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Is Security a Timeless Value?
An Insight from International Relations

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Abstract: *The concept of security has undergone many interpretations over time, and whatever definition we choose, it cannot fully encompass all elements of it. If the Security Studies domain initially began with an analysis of military-type security, after the end of the Cold War the classical approach to security changed from a theoretical point of view, providing security analysis in five additional sectors, including military, political, economic, social, and environmental. This paper aims to draw attention to several academic perspectives on the idea of security as a value. The aim of this paper was fulfilled using content analysis. The findings indicate that security is a constantly evolving notion, with some academics perceiving it as moral and timeless and others arguing for its ethics and temporality.*

Keywords: *Security; Political theories; Securitisation; Values; Security ethics.*

Introduction

The concept of security is essential for the existence of life, freedom and societal progress. Security is built in the human mind as a biological mechanism, strive of the organism to survive, its adjustment to the threatening influences of the environment[1].

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[1] Mladen Bajagic and Zelmir Kesetovic, "Rethinking Security", *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Dilemmas of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, no. 208034, December 2004, p. 2.

Vulnerable to numerous threats, security has experienced over time important modifications as a result of the changing socio-political context or strong influences from the international system. Human communities have always had difficulty preserving their security, and to do so, theorists have consistently updated their empirical works to meet the challenges of the security system. Comprehension of security as an aboriginal interest of every individual and wider human collectivities (families, society, nation, state, international system) indicates the need for broadening the concept of security towards those collectivities so that in theory have shaped concepts as national and international security, and recently individual, societal and global security, which indicates considerable expanding of the seizures onto new dimensions of security[2].

This study aims to draw attention to the development of the concept of security through the lens of theories that have left their mark on the study of International relations. In this regard, two great theories have contested each other's empirical studies. In this perspective, a closer examination of the disagreement between the liberal and realist schools of thinking will be conducted.

The new debates in the field have transformed the old paradigms into new ones. As a result, in the 70s-80s, two new philosophies emerged in opposition to one another, neorealism and neoliberalism (neoliberal institutionalism). After the end of the Cold War, the world seems to fit a mixt model of interpretation, meaning that behind hobbesian human nature directed toward selfishness, it has been proven that individuals can achieve good relations and states can cooperate at an institutional level.

Recognizing that threats to national survival or well-being are not confined to the military realm, these proposals expand the notion of security threats to include such matters as human rights, the environmental, economics, epidemics, crime, and social injustice[3]. According to the theorists of the Copenhagen School, at the end of 20th century, the concept of security goes through an extensive investigation, going beyond the traditional analysis around military threats, and identifying new sources of

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[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] David A. Baldwin, "Security Studies and the End of the Cold War", *World Politics*, Vol. 48, No. 1, October, 1995, p. 134.

threats for individuals as well as to states and the international system in fields such as military, political, social, economic and environmental.

Contemporary discussions about security are not dealing only with the relations between the state and its international environmental, but also with the relations that exist inside the state, confirming that the state is not the only factor and referent object of security[4]. In this new era, individual security aims to analyse threats to individuals, threats that come from other individuals as well as from the state. Most threats to individuals arise from the fact that people are trapped in a human environment that generates inevitable social, economic and political pressures[5].

At the beginning of the 21st century, in the light of tragic events of 9/11, security must respond to new forms of terrorism that threaten individual, national and international security. The extreme fear here is that of terrorists armed with nuclear weapons[6]. In this context it is important to see how the states can use political discourse to reinforce security measures or strategies against terrorism. Recognizing that threats to national survival or well-being are not confined to the military realm, these proposals expand the notion of security threats to include such matters as human rights, the environmental, economics, epidemics, crime, and social injustice[7].

That being said, last but not least, this paper will make some considerations regarding the ethics, morals and the value of security. Debates over security ethics consider it is a value in terms of positive and negative, respectively good or bad.

The methodology used in this research relied on content analysis, making a review of the specialised literature in the field of International Relations.

A brief overview on the concept of security

The concept of security has been used in various contexts, such as property security-protecting members of society from seizing each other's property,

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[4] Mladen Bajagic and Zelmir Kesetovic, "Rethinking Security", p. 4.

[5] Barry Buzan, *Popoarele, statele şi frica. O agendă pentru studii de securitate internaţională în epoca Războiului Rece*, Editura Cartier, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 48.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 58

[7] David A. Baldwin, "Security Studies…", p. 134.

institutional security-protecting members of society against external threats (structural violence), human security-protecting the physical features of a person (his life, his body, his health and his reputation) by any threats and so on. One have to keep in mind that exploring possibilities are limited by the fact that it is a complex phenomena, controversial concept of the political sciences, that through history was often described one-sided and narrow[8].

