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Security and Insecurity in the Contemporary World

Traditional conceptions of security in IR have revolved around the state and its survival as a political community. Indeed, the ultimate goal of state behaviour, and its core value, is assumed to be the securing of the state – making it safe against anything that threatens its integrity *as a state*. Security in these terms has usually been linked to the military defence of the state against external threats, and so a significant part of security studies has been concerned with strategy and war. The overriding security concerns of the latter half of the twentieth century were understandably focused on the possibility of nuclear confrontation between the superpowers and their allies, which had the potential not only to kill millions of people in the short term but to make the planet virtually uninhabitable in the longer term. This gave the strategic aspects of security studies a stronger profile during this period. But it also alerted people to the possibility of catastrophic environmental change, which would have occurred under circumstances of nuclear warfare. Far-reaching environmental change, encapsulated in the idea of the Anthropocene and going well beyond the effects of a possible nuclear war, is now a significant issue in the twenty-first century, requiring a rather different security approach to the more traditional ‘guns and bombs’ approach.

While liberalism had long provided a critique of realist security approaches – and vice versa – the study of security in the post-Cold War period has seen alternative approaches gain strength. Constructivism is now prominent, while more dissident perspectives are provided by critical theory, feminism, postmodernism, postcolonial approaches and green political thought. Taken together, these more critical security approaches bring into focus the limitations of conventional thinking as well as the fact that the modern state is itself a major source of insecurity for some populations, as the case of Syria in the contemporary period

demonstrates only too clearly. Such developments have seen a shift in focus from the state to people as the principal referent of security. This has occurred under the rubric of ‘human security’, which also raises the question of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. There are two particular security concerns of the early twenty-first century that will also be highlighted here: first, the terror wars, for which postcolonial critiques have special relevance, and, second, environmental security, which seems to require a thoroughgoing reconceptualization of security and insecurity.

Conventional Approaches to Security

We have seen that classical realism is founded on certain assumptions about the human condition. These include a rather pessimistic view of human nature, one that sees humans as at once fearful and self-regarding in their social relations. These assumptions feed into a theory of power politics and the struggle for survival in a dangerous and irredeemably anarchic world. Evans and Newnham (1998, p. 565) write that war, defined as ‘direct, somatic violence between state actors’, is considered by realists as intrinsic to the international system, and that this idea is the ‘distinctive hallmark of realism’. The *political* element of warfare as an instrument of state policy has been most famously summarized by the Prussian theorist of war Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), who stated that ‘War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means.’ But Clausewitz also drew attention to the ‘primordial’ aspects of the enterprise, arguing that the ‘original violence of its elements’ include ‘hatred and animosity, which may be looked upon as blind instinct’ (Clausewitz, [1832] 1968, pp. 119–20).

In addition to balance of power ideas, discussed in [Chapter 3](#), a key realist concept that emerged in the Cold War period was the ‘security dilemma’, a term coined by John H. Herz. As is the case with many realists, he begins with a comment on the tragic nature of human existence:

The heartbreaking plight in which a polarized and atom bomb-blessed world finds itself today is but the extreme manifestation of a dilemma...[I]t stems from a fundamental social constellation... where groups live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity.

(Herz, 1950, p. 157)

The security dilemma emerges from the fact that groups or individuals, concerned about the threat of attack by others, strive to attain security by acquiring more and more power. But this renders others less secure, and so compels them to acquire more power. It follows that, 'Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on' (ibid.).

The security dilemma must also be understood in terms of the perception of the intentions of states, on the one hand, and an assessment of their material military capabilities, on the other. The dilemma arises when the action of one state in enhancing its military capacity, and hence its overall security, causes other states to feel threatened or less secure. The first state may intend only to enhance its defensive, not its offensive, capabilities. But it will not necessarily be seen in this way by other states, which may then set about further enhancing their own military capacities to meet the perceived threat. The first state may react, in turn, by further enhancing its capabilities, again prompting additional action by other states, and so a spiralling pattern of military build-up is created.

There are, however, ways and means of containing the dilemma. A liberal approach, for example, would point to the possibilities available through cooperative security regimes. But from a mainstream neorealist perspective, although amelioration is possible, there can be no permanent solution. Once again, this is dictated by the structural imperatives of the anarchic international system, which cooperative social relations cannot dispel. Moreover, where peaceful relations do prevail in the realist's world, this is more often than not seen in negative terms, simply as the absence of violent conflict, rather than as a positive condition in itself. A world at peace would be one in which a certain equilibrium, or balance of

power, had been achieved. But, for a realist, this could only ever be viewed as a temporary, if fortuitous, phenomenon.

With the collapse of the former Soviet Empire in the later twentieth century, the structural conditions of bipolarity which supported the balance of power also gave way. Rather than a multipolar system forming, we now have a situation of hegemony, in which the US, supported by powerful allies, holds a position of unrivalled dominance. Arguably, this has bred, in some quarters, a spirit of resentment and hostility towards 'the West' in general and the US in particular. It is worth noting that anti-Westernism had been manifest for some time throughout parts of the former colonial world but was somewhat muted during the Cold War period. More aggressive and violent displays have been evident in so-called Islamic fundamentalist movements and organizations (I say 'so-called' because the religion of Islam is often used by these movements more as a vehicle for politics than as a cause in itself).

