort to violence and threats to arbitrate their differences in favorable but mutually incompatible ways. The tensions they induce form much of the subject matter and furnish much of the agenda for security analysis and the pursuit of a theory of security. How do these solutions to governance create the security problems besetting peoples and states and how can security analysts study them systematically and find ways to relax and surmount them? The remainder of this discussion sketches some of the dimensions of these security dilemmas. How they will be solved or managed will have a critical bearing on what kind of security system or order is best calculated to produce international peace.

First, the nation-state and the nation-state system are, respectively, the basic unit of government of the world’s populations and the ideational and institutional foundation of international order. The nation-state furnishes, as Barry Buzan persuasively argues, what order exists in a world of contesting peoples. No alternative now exists to this solution to the Hobbesian problem, however much many may find it morally unpalatable, politically bankrupt, or just plain behind the times. Nor is any alternative on the horizon a plausible substitute to discharge, however imperfectly, the state’s security functions. Order is certainly enhanced through multilateral cooperation in international organizations, whether the United Nations, NATO, or the European Union. These mechanisms dampen and check incentives to employ force or threats. However, they do not fundamentally alter the essential makeup and incentives of a decentralized solution to global governance, which the overwhelming number of inhabitants of the world have adopted to have their say—to arbitrate preferences favorable to their aims, interests, and values by force or threats when all other forms of reconciliation, harmonization, and compromise have been exhausted. Liberal democracies or authoritarian governments—manifest and profound differences notwithstanding—all have to confront and solve these security problems as Austinian partisans never cease to insist. A system of nation-states, each claiming to exercise a monopoly of legitimate violence over the territory it rules, remains a self-help system and prone to war.

Defection from cooperation with allies or from prohibitions to use or threaten force are endemic to state behavior as Rousseau’s parable of the hunters and stag made abundantly clear two centuries ago. Conversely, failed or flawed states which are unable to perform their expected security functions are increasingly significant sources of international disorder. Their weakness invites other actors to prey on their vulnerability or make a hostile bid to assume their security roles and the organized violence they dispose. So the nation-state is both the source and the solution to the problems it raises for world peace.

The same contradictory tensions are no less predicable of the continuing spread and intensity of the politics of identity. On the one hand, as Woodrow Wilson assumed with good reason, the fusion of self-determination and statehood does in some instances solve the problem of the unrequited demands of populations for greater political autonomy and independence in governing their affairs. Under the banner of self-determination, identity politics continues to work its way through global politics. Having decisively defeated European colonialism, this force then devoured the Soviet Union. It now feeds on its own children, the newly developing states that arose from the collapse of these empires. At one level, irredentist claims, real or fabricated, prompt aggression and the absorption of neighbors, illustrated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Hussein regime’s grab of disputed territory from Iran a decade earlier. Both Iraq and notably Iran were driven by the politics of identity—quite apart from the state-centric dimensions of their conflict. The result was a mutually devastating war, producing over a million casualties, helped by arms suppliers from all of the major arms production centers.

At another level, dissident groups seek greater political power and, in the extreme, demand their own state, contributing to the stability-instability tensions within the global governance system. These pressures for autonomy and secession pervade world politics. As Charles Maynes observes, “[A]nimosity among ethnic groups is beginning to rival the spread of nuclear weapons as the most serious threat to peace that the world faces.”

The failure of states to curb the politics of identity or the active implication of the state in its deadly pursuit can lead to genocide as a final solution. From this perspective, genocide is in not outside of world politics; it arises as the extreme logical conclusion of the rational calculations of rivals seeking a final solution to their conflicts with others. Between April–June 1994, an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 Rwandans, mostly Tutsis, were massacred, thousands more maimed for life, families and communities permanently disrupted, and an estimated two million uprooted and driven to refugees camps, upwards of 15 to 25 percent of the population. About 8 to 10 percent of the population was slaughtered by the most primitive of means. A similar level of killing in the United States or in the European Union would have resulted in approximately 25 million deaths, an almost unimaginable man-made disaster paralleling World War I casualty levels. Ethnic cleansing, forced emigration, and genocide, however repugnant, are also the logical end games of unabated and uncontrolled identity politics. Chou En-lai was allegedly asked to make an assessment of the French revolution. He reportedly replied that it was too early to tell. The politics of identity, now broader than self-determination and much broader than Chou En-lai imagined, now threatens world peace and the stability of nation-state rule as one of its singular, if shaky, props.


