

Security

People may feel insecure for a variety of reasons. Armed conflict is the most obvious reason, but since the 1990s we also see that terrorism, climate change and the absence of social well-being are sources of insecurity. This development has two implications for the world of today. First, the meaning of security has become much broader. Second, security has become a yardstick for many issues that the world faces: we speak of food security, energy security, migration security. It appears as though security addresses most of the basic human needs that until very recently were covered by human rights. This shift from human rights to security will be discussed in greater detail below.

That the term security has become so dominant gives the impression that people feel much more insecure than before. When one looks at the statistics of armed violence, however, this sense of insecurity is unjustified: armed violence may have increased in some forms (civil wars) but decreased in others (war between states, colonial war), and the total has been more or less the same since 1945. This prompts the conclusion that the sensation of (in)security is driven by other sources. One is the geopolitical positionality: insecurity may have increased among Europeans who after decades of peace are faced with a real or imagined threat from Russia, just like a sense of security may have increased among South Americans after decades of oppressive dictatorships had come to an end. Another source of increased insecurity is the multiplying factor of social media: today one has unlimited access to a non-stop stream of images and videos of war and violence on social media as opposed to the time when these images were distributed in limited quantity and frequency by the daily news outlets. Another factor is the sensation of insecurity itself. To feel insecure in the street is not restricted to warzones or places dominated by violent gangs; it also applies to a fear of crime or harassment, and even to the feeling of unease (e.g., because one is the only black man in an environment of white people, or because one is the only bare-headed woman in an environment of women with headscarves – or vice versa). Students reportedly at times feel insecure (or: ‘unsafe’) in a university when they are presented with information that they experience as offensive or too confrontational. It appears that security is not only to be free from fear of war, violence or starvation, but also to be free from feeling a threat to one’s identity or sensitivities.

In this chapter we will discuss how (in)security has become a global challenge and how, in addressing this challenge, there has been an increase in the focus on security.

Defining (in)security.

Security can be broadly defined as “a state of being free from danger or threat” (Oxford Dictionary). More specific qualities of what security means depend on the persons involved and the values by which it is measured. As with the notion of freedom, a distinction can be made between security *from* something (war, terrorism, violence, or other threats), and security *of* something (being secure in food, shelter, and other basic human needs).

Terrorism

One of today’s main global security concerns is terrorism. Terrorism still lacks a clear definition but is usually described as the killing of political leaders or random people with the purpose of disrupting a governmental or political system. But many organizations also use terrorist means for other goals, like the proclaimed liberation of their people or country from oppression or foreign occupation (examples are the IRA in Ireland, ANC in South Africa, PLO and Hamas in Israel, Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka). In many of these instances, terrorism is not a *goal*, but a *means*: this distinction is important for reasons that will be discussed below.

Terrorism has a long history but was first addressed as a global phenomenon during the 1970s, when several so-called left-extremist organizations were actively aiming to destabilize the country (like ‘Lightning Path’ in Peru, JAL in Japan, RAF in Germany, Brigade Rosso in Italy). Terrorism became recognized as a global *challenge* in the early 2000s with the ‘War on Terror’, which focused primarily on the emerging Islamic militantism around the world. This War on Terror was declared by the United States after they had suffered several simultaneous attacks on 11 September 2001, and it prompted a world-wide effort to combat terrorism.

Combatting terrorism usually aims at preventing the attack rather than prosecuting the attackers afterwards (which is the common action taken in any criminal prosecution). To prevent terrorism, state security apparatuses are trying to predict and anticipate terrorist activities. Since the early 2000s, states are also cooperating more than before in exchanging intelligence. As a result, a veritable global counter terrorism industry has emerged with its own information networks. One side effect (or: nexus) of this is the ways in which the counter terrorism may violate the principles of the rule of law. For instance, how far is one willing to go in the interrogation of a terrorist suspect if that may prevent other terrorist attacks? And is one willing to expand the legally limited time for incarceration of a suspect if there is still no sufficient evidence against the terrorist suspect? Another nexus is the way the counter-terrorism measures affect the privacy of the public. People can be monitored and tracked by cameras in the streets and buildings, by means of

their mobile devices, money transfers, travel itineraries. Consequently, balancing the public interest of security and the individual interest of privacy has become a challenge within the larger challenge of global terrorism.

Another way of preventing terrorism is to focus on its **root causes**. This appears to be quite complex. In terms of the 3-I's, the discussion revolves around the question of whether the causes are rooted in *interests*, *ideas* or *identities*. Do people rebel violently (including through terrorist activities) because they are poor, or because they resent oppression, or because they want to liberate their country? If these interests are indeed the root cause, then it is also clear that the terrorism will end once these interests are addressed. To some observers, however, *ideas* rather than *interests* are the main drivers for many terrorist groups. According to these observers, communism, anarchism, or Islamism are belief systems that promote or endorse violence as part of their ideology. Other observers hold that these ideologies are not causes of terrorism but provide the discourse that justifies their actions. From this perspective, countering terrorism means that one needs to counter the ideology (in intelligence terms: to provide a 'counternarrative'). A recent development in terrorist activities is that they appear to be prompted by issues of identity. The terrorist killings by white supremacists are the clearest example, but one might also include the communities who feel that their very existence is under threat and that they are fighting for their survival (examples are the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kurds in eastern Turkey). In all cases, however, there is a combination of factors at play that may explain the use of terrorist means.