More generally, it is important to emphasize that not all those who regard themselves as realists share identical views on the outlook for security and insecurity, or on other aspects of IR. Some have a much more optimistic perspective on the possibilities for security cooperation among states, believing that the present period is one in which a condition of 'mature anarchy' may emerge (see Buzan, 1991, p. 176). Here states act on the realization that their security objectives are best achieved by abandoning narrow self-interest and taking account of the security interests of other states. A cooperative situation may develop in which groups of countries form a 'security community'. The EU is an obvious example. The idea of transcending narrow self-interest and engaging in cooperative security projects, however, is more usually associated with the nurturing of social relations envisaged by liberal approaches.

From a liberal perspective, the end of the Cold War presented a wealth of new opportunities for international cooperation, requiring only the exercise of 'political will' among key players to bring about a new world order in which widespread peace and security could be obtained. The basis for this scenario was provided by international institutions designed to ameliorate the conditions of anarchy, largely through the practice of collective security. As we have seen, liberal

institutionalism accepts aspects of realism – including anarchy as a feature of the international system – but believes that this condition can ultimately be controlled via the establishment of a durable network of international institutions underpinned by strongly supported norms and rules. As with the idea of mature anarchy, then, this perspective subscribes to the possibility of *managed* anarchy.

The League of Nations represented an early attempt to institutionalize the principles of collective security at an international level, although the actual term was not commonly used until the 1930s (Yearwood, 2009, pp. 2–3, n.3). Along with the peaceful settlement of disputes, it was also meant to foster trade and other objectives supportive of international security. That the League ultimately failed is of course history. However, its failure did not mean that its basic objectives were unattainable. The circumstances of the time, and the inability of the major players to abandon old habits of statecraft and engage in new forms of social relations, all conspired against the chances of success for this particular regime.

The UN has enjoyed much greater success. Its central organ, the Security Council, has enabled it to act more decisively than its predecessor. This is because, although the five permanent members of the Security Council (the UK, France, Russia, China and the US) have the right of veto on any particular decision, they can also simply abstain. Thus an inflexible principle of unanimity has not been built into the decision-making mechanism. Even so, it has been argued that the UN was severely constrained in its pursuit of collective security by the conditions of the Cold War. In contrast, the early post-Cold War period saw a significant growth in confidence concerning its capabilities, especially in the wake of the Gulf War, when the then US president, George H. Bush, made his famous ‘new world order declaration’ quoted in the previous chapter.

Subsequent UN-sponsored activities, however, have met with varying degrees of success (or failure). Apart from the first Gulf War, most of its security-related activities have been specifically in the area of peacekeeping in ‘internal’ conflict situations – that is, with conflicts occurring within the borders of states rather than between states. This has sometimes been seen as beyond the competence of

the UN, given that its primary role is with respect to interstate rather than intra-state conflict. In other words, the mandate of the UN is generally concerned with international, not national, security issues. However, this perspective has been criticized for being too narrow in its understanding of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security, as well as being too rigid in drawing a distinct boundary between the national and the international spheres. After all, most internal conflicts, which include full-scale civil wars, have significant spillover effects, not least in their tendency to generate large-scale flows of refugees which then become the responsibility of the international community at large. They all tend to pull in other states as well as the conflict in Syria, in particular, illustrates. At the time of writing, the latter now involves, in one way or another, Russia, Turkey, the US and a number of NATO allies, Australia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, not to mention non-state groups such as Kurds, al-Nusra Front and Islamic State (IS) itself (see Stein, 2016) while the number of asylum seekers seeking refuge in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, North Africa, Europe and beyond number over 4.7 million (UNHCR, 2016). Similar points about 'spillover effects' have been made with respect to environmental issues (including natural and human-induced disasters) as well as viral and other forms of pandemics which come under the rubric of biosecurity. Both environmental and biosecurity issues constitute threats to human security. Many may originate within particular states but obviously often have significant regional or global consequences requiring, in addition to local or national action, global responses coordinated through the UN.

We consider other aspects of the UN's role in contributing to world order, especially in terms of global governance, in the next chapter. Here we must note that the UN is the pre-eminent international organization with responsibility for global security. Another institution directly involved in international security is NATO. Founded in 1949 in the wake of the Berlin crisis, it is obviously a Cold War institution. But NATO has found a new *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War security order, especially in relation to Eastern Europe. Its military action against Serbia in defence of ethnic Albanian Kosovars in 1999 has been analysed in terms of humanitarian intervention – another concept that has gained

increasing prominence in the contemporary period and which represents a significant departure from conventional norms of conduct. We consider this issue in more detail shortly.

There is insufficient space to do more than mention just a few other organizations that have either an explicit or implicit international security function. Many of these, like NATO, are regional rather than global. Among them are the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). A spin-off from ASEAN is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which has a specific security function. In addition, there are numerous ongoing experiments in regional integration in most parts of the world. The most advanced is the EU, which is still in the process of expanding and deepening (although Brexit is obviously a significant set-back). Closely related to this is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Whether designed with economic integration or security issues in mind, the growth of these and other such organizations is seen as constituting an international institutional network, enhancing the prospects for building a durable regime of international peace and security in the twenty-first century. Far from being a utopian dream, liberal institutionalists believe that this is an eminently attainable objective. The circumstances under which it may be realized, however, depend on the political will of key actors, not merely in building and maintaining such institutions but in remaining committed to the ideals that underpin them. According to some liberals, it may also depend on the institutionalization of another kind of liberal political ideal throughout the world – democracy.

As we have seen, the democratic peace thesis holds that democratic states do not go to war against each other, although they do go to war against non-democratic states. Internally, democratic political institutions also reflect a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflict. People in democratic states do not engage in violent conflict in order to endorse or change their governments – they vote. Democratic governments do not generally imprison, torture or murder their political opponents. They must not only tolerate them, but allow them to *become* the government if that is the verdict of the

polls. And all sides must agree to play by the constitutional rules. Democracy is, in effect, the institutionalization of peaceful conflict.

