

GLOBAL POLITICS AND

VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

**NATASHA
EZROW**

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SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
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2455 Teller Road
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SECURITY STUDIES AND VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

Key Terms

- Anarchy
- Balance of power
- Bipolarity
- Constructivism
- Collective security
- Democratic peace theory
- Human security
- International institutions
- Non-state actors
- Nuclear weapons
- Polarity
- Security dilemma
- Small arms

WHAT ARE THE MAIN APPROACHES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

International relations (IR) is a huge field that offers theories that organize generalizations about international politics. The discipline has had a long tradition of trying to explain the relationships between states. Theories of international relations examine questions such as: What are the causes of conflict? and Why is there peace? The last several decades, however, has seen the field of IR undergo a revolution in the study of conflict and violence.

For most scholars in IR, the role of the *state* is critical.¹ Most scholars still see states as the most important actors, though others acknowledge that other actors are important.

¹Legally the state is supposed to have a territorial base, with a stable population that resides within its borders and a government that the population owes its allegiance to. The state also has to be recognized diplomatically by other states (see Mingst and Arreguín-Toft, 2013: Ch. 5).

The heavy focus on the state materialized in the post–World War II era (see Waltz, 1993). It was from this time onwards that the idea of state sovereignty – that states had territorial boundaries that should not be interfered with – became more commonly espoused. By ‘states’, scholars are referring to the governments of different countries around the world. Assumptions are then made about states and their interests, as if the state was a unified entity. Before turning to a discussion on the role of the state in global politics today, this chapter will sum up the main approaches of IR.

The field of IR has been dominated by two main paradigms: realism and liberalism. Though heavily criticized, realism has been the most dominant paradigm, guiding policymakers since World War II. Particularly during the Cold War, realist thought dominated academic and policy circles. The importance of the superpower rivalry helped place realism as the most important approach to understanding interstate relations and security. But can it still add to our understanding of the biggest threats to security today?

REALISM

Even before the Cold War, realism had had a long philosophical tradition. The works of Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli formed the philosophical underpinnings of realism. Realism is also an academic approach to understanding international politics, but there are different variants of realism (something that will be explained in more depth later in the chapter). For now we focus on the key components that tie all strands of realism together.

Realists argue that they see the world as it is. They make no attempt to sugar-coat the nature of global politics. Realists see the world as inherently conflictual. States struggle to attain power in a world that is anarchic. Without a central authority to guarantee security, states rely on their own means to protect their interests (Grieco, 1988). Because of this, realists assume that states live in a self-help system where relative gains matter more than absolute ones. By this we mean that states care more about what they have in relation to other states rather than being satisfied with what they have. States are self-interested and motivated by attaining power, more so than attaining economic wealth. Scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (1904–80) focused on how states are driven by attaining power, while other realists such as Kenneth Waltz (1924–2013) focused more on states seeking power as a means to attain security. How powerful states are is usually measured by their military capacity first, followed by their economic resources. All realists also assume that states are the most important actor. It is this assumption of realism that this book will examine the most thoroughly.

While early realists may have focused more heavily on power and human nature’s quest for power, neo-realism turned more attention to the international system that shaped state behaviour. Anarchy figured heavily in the approach as an explanation for why the world was so conflictual. Most neo-realists in the Waltzian tradition focused on the uniformity of state behaviour. In addition, for most neo-realists, states are all the same. The only thing that differentiates them is their capabilities. States are all self-interested, rational, unitary actors that are driven by the need to seek power for its own sake or power to attain security.

Other realists focus more on unit-level factors such as motivations. As noted before, traditional realists wrote about the role of human nature in driving behaviour. Neo-classical realists agree that anarchy causes a sense of insecurity, but note that

states may vary in terms of their motivation, with some being more dissatisfied with the status quo than other states. Classical realists and neo-realists differ in terms of the source and content of state preferences. Morgenthau's work assumed that leaders of states are motivated by their need for power. Waltz never focused on leaders' motivations or state characteristics, only assuming that states' main aim is survival.

For most realists, security is achieved by making others more insecure. One state's need to attain power or security will cause other states to seek their own security. This leads to the security dilemma, which helps to explain the spiralling arms race that took place during the Cold War. Henry Kissinger illustrates the logic of the security dilemma during the Cold War: 'The superpowers often behave like two heavily armed blind men feeling their way around a room, each believing himself in mortal peril from the other, whom he assumes to have perfect vision' (quoted by Conlin, 2013: 804). Though both the US and the Soviet Union had acquired enough weapons to blow up the world ten times over, they were never satisfied with their arsenal, and the high military spending of one camp caused the other to follow suit. Demonstrating the effects of these policies, Kissinger added, 'Of course, over time, even two armed blind men can do enormous damage to each other, not to speak of the room'.