One of the most well-known definitions of security, which emphasises its characteristics, comes from Arnold Wolfers (1952), who defines the notion as follows: Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such value will be attacked[9]. In the case of security, according to Barry Buzan (1991), discussion is about the pursuit of freedom from threat[10].

The concern for security began to be theorised by illuminists such as Adam Smith, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, William Blackstone, Jeremy Bentham and others. In this regard, it was observed that the notion of security was focused on individual aspects rather than those of the state.

Following the development of the Security Studies domain in the early years of the twenty-first century, the security concept began to be analysed through concepts of power and peace which reflects the difference between the liberal and realist schools of thought, two competing paradigms. While realists believe that a state's security comes from maximising its power, guaranteeing them a position of dominance within the system, idealists believe that everyone's security comes from pursuing peace[11].

The issue of order was initially brought up philosophically by both schools, understanding human nature and subsequently analysing its effects on the political sphere. Thus, while Immanuel Kant noted in Perpetual Peace that harmony is the natural state of affairs and laws of nature favour cooperation, Thomas Hobbes in his work Leviathan argued that in the state of nature individuals use violence to satisfy their own preferences, behaviour that in the end leads to a "war of all against all". As

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[8] Mladen Bajagic and Zelmir Kesetovic, "Rethinking Security", p. 2.

[9] Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol", *Political Sciences Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 4, December 1952, p. 485.

[10] Barry Buzan, *Popoarele, statele şi frica…*, p. 30.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

such, it is entitled to name realism (like idealism) is rather a philosophy of international relations[12].

To understand the characteristics of these paradigms, we should also consider that these schools were founded during different historical periods, within a particular socio-political setting that contributed to the validation of their theories. Thus, after the dynamic of the international system changed, they rapidly lost their influence. Following that, each paradigm reconstructed its analysis around the weakness from previous, wrong assumptions in an effort to regain its dominance in the field of International Relations.

The realist paradigm dominated the field of International Relations during the Cold War, highlighting that states are forced to maximise their power in order to survive in an anarchic system. Also, the realist theorists proposed a balance of power mechanism in order to restrain the hegemonic ambitions of states.

After the end of the Cold War, classical realism has come under criticism and was accused of reductionism, given that it created an explanatory model based on human nature that has not changed over the century. For realist authors, there is no change in human nature, from which it necessarily follows that there is no progress[13]. Given that, the neo-realists tried to support the realist programme adding a systemic analysis. So, their added value consists in an analysis over the international system structure, where its exclusively anarchic characteristic determines particular behaviours among states. Another contribution consists in the idea of the importance of a state's capacities. So, even if the states perform the same function, they highlighted the fact that states are very different from each other in terms of size, wealth and power. Therefore, the international anarchy system will encourage the great powers to balance the power.

At the end of the Cold War, the liberal paradigm was reaffirmed through the triumph of liberal democracy and market economy models that are nowadays essential to economic and political growth. Also, under the liberal paradigm was reinforced the idea that only non-democratic states

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[12] Andrei Miroiu, Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu et al., *Manual de Relaţii Internaţionale,* Editura Polirom, Bucureşti, 2006, p. 96.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 96.

experience war. A common thread, from Rousseau, Kant and Cobden, to Schumpeter and Doyle, is that wars were created by militaristic and undemocratic governments for their own vested interests[14].

In the early 1990s, according to Francis Fukuyama, all societies must adopt a democratic model which would put an end to international conflicts. According to him, democracies would not fight each other. Fukuyama is struck by the extent to which liberal democracies have transcended their violent instincts and institutionalised norms which pacify relations between them[15].

At the same time, the liberal paradigm transfers authority to the international organisations' normative framework which has a considerable capacity to control the relations between states. To increase the chances of cooperation, states can try to change the context in which interactions take place, creating international institution and regimes[16]. According to neo-liberal perspective, there's hope for everyone's welfare, considering free trade, removal of barriers to commerce and international institutions that govern state behaviour in specific policy areas.

Globalisation integrated most of the societies in the global market system creating close economic interdependence. In light of this, the national interests have changed due to the preservation of civil liberties and the development of market relations. The economic force is becoming more important than the military one and this temptation comes from the fact that the powerful states are still competing over the large markets for goods, services and capital. The globalised economy, which some consider a great opportunity, is perceived by others as a scourge, which gives rise to a feeling of frustration and injustice[17].

On the other hand, national security analysts watched closely the transnational challenges brought up by globalisation, observing that institutional mechanisms of states didn't succeed to respond to the individual

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[14] Burchill Scott, Andrew Linklater et al., *Theories of International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, New York, 2005, p. 58.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 57.