Another salient point from a security perspective is that democratic governments do not murder their own citizens in large numbers (see Rummel, 1997). Some may argue that all this has little to do with IR – if IR is seen as a matter concerned exclusively with the relations between states and not what goes on within them. But given that humanitarian issues have become so prominent on the global security agenda in recent years precisely because of the behaviour of murderous regimes, this position is increasingly difficult to sustain. Genocide and ethnic cleansing, as witnessed in places such as Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, and the attacks on civilians during the Libyan, Iraqi and Syrian crises, have been issues that the international community could scarcely pretend were matters for these states to resolve behind a ‘veil of sovereignty’.

To summarize, realists claim to recognize the brute facts about the world of international politics for what they are, unclouded by wishful thinking about unattainable goals. Thus realists see an ‘objective reality’, as opposed to the subjective, value-laden approach of liberals. But realists and liberals also share some common perspectives. While liberals do not deny the anarchic character of the international sphere, most realists concede that institutions have some value. Both recognize the security dilemma, although they advance different approaches to dealing with it – the one through cooperative international institutions and the other through balance of power mechanisms. More generally, both realists and liberals have traditionally stood firm on one important common ground, and that is the centrality of the state to the international system and as the prime object of security. Having said that, liberal economic theory – at least in its contemporary neoliberal formulation – has a certain anti-statist element as well, as we see in [Chapter 7](#). But, beyond both liberalism and realism, there is a burgeoning literature on ‘critical security studies’ incorporating constructivism, feminism, critical theory and postmodernism, much of which seeks to decentre the state as the primary security referent as well as to introduce conceptions of emancipation as key elements of a new security agenda for the twenty-first century.

Critical Security Approaches and Securitization Theory

Constructivism, as we have seen, treats the 'reality' of the world as constructed via a complex of intersubjective understandings emerging from social relations. This means that the condition of anarchy is, quite simply, 'what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992, p. 395). Thus anarchy is not an autonomous phenomenon that generates its own inescapable logic. This also means that the security dilemma does not exist *prior to* any interaction between states but is in fact a *product* of the social interactions of states. This supports the liberal claim that institutions can indeed be devised so as to transform state interests and identities and therefore create conditions more conducive to international peace and security (ibid., p. 394; see also Wendt, 1999).

Constructivist security theory has also addressed in some detail the idea of 'security communities', an idea developed more than four decades ago in relation to the North Atlantic region and which emphasized the efficacy of shared understandings, norms and values among states (see Deutsch, 1957). There are some similarities with democratic peace theory here, but constructivist approaches do not limit the idea of 'community' to democracies. A basic premise of contemporary constructivist theory is that global politics has an essentially *social* character, in contrast to the firmly *asocial* world depicted by neorealist scholars. This highlights 'the importance of state identities and the sources of state interests, suggesting that the purposes for which power is deployed and is regarded as socially legitimate may be changing' (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p. 12).

A more radical challenge to conventional thinking on security that shifts the focus away from states, while also deploying ideas about the social construction of reality, has been provided by feminist theories. Security, as with virtually all forms of 'high politics', has traditionally been viewed in highly masculinist military terms. Writing in the early post-Cold War period, J. Ann Tickner argued that, because foreign and military policy has been largely made by men, 'the discipline that analyzes these activities is bound to be primarily about men and masculinity'. She also pointed out that

women and men are socialized into believing that 'war and power politics are spheres of activity with which men have a special affinity and that their voices in describing and prescribing for this world are likely to be more authentic'. Further, what is seen as 'normal' behaviour is usually based on a male model of normality (Tickner, 1992, p. 4). The model of masculinity adopted in traditional security approaches, however, is based on an ideal model of a male warrior possessed of ruggedness, courage, strength and bravado, a stereotype that many 'real' men don't actually fit (ibid., p. 6).

What might a feminist security agenda look like? And what kinds of insights might a gender-sensitive perspective bring to bear on contemporary issues? First, feminist analysis draws attention to the pervasiveness of gender hierarchies and the extent to which these impinge on the lives of women, including their vital interests in forms of security not normally considered (by men) as 'real' security issues. One example, which has only recently been recognized as a genuine security concern, is the widespread practice of rape in war. One study of the Bosnian war has shown the challenges posed by a long-standing realist attitude that rape is a 'normal' part of war (Hansen, 2001, p. 67), which is tantamount to saying that it is 'natural' behaviour. And, as suggested earlier, to cast something as 'natural' is to award it a measure of legitimacy.

The recognition of rape in war as a security issue would have been much more difficult, however, if feminism had not broken down some of the barriers between the rigid separation of 'domestic' or 'private' concerns and 'public' ones. Rape, like incest, was for a long time one of those things that many people simply would not talk about, and relegating it to a non-public realm was an effective avoidance strategy. Today, despite now being recognized as a war crime and firmly on the agenda of the UN Security Council, the practice of rape in war continues unabated with reports from African and Middle East zones of conflict indicating that it is not just a tactic deployed by extremist groups, but by practically all parties to the conflicts.

Another manifestation of the gender hierarchy which has implications for women's security is seen in the profound global inequalities of economic status and power. Statistics collected by the

UN and other agencies reveal the extent to which poverty, violence, ill-health, poor working conditions, lack of legal protection and general cultural attitudes afflict women's lives around the globe, although slow improvements are evident across most regions (see, for example, UN Statistics Division, 2015). In all sectors – economic, military, political and social – solutions require not simply the inclusion of more women at various levels, which is relatively simple, but the thoroughgoing transformation of institutional cultures themselves (Hendricks, 2011, p. 22).