31 See *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwandan Experience* for estimates of casualties, especially studies 2 and 5, which summarize the entire set. It is the joint product of several non-governmental agencies, available: http://www.reliefweb.int/library/nordic/index.html.
Joining the nation-state and self-determination as sources and solutions to security, and potentially of greater impact in the long run, are the revolutionary forces of democratization and human rights. Neither should be confused with self-determination and identity politics. Democratization can assume many forms. At one extreme are pluralist forms, typically those of the Western liberal democracies. They are based on majority rule but provide for the protection of minorities as well as of civil rights that are accorded to all citizens. At another, extreme claims of popular sovereignty are invoked in the name of a dominant ethnic, communal, or religious groups to justify widespread cleansing and even genocide itself. Illustrative is Serbian deprivations against their ethnic neighbors and the Hutu-led Rwandan genocide in which the perpetrators cast themselves in the role of victims. These evidence a perversely reinforcing form of identity politics and the claims of popular rule—Hutu “power” or Serbian national identity—to justify the alleged threat posed by rival communities. Appeals to referenda or majority voting are invitations to prompt, not impede, group conflict as a majority will use the ballot box and state power to control or oppress a minority (Kosovo). Or, facing these threats, a minority will arm and fight rather than submit to their suppression.

Human rights also solve and raise security problems. Their assertion and protection imply material support for their recognition; conversely, the denial of human rights almost invariably requires coercion to enforce state or group refusal to honor these claims. Peace is hostage to both claims. What rights should be protected are scarcely settled political, legal, or moral issues. There is widespread and serious disagreement across cultures and states over what rights qualify for protection. What Westerners may believe are indispensable human rights or their tendency to assign greater priority to substantive political and procedural rights over socioeconomic claims do not square with Chinese, Russian, or Muslim cultural and national dispositions.

Defining the conditions justifying armed humanitarian intervention raises additional thorny problems, depending on the kind of relief being tendered: whether to bring food and material assistance to a war-ravaged people caught between rival factions (Somalia) or to stop ethnic cleansing and genocidal sweeps through a targeted population (Rwanda and Kosovo) or to bring democratic rule to a country (Haiti). On the one hand, many insist that Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits intervention in the domestic affairs of other states, should be strictly applied to ensure peace among states. On the other hand, the case for armed intervention has gained momentum in the service of democratization and human rights. NATO’s bombing

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32 Peter Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998) underscores this point for Rwanda. During NATO bombing, a Serbian physician attending to casualties exclaimed: “This man is dead. This man is dying. Here is the result of NATO’s criminal aggression against our country. It is barbarism and it must stop.” Another physician, a young woman working in an intensive care unit, reinforced this image of Serbs and Serbians as the oppressed, not the source of genocidal practices: “It is important for the world to see what is happening to our people, how they are suffering because of the NATO aggression,” The Age (Melbourne), 3 April 1999, p. 2.

33 Peter Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You.


36 The literature on humanitarian intervention or, more broadly, intervention of all kinds, including coercive means, to protect human rights, other international norms to the contrary notwithstanding, is vast sprawling and profoundly contentious. For relevant commentary which presents radically contrasting points of view, and for an introduction to this rapidly expanding literature, see these authored or edited works: Hedley Bull, ed., Intervention in World Politics (London: Oxford, 1984); Lori Fisler Damrosch, ed., Enforcing Restraint: Collective Intervention in Internal Conflicts (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993); Ian Forbes and Mark Hoffman, eds., Political Theory, International Relations, the Ethics of Intervention (Basingstoke: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); John Harriss, ed., The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention (London: Pinter, 1995); Gene Lyons and Michael Mastanduno, eds., Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
campaign gives material point to this position. Humanitarian aims now justify its armed intervention into Serbia, but the bombing also accelerated the cleansing process, contributed to deaths of perpetrators and victims, and solidified a Serbian population around a regime that was previously on the brink of collapse. Big power cohesion was also sacrificed as the UN Security Council was not consulted and China and Russia were deliberately sidestepped despite Article 53 of the Charter, which requires the Security Council to authorize the intervention of regional organizations into the domestic affairs of member states.