Because the system was so unstable, achieving a balance of power was essential. States assessed one another in terms of their power and capabilities. States could balance in two ways. They could balance internally by increasing their military personnel and acquiring a large arsenal of weapons (possibly even nuclear weapons), or they could balance externally by making alliances with other states. Alliances have the advantage of reducing the resources that must be devoted to defence. But the inherent problem with external balancing is that because all states are self-interested and often cannot be trusted, alliances can be short-lived. It is not uncommon to be abandoned or betrayed by a past ally. Alliances may also draw states into conflicts that they may not wish to join. Thus, though alliances may be important for helping states alleviate the burden of internal balancing, states must always work to ensure that they can survive. Though eliminating threats is impossible, there are strategies that states can employ to achieve stalemates which may offer a respite from conflict.

For neo-realists in the Waltzian tradition, threats to security are affected by the distribution of power, referred to as *polarity*. Thus, it is the polarity of the system (whether it is unipolar, bipolar or multipolar) that influences the propensity for conflict. For Waltz (in contrast to Morgenthau), the bipolar system during the Cold War was stable because a stalemate was established between the superpowers where no state was willing to risk disrupting the balance. Though the bipolar era lasted for decades, the distribution of capabilities is constantly shifting, which causes variation in balance-of-power behaviour.

Though there are various strands of realism, the overarching theme is that states are the most important actors, states are driven by the need for power in order to achieve security and the world is naturally conflictual, which necessitates that states seek to build up their military power to defend themselves from constant threats coming from other states. These views largely shaped policymakers' agendas.² For a summary of the realist position, see Table 1.1.

²Realism is not associated with hawkish behaviour, however. While some realists have advocated more aggressive foreign policies, others, like George Kennan, consistently criticized the United States' confrontational policies. Many other realists, such as Hans Morgenthau and John Mearsheimer, were strong critics of the US's intervention in Vietnam and Iraq, respectively.

Table 1.1 How Realists See States

Ideology and political objectives:	Do not matter; states are all the same
Strategy and tactics:	Acquire as much power as possible (offensive) or achieve a balance of power (defensive)
Organizational structure:	Does not matter; states are all the same
Funding and support:	Varies by states' economic capacity and by the polarity of the system
Power and impact:	States are the most important actors; they differ only in terms of their capabilities

Though realists should not be accused of advocating conflict, realism has been criticized for not being able to understand global politics in the post-Cold War era. The focus on states as the most important actors makes it difficult to understand the behaviour of *non-state* actors. This is a critical omission, because non-state actors in global politics abound. Many non-state actors are non-violent and focus on improving the human condition through non-violent means. There are millions of non-governmental organizations, international organizations and international agencies committed to preventing conflict, easing poverty and improving communication and cooperation in a non-violent manner. In spite of these efforts, the world has also seen a spike in the formation of organizations that have used or still use some form of violence to achieve their objectives. Their formation, motivations and impact cannot be explained by a reductionist approach that focuses on strong, capable, unitary states. In addition to this criticism, the following section elaborates on the other key criticisms of realism.

CRITICISMS OF REALISM

Though realism dominated international security circles for decades, alternative paradigms have also been influential. Prior to World War II, the *liberal* tradition attained popularity for espousing views of progress. Known sometimes as idealists, liberals acknowledge that the world is conflictual but are optimistic about the potential for peace and cooperation. Liberals focus on what needs to take place for states to coexist peacefully. In contrast to realists, early liberals' view of human nature was optimistic that there was a capacity for optimal outcomes, that cooperation and respect for human rights could be achieved. In their view, states cared about morality and promoting a common good.

Neo-liberals adopted many of the same assumptions that neo-realists did, but came to opposite conclusions. Neo-liberals also assumed that states were important actors that acted rationally. They concluded, however, that this rational behaviour, which was constrained by institutions, would lead to peace and cooperation. States were not as concerned with power as they were with economic and political considerations, such as the desire for prosperity and possibly a commitment to liberal values (Walt, 1991). States would see it in their self-interest to cooperate and trade. States that focused on trade emphasized the benefits of trading freely and highlighted how states that traded would become interdependent, due to the mutual benefits of trade. The benefits of trade would make the costs of war extremely high.