Although the statistics for women in the Third World are much worse on most counts, women in advanced industrialized nations continue to lag well behind men as well. This indicates an ongoing problem of subordination embedded in a particular masculinist 'construction of reality' which has multiple social and economic consequences. The *maldistribution* of resources – which occurs on the basis not only of gender but also of class, religion, language and ethnicity – is regarded as a serious security issue, especially by international agencies concerned with development. Of course feminists are not the only ones to have drawn attention to these matters, but it is indicative of the kind of broad security agenda with which feminists are concerned in the contemporary period.

Critical theory, like feminism, rejects the emphasis placed on the state and encompasses a broader array of factors. Much post-Marxist critical theory retains a democratic socialist perspective in which a key focus for critique is global capitalism. Because it generates relentless competition for materials and resources, it is global capitalism, and not anarchy, that must be held primarily responsible for much conflict and violence, whether this takes place within or between states. Certain strands of critical theory are also very much concerned with how states treat their own inhabitants. Because people are more likely to suffer at the hands of their own governments than from any external threat, critical theorists argue that attention needs to be shifted from the security of the state, as such, to the security of the groups and individuals within it. Unlike older-school Marxists, contemporary critical theorists recognize that people do not simply constitute socio-economic 'classes'. Social and, therefore, political and economic relations are also mediated by

gender, religion, language, ethnicity and age – and this is comparable to the range of factors on which feminists focus.

For critical theorists, any security agenda worth its name must be concerned primarily with the quest for human emancipation from unfair social arrangements (see, generally, Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2015). This entails adopting a methodology addressed not merely to problem-solving within the parameters of the existing social, economic and political order, but to a more thoroughgoing *transformation* of that order to achieve the greatest possible measure of security through human equality. Critical theory, like feminism, therefore has a very strong normative thrust. And it is by no means content simply to understand the world as it is, but is very much concerned with changing it. Furthermore, the focus on emancipation renders critical theory a progressive, modernist political project with roots in Enlightenment philosophy.

Despite much variety within postmodern approaches to IR and security studies, a common theme is discernible. Once again, a prime target of critique is realism (especially neorealism), although most other approaches are rejected as well for their modernist underpinnings. A prime task for postmodern security theory is to ‘deconstruct’ the realist metanarrative, thereby revealing its subjective foundations. As we have seen earlier, a metanarrative is meant, at least by those who construct it, to represent a universal truth. Postmodernists will have none of this. The ‘reality’ of the world is open to an endless variety of different interpretations. There is no ‘truth’ beyond these acts of interpretation, no body of knowledge – scientific or otherwise – that has a shred of objectivity, and no possibility of devising universal solutions to problems of human emancipation. Where certain ‘knowledges’ do prevail, this is a function of power within an existing social structure. For example, US power in the international system has imposed a certain ‘metanarrative’ about terrorism – and the appropriate responses to it (Garner, Ferdinand and Lawson, 2016, p. 373). Alternative interpretations of what constitutes terrorism may hold that it is the US, rather than other groups, that is guilty of terrorist crimes. But the power of the US ensures that its interpretation tends to prevail over other possible interpretations in those parts of the world where its influence is significant, thus demonstrating the relationship

between power and knowledge. This also raises the issue of ethnocentricity in the framing of security issues, a form of subjectivity with which, as we have seen in [Chapter 3](#), postcolonial theory has been especially concerned. We consider this matter further in the section below dealing with terrorism.

In summary, the major task for postmodern approaches is to decentre the state, as well as notions, such as citizenship, which are tied intimately to the state paradigm and the particular social relations it engenders, and to consider other possible forms of community and identity that might require 'security'. Furthermore, because it is *against* the state that struggles for security are often carried out, states themselves must always be regarded as a potential source of insecurity, a point raised by human security theory, which we examine shortly. Before that, we consider the idea of 'securitization', which focuses attention on the social processes through which certain issues emerge as security problems in the first place.

This section began with the observation that realists purport to describe the world as it actually is, recognizing brute facts objectively for what they are. Securitization theory, however, begins from the assumption that there are no 'objective' threats waiting to be exposed. Rather, threats emerge through 'speech acts' – utterances by authoritative actors in salient contexts. These speech acts construe certain valued objects as endangered in some way, therefore requiring security – for example, 'the state'. The state thus becomes the referent for a 'securitizing discourse', requiring in turn that certain measures be taken to ensure its safety from some existential threat – for example, military invasion by a hostile power. In recent times a threat may be seen in the form of invasion by a flood of asylum seekers or immigrants. In the 2016 US presidential campaign, Donald Trump famously branded Mexicans crossing into the US as drug dealers and rapists while in Europe there was a tendency to equate asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa as terrorists. This links the securitization of the state through discourse to a set of actual security practices, military build-up being an obvious one (see Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998). 'Enemies' can also be constructed through speech acts which 'frame' them in particular ways as hostile, dangerous, subversive, and so on. Enemies

of the state may be either external or internal, the latter becoming the object of internal security regimes, which often draw on an Internal Security Act of some kind.