For many, human rights as the justification for armed humanitarian intervention, however well intended, is too broad and ill defined a rationale for using force. More, not less, violence is seen to be the product of efforts to give them effect across resistant states and cultures. There is the clear risk that, in attempting to reform the domestic regimes of putatively errant states, peace will be the casualty as a consequence of the uncontrolled and relentless workings of human rights claims around the globe. These clash and crash against the counter claims of state sovereignty, the self-determination of peoples, and democratic rule. Stirred has been a lively and inconclusive debate to define the ethical principles justifying intervention.37 Many argue for an ambitious intervention strategy not only on grounds of moral right, but also as a contribution to the democratic peace.38 Others are less sanguine that force can alter popular attitudes or political regimes so readily or that more good than harm will result from these interventions despite the best intentions of those engaged in these ventures. Into the camp of these critics of humanitarian intervention are many realists, no strangers to using or justifying force, who insist that the cause of peace risks being irremediably damaged by continued war and turmoil. Particular strained, possibly to the breaking point, is big power cohesion, the bedrock of international...
peace. Neither Russia nor China is keen on authorizing armed intervention that may set dangerous precedents damaging to the pursuit of their national interests, most notably China’s claims to Tibet and Taiwan. The determination of reformers to transform the governments and civic practices of other states and to overturn deeply held cultural values and mores in order to compel their compatibility with a universally standardized model of human rights risks plunging the world into perpetual war—certainly not what Kant had in mind in envisioning perpetual peace as the product of free republics. Just war principles may help to clarify the conditions under which force might be used, and much work is now being done to apply these prudential rules to humanitarian intervention to curb its potential excesses. But like all aphorisms, they are not self-revealing as to how they should be applied in a specific case. For example, it would appear quite reasonable that all non-violent means be exhausted in resolving a conflict before armed intervention were contemplated. On the other hand, such a rule if slavishly adhered to would offer little solace to a people under the genocidal gun.39

Finally, the world’s populations have now accepted the globalization of markets as the key to their aspirations for prosperity. With the self-destruction of the Soviet and Chinese bureaucratic, state-directed solutions to economic development, the peoples of the world now clap with one hand. There is no alternative model than open markets to explain or achieve sustained economic growth and to respond to popular demands and expectations for “more now.” But there is no clear guarantee that full employment will be achievable through the free reign of markets or that distributive demands for greater material benefits and social safety nets for the disadvantaged can be furnished simply by relying on the free and unhindered play of free market operations.

The application of harsh economic medicine and strict rules of market discipline helped bring down the crony capitalism of the Suharto regime in Indonesia. Its almost overnight collapse ended thirty years of authoritarian rule, but neither market rules nor the IMF in applying this discipline could provide for an alternative order to the Suharto regime. As a consequence, economic hardship and the unraveling of the Indonesian order accelerated already long smoldering communal tensions, prompting hundreds of deaths and opening the possibility of a scale of violence that might repeat the wholesale atrocities of the 1960s.

The Indonesian case illustrates the tensions generated by reliance on markets and market discipline to meet welfare needs, yet such faith is misplaced if economic reform is not dovetailed with security and order measures to cope with the painful transition process, a problem that the Russian Federation and most of the republics of the former Soviet Union have yet to master. On the other hand, if economic and political upheaval in Indonesia can be partly explained by the application of market discipline, most of the Western states are counting on enlarging market practices within China to integrate the regime and its people into the West-centric system. By that token the possibilities of a security clash with Beijing are supposed to be diminished. Markets and market rules would appear to be both a source and solution to violence.

If international peace is the quest and aim of security studies, then it becomes readily apparent that world order appears to depend on contradictory solutions to governance. It is important to identify these globalizing forces as they impact on regional and local affairs, but it would be a mistake to believe that there is a universal solution to the security dilemmas posed by these forces. This paradox defines security studies today. It arises from the flawed solutions to global governance that were devised by peoples and states to address not only their immediate security needs but also their demands for self-determination and respect for their identities, for democratization and human rights, and for greater material welfare. Explanations of actor behavior in the domain of security have to be cast within this larger process of global governance. Moreover, security policy recommendations have to be sensitive to their own limits set by these broader governing concerns. As long as we have some idea of what our problems are—Stein’s query about what are the right questions—then there is some prospect that security studies might supply some of the right answers.