Peacemaking, building and keeping

Universities today offer courses in Conflict Studies, Terrorism Studies and Security Studies, but hardly ever in Peace Studies. While peace may be defined as the absence of conflict, the processes of peacemaking and peace building require entirely different analyses and actions than ending conflicts. While peacemaking is the action of deciding what conditions are to be met to end hostile relations, peacebuilding is the elaborate process before and afterwards that focuses on trust and social interactions. Peacekeeping, on the other hand, is a term that is usually reserved for a military presence by a third party in a conflict with the aim to prevent further violence.

'Peace' is more than the absence of war, however. Given the widening of domains where insecurity is experienced, it is argued that an equal widening of the notion of peace is needed. Here, the concept of **polarization** is important: the hostile opposition between two or more factions represented by political, ethnic, religious or regional groups (see also the notion of 'multipolarization' elsewhere in this textbook). The manifestation of such hostile opposition has grown to

include discrimination, hate speech, vengefulness and even violence and conflict, both within states and among states. From that perspective, the notion of peace is not only relevant on the global level, but also on the national and local: schools, neighborhoods, cities and societies anywhere in the world (and perhaps mostly so in the West) experience the challenges of such types of polarization.

Peace is a notion that is commonly related to states. The United Nations charter states that it wants to ‘maintain peace and security’ among states and peoples, but it fails to set any guidelines on how to achieve that. The United Nations mostly started out as a mediator of conflicts, but it gradually grew in a role of preventing international conflicts. While mediation is a typical form of soft power, prevention can also be a form of hard power: the United Nations started to act as the policeman of the world by sending peacekeeping forces to places where conflicts could erupt or after – and that was usually the case – a conflict had erupted, and where peacekeepers were stationed to keep the warring parties separated. These peacekeepers consisted of army units that various states committed to the peacekeeping force of that conflict. This marked an interesting change in many armies, especially in those of smaller states: the national military did not only serve the defence of one’s own country, it could also serve the peace processes in countries around the world. Countries who commit their military to a peacekeeping force may do so to contribute to world peace. But more often do they do so to show their goodwill to the world community which, in turn, might pay off in the future when favors are required.

The main problem in peacekeeping is the issue of sovereignty. It is one thing to place a peacekeeping force on the borders between two warring states with the permission of those two states. But it’s quite a different thing when a conflict is happening within a country, like a civil war, a massacre, a genocide. What if the government refuses any foreign interference? And what if that government is the main perpetrator of the violence? State sovereignty is generally sacrosanct: no interference is allowed in domestic affairs without the permission of the government. This principle started to waver after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Genocide in Rwanda (1994)

The Hutu majority government of Rwanda had incited violence against the Tutsi population, and within a matter of days between half a million and a million Tutsis were massacred, mostly with machetes. The world watched in horror, but no country intervened. A United Nations peace keeping mission was already present, but they were not allowed to interfere because their UN-mandate was to oversee the implementation of a peace accord between Rwanda and its neighbour Uganda. When the United Nations finally obtained a Security Council declaration which gave the mandate to intervene in the ongoing genocide, it was already too late.

UNESCO: Peace education

“Building more peaceful, just, and sustainable societies starts with education. It influences all aspects of our daily lives and our overall prospects while being impacted by our health and environment. In the global landscape of worsening climate change, democratic backsliding, persistent inequalities, rising discrimination, hate speech, violence and conflict, it can be a tool to address and prevent these problems in the future.”

(UNESCO: *The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development*, 2023)

‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P)

When considering the principle of state sovereignty in the case of internal conflicts within a state, like civil war or genocide, it may be useful to draw a comparison with the situation of a burning house, or with domestic violence. Do we wait for the fire department or the police to arrive, or should we rush in to help and prevent worse? In 1999, some members of the international community decided on the latter during the Yugoslavian civil war. When Kosovo declared independence from Serbia (then still officially called Yugoslavia), atrocities committed by Serbian forces against Kosovan civilians shocked European powers, who still had the 1995 images of the massacres committed by Serbian forces against Bosnian Muslims fresh in their minds, and the genocide in Rwanda a year before that. Was the world to stand by and watch another massacre? A resolution to act before the United Nations was blocked by Russia. But NATO, the American-European military alliance, argued that they had a ‘Responsibility to Protect’, and bombarded Serbian forces and strategic targets within Serbia. And again in 2011, NATO invoked this principle to bombard the military forces of Khaddafi who were about to violently suppress the ‘Arab Spring’ revolt in Libya.