Security threats to the state or other national/international actors also now emanate from cyberspace. Thus the field of cyber-security emerged in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century as a response to risks and threats surrounding information technology infrastructure, mainly in the form of the internet (Stevens, 2016, p. 2). WikiLeaks is one of the most obvious examples in recent times, with its founder, Julian Assange, being cast as a prime enemy of the US, where conservative figures such as Sarah Palin put him in the same category as Osama bin Laden. Ironically, the leaking of masses of secret diplomatic reports was made possible by new guidelines for communications between US agencies such as the CIA and the FBI in the wake of 9/11, which sought to address the lack of sharing of information prior to that time. Despite additional security measures, leaks continue. In December 2014, WikiLeaks uploaded CIA documents which instructed its field operatives on how to avoid detection at airport and immigration security checkpoints, including throughout the EU (RT News, 2014).

With the expansion of the security agenda in the post-Cold War period, threats to the state are seen as taking different forms. In addition, the state is now just one among a number of objects requiring security, 'the environment' being a prime example of a new security referent. Others concern cyber-security, food security, energy security, security for the identity of minority ethnic groups, gender security, and so on. An issue for securitization theory is how one decides what should, and should not, be regarded as a genuine 'security' issue. One text notes that, while securitization theory shares the concerns of critical approaches generally with broadening the security agenda, they also wish to circumscribe the issues falling under the security rubric to prevent it from becoming 'the study of everything, and hence the study of nothing' (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2015, p. 104).

Human Security vs State Security

Human security takes the concept of security into almost every area of human life, thus 'securitizing' issues not normally included in traditional approaches. It was given much of its currency by the United Nations' *Human Development Report 1994*, which argued that traditional definitions of security had been far too narrow, since the concept was confined largely to 'security of territory from external aggression, or as the protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust'. Forgotten were the more basic concerns 'of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives' (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). The report went on to define human security in terms of safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression as well as 'protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities' (ibid., p. 23). There was also a more specific list of human security issues:

1. economic security – consisting, for example, of freedom from poverty;
2. food security – access to basic sustenance;
3. health security – access to health care and protection from disease;
4. environmental security – protection against pollution and depletion;
5. personal security – including safety from war, torture and sexual and other forms of assault, such as domestic violence;
6. community security – referring to the integrity and survival of traditional cultures and minorities;
7. political security – the protection of civil and political rights.

Such an extensive list clearly involves a large-scale exercise in securitization.

In recent years, some of the more obvious human security threats dominating international headlines have been, to name just a few, episodes of mass starvation due to drought, especially in Africa and in other locations around the world various pandemics, tsunamis, earthquakes, forest fires, hurricanes and tornadoes, floods and so on.

Poor countries which lack resources and state capacity are always hardest hit and rely on international relief efforts to support whatever their own governments can provide. But wealthy countries, like Japan after the 2011 tsunami, have also needed international assistance. And Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in August 2005, revealed 'Third World' conditions in the world's richest and most powerful country, especially among the poor African-American community there. Addressing security needs in these situations may involve use of the military in relief efforts, but they are obviously not traditional military problems. It may therefore be argued that long-term solutions require a focus on the nexus between security and development and improvements in socio-economic conditions (see Lawson, 2005, p. 108). Most of these security threats are also clearly implicated in the Anthropocene which we return to shortly.

Human security approaches are also closely related to human rights. The shift from 'state security' to 'human security' therefore encourages a more sustained focus on the fact that human rights abuses – which range from torture, to arbitrary arrest and detention, and to sheer neglect of basic sustenance needs – not only constitute a serious security issue but often occur as a direct or indirect result of state-sponsored activities. Political repression is almost always justified by reference to 'national security', especially in authoritarian countries. Singapore's 'total security doctrine', for example, links internal political subversion directly to national security. Internal political oppression has also been justified at times by the US, one infamous episode being the communist witch-hunt led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. The more recent war on terror is another development involving not only US military intervention abroad, but the undermining of civil liberties within the US in the name of 'homeland security'. Similar developments have occurred in the UK and elsewhere in the West.

In summary, human rights abuses have often been defended on the grounds that they are justified by the ends they served – usually the 'national interest' – which in turn accords with a notion of states' rights. However, the pursuit of states' rights at the expense of the very people that states are supposed to protect, namely their own citizens, undermines the legitimacy of the sovereign state concept at

its very foundations. If the modern theory of sovereignty imposes any moral duties on states, it is surely the security and well-being of their own people. This accords with the Hobbesian focus on security *within* the state and the duty of protection owed by the sovereign. This is related in turn to the more recently articulated idea of the ‘responsibility to protect’.

Humanitarian Intervention and the ‘Responsibility to Protect’

The term ‘intervention’ in IR denotes some kind of intrusion into the internal affairs of a state by an external actor – another state, group of states, international organization or non-state group. On occasions, intervention may be officially condoned by authorities within the subject state, as is the case with international peacekeeping activities. The example of intervention in East Timor by Australian, New Zealand and other forces in 2000, which was permitted (albeit somewhat reluctantly) by Indonesia, is one example. Intervention in the form of humanitarian assistance in times of natural disaster is another type usually accepted by state authorities. But at other times intervention will be specifically aimed against a governing authority, as in the case of the US-led coalition that drove the Taliban from government in Afghanistan in 2001, the invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the Libyan intervention in 2011 – although here the initial intention was not ‘regime change’ but protection of civilians from Colonel Gaddafi's forces. In the case of Syria to date, Western interventions have been aimed not at Syrian state forces (although regime change is considered highly desirable), but at IS forces; while Russian intervention, although ostensibly also targeting IS, has been aimed largely at eliminating the more moderate Syrian opposition.