[16] Andrei Miroiu, Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu et. al, *Manual de Relații Internaționale,* p. 147.

[17] Ali Laidi, *Efectul de bumerang. Cum a determinat globalizarea apariția terorismului,* Editura House of Guides, București, 2007, p. 167.

security problems. For many reasons, the state has lost its exclusive status as the key referent object of security, which caused expanding national security down – towards individual and societal security[18].

In his book Peoples, States, and Fear that was published in the 90s, Barry Buzan brought the analysis of security to the next level, trying to conduct security beyond the conventional discussion of the state as the principal referent of security, wondering more about who we are protecting? and what threats are we protecting against? He distinguishes three referent objects of security, including individuals, states and international systems. Additionally, the theorist stressed that for each referent of security the source of threat comes from the military, political, economic, social, and environmental domains. At the same time, in order to improve security, he extended his complex analysis to the relation between threats and vulnerabilities to the security of the individuals and states.

Given his firm position over the importance of state as principal referent of security, this theory was criticised being accused of ethnocentrism. In order to fix this disagreement he introduced the idea of weak states and powerful states, arguing in this sense that the difference is made by socio-political level of cohesion, thus clarifying why there are disputes in weak states.

Thinking back to the tragic events of 9/11, after the terrorist attacks, the security concept was reconsidered in order to stop such tragedies from occurring in the future. In this sense, additional security measures were legitimised under the language of 'existential threats', even if the measures could be considered undemocratic in an ordinary political decision context. Security measures in the War on Terror, such as the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, the use of torture, the increased surveillance of citizens, extraordinary renditions and secretive drone strikes, illustrate the logic of exceptionality[19].

At the same time, from that moment on,as president announced that terrorism is theis biggest national security issue, they have given priority, and deployed immediately resources. Although the international

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[18] Mladen Bajagic and Zelmir Kesetovic, "Rethinking Security", p. 4.

[19] Clara Eroukhmanoff, "Securitisation Theory: An Introduction", *International Relations Theory*, E-International Relations Publshing, *Jan* 14 2018, p. 2.

community denounced these acts of terrorism, the deployment of military troops was largely supported by America. If a president of a country announces that 'crime is our biggest national security issue', it means that dealing with crime has been identified as an issue that must be given priority, and hence time, energy, and resources must follow[20].

Since we are not more under the shock produced by the tragic event of 9/11, it is important to reevaluate the threat that terrorism poses to the world, considering if it concerns everyone equally everywhere in the world. In order to convince an audience to take extraordinary measures, the securitising actor must draw attention and often exaggerate the urgency and level of threat, communicate a point of no return, i.e. "if we do no tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant", ans offer a possible way out (lifting the issues above politics) – which is often frames in military terms[21].

On the other hand, the discussion over security needs to combine the political theory and politics of security in order to figure out which values and interests of people and states are in jeopardy and what are the threats. A complex analysis that depends each time on a sensitive context.

The ethics, morals and value of security

In the field of International Relations has been also debated the value of security. Even if in general terms security is seen as a positive concept, suggesting that it is used to legitimise various policy choices, the theorists dug deeper in order to understand its peculiarities.

An interesting debate took shape around ethics, looking to clarify to which extent security is seen as good, questioning its value according to the way we actually live. Also, being criticised for its universal security logic, the debates in the field have analysed the security concept through the terms of negative and positive security, meaning that the notion of negative security reflects the absence of threat, while the notion of positive security is looking for provision and protection of something. In the analytic frame, attaining negative security is about preventing threats from harming the

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[20] Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, p. 109.
[21] Clara Eroukhmanoff, "Securitisation Theory…", p. 2.

wellbeing of the thing to be secured; in this sense negative security is essentially a lack, an absence of threat – this is why it is negative[22].

The ethics and value of security have long been debated within the different schools of thought that interpret the concept and practice of security. For instance, on the one hand, The Copenhagen School treats security through the lens of securitisation, perceiving it as negative (absence of threat) and best avoided (Waever, 1995), on the other hand, the Welsh School study security as emancipation, highlighting its positive value (security-plus) and potential (Booth, 2007; Nyman, 2016). In this conceptual relation security-emancipation, security must be understood as more than a typical absence of threat, adding to it the concept of "survival-plus", consisting in freedom of individuals from those physical and human constraints and freedom to make choices.

Another distinction is being made between good and bad security. Here, negative security is seen as something 'bad' to be avoided, and positive security is seen as something 'good' to strive for[23]. In order to understand this distinction, we have to look in terms of normative and value judgments. These could be attached to procedure: if particular practices are undemocratic and I think this is a bad thing, then securitization or treating an issue as security in this way is negative from my perspective[24].