Until that point, the United Nations had kept quiet. After all, the sanctity of state sovereignty is one of its foundations. But many (not all!) members of the international community agreed that intervention was sometimes needed to prevent human catastrophes from taking place. This required a rethink of the notion of sovereignty. It was considered politically too sensitive to make the Responsibility to Protect an *exception* to sovereignty. A more elegant solution was *expanding* the notion of sovereignty. It was argued that sovereignty implies a **dual responsibility**: externally, to respect the sovereignty of other states, but also internally, to respect the dignity and basic rights of all the people within the state. It is important to realize that this is not a rule of law set in stone, it is still under discussion, and for many states it is controversial.

Human security

The discussions about possible exceptions to the sanctity of the principle of sovereignty were prompted by considerations regarding citizens of a state rather than the state itself. This meant that the conversations about the relation between the international and national also permeated to the third level of the 3-D-chessboard: to the local and the individual. Before, these levels were usually discussed in different frameworks: states were viewed in terms of security, people in terms of human rights. By the 1990s, these two concepts converged in the notion of 'human security'.

The first official mention of human security was in the *Human Development Report* of 1994. It was introduced because the existing terminology was considered inadequate: 'security' was still too much seen in terms of state security, and in humanitarian law, where not states but people were placed under protection of international law, security was still only seen in terms of armed conflicts. Now, in 1994, the concept of security was to include chronic threats such as disease, hunger, unemployment, political repression. This was termed human security. However, at the time, this notion was not framed in terms of security, nor in terms of law, but in terms of development.

Ever since its introduction, the concept of human security has been evolving. At first, human security was seen in material terms, meaning the struggle against poverty and disease and hunger. Later, human security was extended to include values and identity. Nowadays, the term human security has become common usage both in the academic world and in the world of development policy.

Human security

There is general consensus among policymakers and academics that human security has four key characteristics:

1. Human security may be discussed in material terms, like food, or energy, or migration, but it is about the people.
2. Human security is a global concern because it is of importance to any individual wherever they may be.
3. The consequences of insecurity can travel beyond borders.
4. Early prevention rather than later intervention is the best way to go about ensuring human security.

A question is how the notion of human security relates to human development. Some see a clear distinction between the two: human development has to do with choices, and therefore with empowerment (also described as the security *of* basic human needs), while human security has to do with protection *from* unwanted

situations. But for others, the two are interrelated or even the same. This argument was made by a group of intellectuals from all over the world and included Amartya Sen, who in 2003 produced a report with the telling title *Human Security Now*. They defined human security as the protection of the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security is a dynamic concept, the report says, because its meaning varies across individuals and societies. Because of that dynamic nature, the report deliberately does offer an itemized list of what makes up human security: that needs to be decided separately in every situation. Based on these discussions, the concept of human security has been criticized for being too vague and therefore ineffective as a useful tool of analysis in policymaking.

‘Securitization’

Security has become the new nexus in many global issues that have, since the turn of the millennium, been framed in security terms: economy, pandemic, migration, development. According to some observers, this is the result of an increased ‘securitization’ of these issues. This specific term describes how an issue is presented as being under such a threat that immediate action must be undertaken. Securitization comprises three elements. First, there is an *existential threat*, that is a threat to the very existence of a community. This threat can be physical – being bombed or wiped out in a genocide – but also existential, that is, a threat to the preservation of a culture and identity. Here, security is about survival. The second element is that this threat is so imminent that there is no time to waste, that *immediate action* is required. We can imagine this to be the case when an army marches across the border, but similar images are used with immigrants crossing borders. The third element is the need for *decisive action*, preferably by a strong leader who will not compromise but who will do what it takes to get the job done to safeguard the security of the nation, even if it demands exceptional measures.

The Copenhagen School on ‘Securitization Theory’

Securitization is a successful speech act ‘through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat’.

(Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, 1998)

Securitization can be legitimate, but the Securitization Theory was developed to describe situations where securitization is an abuse of power for political and populist purposes. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic was a health issue that in 2019 became securitized: it was considered an existential threat because it could kill people extensively and therefore demanded immediate action. In democracies one witnessed leaders setting aside regular democratic processes so they could take decisive action that they claimed to be justified as a safeguard of the nation's security. Many considered this a legitimate securitization, while some claimed that it was an unfounded abuse of power.

Academics observe an increase of securitization as an abuse of power for political and populist purposes. They criticize the ease with which issues are being securitized. Part of that criticism is directed at the exaggerated urgency that is evoked by security language. For example, military metaphors like 'war on drugs', 'war on terror, or 'war on crime' are being used to emphasize – some will say: exaggerate – the urgency of these issues. This type of language evokes the image of imminent threats to society which demand exceptional measures. Other critics point out that when an issue is treated in terms of security, there is a tendency to lose sight of other aspects. This has happened with religion (the focus on Islamically justified terrorism has made religion in general suspect), terrorism (that label prevents one from considering the motives of freedom fighters who use terrorist means), and migration (migrants are perceived as an economic or cultural threat rather than as a people in need or as a solution to economic and demographic decline).

Further reading

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