Forcible intervention, whether on humanitarian grounds or otherwise, is directly contrary to the doctrine of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. Given the history of interstate warfare, it is not difficult to see why so much importance has been placed on this doctrine. The twin principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, however, have been weakened considerably in

the contemporary period. Again, the end of the Cold War and the changing international environment contributed much to this shift. As the prospect of major interstate warfare appeared to fade into history, much more attention was given to the deadly internal conflicts being fought out around the globe, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#). The UN secretary-general of the early post-Cold War period, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a major report to the Security Council entitled *An Agenda for Peace*, said that, although the prospects for common international progress in relation to peace and security remained firmly grounded in respect for the fundamental sovereignty and integrity of states, the sovereignty principle needed to be balanced by a legitimate ethical concern for what goes on inside the borders of states. This meant including on the international security agenda issues of human rights and good governance along with the empowerment of the poor and the marginalized (Lawson, 1995, pp. 4–5).

The ‘humanitarian’ label attached to various instances of intervention in the contemporary period provides the essential normative justification that proponents would argue trumps the doctrine of inviolable state sovereignty. This was the argument used by the NATO-led coalition against Serbia in Kosovo, with the focus of humanitarian concern and therefore the major security referent being Albanian Kosovars. On the Serb side, however, the principal security referent remained the ‘Serb state’. An interesting point with respect to the peacekeeping operation that followed the war in Kosovo is that protection for Serb Kosovars against revenge attacks by Albanian Kosovars became a key security consideration. This shows the fluidity of the identity of victims and perpetrators, and therefore the main security referents, in crisis situations.

Also subject to fluid interpretations are the circumstances under which an act of intervention is considered or not considered humanitarian. This cannot depend simply on the say-so of those intervening. For example, it is widely believed that French intervention in Rwanda in 1994 was motivated largely by France's perception of its own interests and status in Africa, even though the sole justification put forward was humanitarian principle. The French were involved again in Ivory Coast in 2011, when former President Laurent Gbagbo refused to vacate office despite losing an

election to his rival, Alassane Ouattara, with some portraying it as an instance of French neocolonialism. Others in the region believed otherwise, with one Nigerian newspaper stating that, 'While Ouattara and French forces were doing somebody else's job, the African Union was comatose in far away Tripoli dining and massaging Gaddafi's ego' (BBC News, 2011).

Such issues have become much debated since the release in 2001 of a report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*, adopted by the UN's World Summit in 2005. This built on an idea promoted by Sudanese scholar and UN advisor Francis M. Deng, whose work on the humanitarian crises, provoked by huge numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in situations of violent internal conflicts, called for fresh attention to the responsibility borne by states with respect to their own people, as well as to the role of the wider international community in such situations (Deng, 1995). This resulted in the establishment of the ICISS itself, and its 'R2P' report. A key claim is that 'sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe, but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states' (ICISS, 2001). Thus the 'responsibility to protect', which is, in the first instance, the responsibility of states for the security of their own people, may shift to the external realm – the international community – when any state fails in its essential purpose (see, generally, Bellamy, 2002).

In practice, a decision to intervene can only be made by the UN Security Council, where a veto may be exercised by any of the permanent members – the US, the UK, France, Russia and China. In the case of Libya, NATO intervention was authorized because Russia and China abstained – Gaddafi having no support from either. In the case of Syria, Russia and China support the Assad regime and many resolutions on Syria have been vetoed.

Although from a human rights perspective there are good reasons for supporting the norm of humanitarian intervention in certain situations against the norm of inviolable sovereignty, the question remains as to who is entitled to adjudicate any particular case. That rather vague entity the 'international community' is more or less

embodied in the UN, and it is really only the UN that can claim the necessary legitimacy in this respect. But there are aspects of this question that go beyond standard measures of legitimacy and authority. One critic points out that intervention is always an act of power. In the present period, the rich and powerful states – namely the US and its key allies – usually get to determine when intervention is appropriate or not, as well as what counts as ‘humanitarian’. Thus ‘one does not have to be an apologist for tyranny to see that this is not a particularly desirable state of affairs’ (Brown, 2002, p. 153). As we see next, this critique is well supported by aspects of the ‘war on terror’.

War and Terror in the Twenty-First Century

Like many political concepts, even defining terrorism has been difficult and controversial. For practical purposes, however, the International Convention for the Suppression of Financing Terrorism (1999) provides a starting point: ‘Any ... act intended to cause death or bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act’ (quoted in Smith, 2015, p. 11). The objectives of terrorism are inherently *political*, and its methods systematically violent. Among its characteristics are ‘fear-inducement, ruthlessness, a disregard for established humanitarian values and an unquenchable thirst for publicity’, while strategies ‘commonly include hijacking, hostage-taking, bombings, indiscriminate shootings, assassinations and mass murders’ (Evans and Newnham, 1998, p. 530).

Terrorism in international politics has also been around for a long time, although the highest profile case in recent years is obviously the set of events known as ‘9/11’. The response by the US, supported by a significant international coalition, was to deploy military force against Afghanistan, the country in which the organization responsible for the attacks, al-Qaeda, was based under the protection of the Taliban government. The intervention appeared to be

successful in its short-term aim of driving the Taliban from power and installing a new US-friendly government.

Buoyed by this apparent victory, the US also led an invasion of Iraq in 2003, ostensibly on the grounds that Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime had developed weapons of mass destruction and was therefore a significant threat to international peace and security. Although the US failed to get the backing of the UN Security Council, it received significant support from around fifty other countries, notably the UK under Tony Blair, which together comprised a 'coalition of the willing'. These allies, as well as a significant majority of the US population, were evidently persuaded that Iraq was part of a network of international terrorism linked to the events of 9/11. There was never any evidence for this claim, but the fact that such a falsehood was widely believed to be true (and still is), especially in the US, is testimony to the link between power and knowledge identified by postmodern scholars, as mentioned earlier.