Apart from the positive/ negative and good/ bad distinctions of security, the academic literature also suggests the philosophical approach of pragmatism. Pragmatists emphasise that the value of security can only be seen through a particular analysis. The security value remains abstract when we choose to define it in terms of bad or good. So, a practical investigation is needed to examine how various actors utilise and experience security in order to see what kind of actions and behaviours produce.

Looking now at the cosmopolitan security ethic in terms of global security, this debate also enjoys many supporters. According to them, ethics and security are intrinsically human attributes. The supporters of security as cosmopolitan ethics emphasise several fundamental principles as

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[22] J. Nyman, "What is the value of security? Contextualising the negative/positive debate", *Review of International Studies*, 42(5), 2016, p. 10.

[23] *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

responsibilities. One principle concerns the recognition of responsibility to all security actors in promoting security of human beings, keeping at the same time a proper balance between security policy activities and global ecosystems. Another principle entails a commitment to evaluate the impact of our actions on the future generations. This principle recognizes that current insecurities (such as climate change) are the product of past ethical choices, and to avoid creating future insecurities we must consider the consequences of contemporary decisions[25].

The last principle is that security actors must be aware of the repercussions of his acts on the global environment, because an isolated conflict may swiftly turn into a global conflict, and therefore affect the security of all actors. More than that, these principles stated above refer to the moral obligations of each individual as well as of the state to act with responsibility, being constantly conscious of the fact that their safety is dependent upon their behaviour and collaboration with other security actors.

Beyond the perspective according to which security is related to ethics and should be seen as moral, there is also a standpoint which questions the morality and ethics of security. This outlook highlights the ethical concerns involved in the trade-off between privacy/liberty and security, a relation viewed as a two-faced coin for policy development. The debate is over how much privacy can we give up in order to feel secure. In the context COVID-19 pandemic, some countries, such as Norway, Ireland and Singapore, have developed mobile apps to track people who are positive with COVID-19. Given this example where privacy of individuals is considered the cost of security, this fact involves a set of moral and ethical inquiry towards security itself.

The most frequently asked question is whether governments and other entities in this regard can leverage the need for security in order to encourage individuals to compromise other values such as liberty or privacy. While such losses would be disastrous by themselves, I have further argued that whenever privacy and liberty are lost, there can be no security[26].

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[25] Anthony Burke, Katrina Lee-Koo, and Matt McDonald, "An ethics of global security", *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 1(1), 2016, p. 7.
[26] H. S. Saetra, "The ethics of trading privacy for security: The multifaceted effects of privacy on liberty and security", *Technology in Society*, 68, 2022, p. 9.

In other words, it is still uncertain how security can retain its moral value when governments may use security to alter other fundamental human values. Security is fundamentally valuable, but at a certain point the loss of privacy leads to a serious loss of liberty and privacy[27].

Conclusions

It can be said that security is an atemporal value due to its consistency over time in maintaining peace, wellbeing, and the global community.

Being initially constructed around the military threat, security concept expanded its analysis after the end of the Cold War. This success is due to the contribution of Copenhagen school theorists such as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wildee, who brought security analysis to the next level. In their security study they have identified five threats that have been neglected for a long time, such as military, political, social, economic and environmental. Individuals as well as the state are exposed at the same time to these threats. Thus, the traditional limitations were surpassed by these theorists who tried to understand security in its complexity adding also others concepts such as "existential threat" and securitization theory.

Threats to public safety and state security have escalated in the modern era because of globalisation, technological advance, and lack of regulations across many sectors. Along with these, it is obvious that security must be interpreted more carefully because of new atypical threats. In this regard, for example, people become increasingly insecure in their daily lives due to the emergence of new diseases, lack of access to treatment, societal violence, and internal conflicts.

Searching for new securitization formulas, the theorists of the Copenhagen School developed the theory of securitization that an issue of security can be securitized through an act of speech. As example, after tragic event of 9/11 we saw how an existential threat represented by terrorism has been securitized, but interesting is that democratic leaders once again appealed to military force, thus reiterating the military domain's importance. Concluding therefore that, security cannot be enforced only by

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[27] *Ibidem*.

political discourse, but also implies other securinting actors like police, intelligence services, immigration services, border guards and the military.

In regards to the security ethics, I presented above some debates over the security in terms of positive and negative security, and of good and bad security. At the same time, I concluded that it is still uncertain how security can keep its moral value when government smay exploit security to potentially alter other fundamental human values. The cosmopolitan security ethics draws attention to the responsibility of all security actors and security policy activities with care of future generations.

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