Fifteen years later, Afghanistan remains an exceptionally weak state riddled with internal conflicts and corruption and unable to provide basic security for many people. Although al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was at last found and executed in Pakistan in 2011 by US operatives, the Taliban insurgency continues. Iraq is faring no better. Although President Obama declared the end of the US military mission in Iraq in August 2010, the situation remains highly unstable. Best estimates of Iraqi casualties, both military and civilian, since the 2003 invasion put the figure at nearly a quarter of a million – not counting those injured or permanently maimed (IBC, 2016). As we know, there were never any weapons of mass destruction. The secondary justification – of saving the Iraqi people from terrible oppression at the hands of Saddam's dictatorship and instituting a democracy in the heart of the Arab world – may have had a pleasing humanitarian cadence, but it was conceived at least partly as a face-saving ploy after the weapons of mass destruction justification had collapsed.

In light of these factors, there is good reason to be suspicious of arguments about humanitarian intervention. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to dismiss the possibility of genuine humanitarian intervention in all circumstances. More timely

intervention in Rwanda, for example, may well have prevented the genocide there and alleviated suspicions that 'black' lives are less valuable than 'white' lives. The 2011 intervention in Libya is also a very different situation from either Afghanistan or Iraq, with much stronger evidence of genuinely humanitarian motivations in play, despite accusations of neocolonialism. Even so, the situation in Libya today remains chaotic and dangerous with no agreed national government in place creating a situation conducive to IS operations.

Although the US and its allies have used conventional military means to prosecute the 'war on terror', they scarcely faced a conventional enemy. Rather, as Barkawi and Laffey (2006, p. 329) note in their postcolonial critique, the 'existential threat' comes not from another state or group of states but from a 'transnational network enterprise' in the form of al-Qaeda. This represents a significant departure from conventional narratives about world politics, characterized by great power struggles. The authors also argue that the inadequacy of existing security paradigms to deal with this development is due to an entrenched Eurocentrism which fails, among other things, to appreciate 'the mutual construction of Europe and the non-European world and their joint role in making history' (ibid., p. 330). They further note, as other critical security scholars have done, that many of the conflicts pursued by the West have often been framed in terms of a civilizing mission: 'Whether "white man's burden", humanitarian intervention ... or the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the assumption is that it is the right of the West to bear arms to liberate the "natives".' This, they say, is and always has been the primary justification of imperialism in all its forms: 'it is about civilising the barbarians' (ibid., p. 351; see also Orford, 2003, p. 47). Again, this style of postcolonial analysis casts a rather different light on humanitarian justifications purveyed by the US and its allies.

Understandably, much of the discussion about terrorism and associated security issues in recent years has been dominated by the fallout from 9/11 and subsequent attacks by extremist Islamic groups in Spain, Russia, the UK, Indonesia, India and France and other locations. Nonetheless, this type of attack is not typical, and it is important to look at the broader picture. Most terrorist attacks are aimed at domestic regimes or other targets within the terrorists' own country. Various separatist groups, from the Basque country to

Kashmir, and similar movements within Northern Ireland, Peru, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Israel/Palestine, to name just a few active over the last few decades, have used terror tactics to further their political objectives. A number of terrorist organizations also link political objectives to a religious cause, and none of the major religions has been exempt. Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam have all, at one time or another, inspired causes in which terrorism has been justified as a means to a righteous end. One source, using figures compiled by the FBI, points out that only 6 per cent of deaths from terror attacks in the US between 1980 and 2005 were by Muslim extremists, compared to 7 per cent for Jewish extremists. The figure for Europe was fewer than 1 per cent. This is in addition to the fact that the overwhelming majority of victims of Islamic extremist terror attacks around the world are in fact other Muslims. Some of the more interesting non-Muslim US-based groups named in the report are the Ku Klux Klan, Medellin Drug Cartel, Irish Republican Army, Anti-Castro Group, Mormon extremists, Vietnamese Organization to Exterminate Communists and Restore the Nation, Jewish Defense League, May 19 Communist Order, Chicano Liberation Front, Jewish Armed Resistance, American Indian Movement, Gay Liberation Front, Aryan Nation, Jewish Action Movement, National Front for the Liberation of Cuba and Fourth Reich Skinheads (Global Research, 2013).

The recent focus on Islam has also tended to overshadow forms of terrorism linked to the obsessions of particular individuals, who may act alone or lead small but deadly groups of devotees. These are as likely to be found within America as anywhere else. Timothy McVeigh, the 'Oklahoma bomber', and before him the infamous 'Unabomber', are typical of the loner types, sometimes regarded as representative of an almost uniquely American type of paranoid terrorist.

In looking at the sources of terrorism, although one can point to the grievances of specific groups, there is no simple explanation. An account of the causes of 'Islamic terrorism', for example, would involve attention to a complex of factors, including colonial legacies, the Israel/Palestine issue, the political economy of the Middle East oil industry, control of water resources, the politics of Islamic groups versus the state in pro-US regimes in the Arab world, and so forth.

The projects of, say, Basque, IRA and Palestinian groups also have their different histories, although they all involve minorities that have historically suffered oppression at the hands of a state controlled by another group. On the other hand, there is also the phenomenon of state-sponsored terrorism, in which a state takes an active, if covert, role in organizing terrorist activities against another state. The US has pointed the finger at a number of states over the years, among them Libya, Syria and Iran as well as Afghanistan. But US-sponsored terrorism in protecting its perceived interests in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia has also been well documented (see George, 1991).

In the wider scheme of things one must ask what can be done to bring about lasting solutions to the problems of both national and international terrorism. It is one thing to institute defensive programmes of 'Homeland Security' and to hunt down particular groups of terrorists. But it is another thing altogether to address the basic causes of terrorism. While not necessarily found in adverse conditions of material deprivation, this may be one factor, combined with a strong sense of injustice either against governing authorities within a state or against an international hegemonic power that is perceived to be at least partially responsible for those adverse conditions of life and the loss of dignity and respect that goes with them.

Environmental Security and the Green Agenda

While environmental problems have never been a central concern for traditional IR agendas, the environment itself has become 'securitized' in a way unimaginable just a few decades ago. We have seen that natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, droughts, earthquakes and forest fires have generated significant human security problems. Of course natural disasters, like war, are nothing new. But what makes them such hot political issues in the current period is the perception that many natural disasters are associated with industrialization and a global 'carbon economy', and therefore a manifestation of the Anthropocene. Climate change is the

most prominent case in the current period, with a strong scientific consensus on the fact that global warming through the release of excessive 'greenhouse gases' into the atmosphere has been generated mainly by the consumption of fossil fuels and livestock production. In the face of possibly catastrophic consequences in the future, there is growing pressure for action to be taken at the highest levels. It also suggests that 'how we now think about security needs a substantial overhaul because traditional assumptions of a stable environmental backdrop to geopolitics are simply no longer tenable' (Dalby, 2015).

As we have seen, the securitization of environmental issues has been accompanied by the emergence of systematic thinking in the form of green theory. The principal reference point is a concern for protecting the environment, prompted in turn by the perception that there are significant threats to it. These take many forms, not just those associated with climate change: oil and chemical spills on land or water; toxic waste going into landfill; the degradation of river systems through the construction of dams; dwindling biodiversity; the invasion of sensitive ecological areas by alien plant or animal species; and so on. In turn, many of these problems produce major threats to food resources, and so 'food security' and 'water security' – basic requirements for human survival – are now considered a major issue for the survival of millions of people.

In 2007, the UN Security Council discussed for the first time the implications of climate change for security. Although there was no clear agreement that environmental issues should be included formally on their agenda, it represented a significant step in the securitization of the environment. Progress at the level of global politics since then has been slow and it was not until the Paris Climate Conference (COP 21) in December 2015 that the first legally binding agreement, aimed at limiting global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, was signed between 195 countries. The extent to which action will follow remains to be seen, although most countries do at least have national climate action plans (European Commission, 2016).

That climate change and global warming have become such major issue areas for world politics is due to recognition of the fact that the general effects of anthropogenic environmental change has put both

national and global security futures at risk. Climate change ‘denial’ is still doing brisk business in some quarters, even in the face of an overwhelming scientific consensus on the reality of the phenomenon, now followed by virtually unanimous global political agreement on action. An interesting question is why there has been such vociferous resistance to accepting the scientific evidence. Part of the answer lies in the rather obvious fact that there are vested industrial interests in carbon-based energy resources (just as there were in the tobacco industry when strong resistance to health warnings was mounted). But among the general public, other factors are at play. One interesting commentary suggests that climate change denial is partly a manifestation of ‘status quo bias’ – the tendency to support systems (in this case, carbon-based energy sources) that we are familiar with. It is further suggested that status quo biases may make political and social systems very hard to change but, once they do actually change, the same biases then work to enforce the new status quo (Mooney, 2015). With a new global status quo now established, national governments may find their pathways to a cleaner energy future, and thus a reduction in environmental security risk, made a little easier. And although global agreement is vital, it is at the national or local level that practical action always needs to take place. As René Dubos, an advisor in 1972 to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, famously said: ‘think globally, act locally’.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a broad outline of both traditional and more recent critical approaches to security and insecurity. It has also highlighted some of the most serious practical issues confronting both scholars and policy-makers today. In addition, it should be emphasized that none of the theories mentioned here is in any way disconnected from political practice in the ‘real’ world. Indeed, the theorizing of security, as with the theorizing of IR more generally, is intimately connected to actual developments on the ground. Attention to the fields of critical security studies, including gender approaches, further highlights some general themes of this book, and that is the importance of social processes in the construction of what

counts as significant from political and security perspectives, as well as the problematic nature of the domestic/international divide.

Further Reading

Burke, Anthony, Katrina Lee-Koo and Matt McDonald (2014) *Ethics and Global Security: A Cosmopolitan Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Dalby, Simon (2013) 'Rethinking Geopolitics: Climate Security in the Anthropocene', *Global Policy*, 5/1: 1–9.

Hough, Peter, Shahin Malik, Andrew Moran and Bruce Pilbeam (2015) *International Security Studies: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Kaldor, Mary and Iavor Rangelov (eds) (2014) *The Handbook of Global Security Policy* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell).

Kay, Sean (2015) *Global Security in the Twenty-First Century: The Quest for Power and the Search for Peace* (3rd edn, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

Questions for Discussion

- What are the main points of difference between realist and liberal approaches to security?
- How do gender approaches enhance our understanding of security and insecurity?
- To what extent do critical approaches to security de-centre the state as the primary object of security?
- In what ways does terrorism defy conventional security analysis?
- What does it mean to say that the environment has become 'securitized'?