Other scholars focused on the importance of ‘democratic peace’ (Russett et al., 1995). The theory holds that democracies are unlikely to fight one another due to shared norms, the institutional checks that slow down the decision to declare war, peace-loving populations and a habit of choosing negotiation and bargaining over going to war. Democracies are used to resolving conflict through rules and negotiations. Therefore, two democracies will choose diplomacy and bargaining over going to war with each other. An additional factor is that democracies are more transparent which enhances the chance for cooperation and peace. Cooperation will be a more likely option; clear communication and transparency will help to better understand the intentions of other states. Furthermore, it may be internationally unpopular to choose to go to war if diplomatic options have not been completely exhausted.

Other liberals have focused on the importance of international institutions (Keohane, 1989), such as collective security arrangements (Kupchan and Kupchan, 1995) that could mitigate the propensity for conflict by providing a collective deterrent against aggression. Institutions could also help communication and increase transparency. This helps to lower transaction costs of cooperation and to coordinate multilateral action. Institutions could also assist in creating future cooperation by acting in reciprocity with other institutions – in effect, setting up an iterated game of cooperation. Institutions may also help states create shared values and concerns, thereby helping states become interdependent. By creating mutually beneficial relationships, states would be able to concentrate on absolute, not relative, gains. Finally, in the absence of an international government, institutions can play a role of enforcing agreements and punishing defection.

In general, liberalism has worked to understand cooperation, peace and how to avoid conflict, but has not offered a theoretical framework for explaining violence. Liberals have placed attention on non-state actors, but much less on violent non-state actors. Because of this, liberals have contributed less to our understanding of security threats and more to our understanding of how to prevent these threats. Liberals acknowledge the role of non-state actors in international politics and emphasize international cooperation when facing threats from violent non-state actors. Networks of cooperating government agencies are the best response to threats from violent non-state actors, according to political scientist Joseph Nye (2003, 2004).

Realism and liberalism have been the dominant paradigms in international relations. Constructivism, peace studies, feminist studies and critical theory have aimed at uncovering the weaknesses of traditional theories. Here we focus on constructivism.

Constructivism is not a unified school of thought – it has been interpreted very differently by various scholars – but all constructivists challenge realism’s assumptions about states (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001; Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992; 1995). First, they challenge the notion that states are the main actors seeking survival. Constructivists argue that state behaviour cannot be assumed; it is shaped by a combination of collective norms, social identities and elite beliefs and interests. These norms, identities and interests have in turn been affected by the discourses of societies and by historical processes and interactions. Thus the construction and evolution of ideas and discourse are more important than sheer military or economic power. For example, in examining the role of threats, constructivists argue that there are processes by which individuals and states construct threats. The goal

of security may change and this may depend on how the state is constituted and how security issues are framed. Different countries have different ways of defining security and threats. For example, Cuba for decades viewed the US as the biggest threat to its survival, whereas its Caribbean neighbours viewed the US as an ally. Constructivists ask what discourse has taken place to affect how one country could be viewed so differently. In contrast, realism does not address behaviour that is based on ideologically driven agendas because it sees behaviour driven by self-interest (Hyde-Price, 2009: 34).

In addition to challenging assumptions about the importance of power and security to states, constructivists also challenge the importance of anarchy. Noted constructivist Alexander Wendt argued that anarchy is what states make of it. Spirals of hostility, arms races and war are not inevitable in an anarchic system. If states fall into conflict it is due to their own behaviour which can reproduce militaristic mindsets. For Wendt (1992), anarchy is an empty vessel with no logic. It is the interests and identities that explain behaviour. States' interests are a function of international interactions that have taken place, not due to the looming fear of anarchy. Barry Buzan (1984, 2008) argued that security communities can emerge when there are strong states. Security communities are socially constructed when knowledge can transform international structures and security politics creating conditions for a stable peace. However, though the role of knowledge is important in establishing security communities between states, establishing security communities within states is more difficult to achieve.

GLOBAL RELATIONS IN THE THIRD WORLD

Towards the end of the Cold War, more scholarship turned its attention to the international relations of states in the Third World. Issues facing the Third World were only examined in terms of how they may affect the great powers (Nye and Lynn-Jones, 1988). Now referred to more commonly as the developing world (from here on, it will be referred to as this), states that were not part of the great power circle engaged in behaviour that was very different than the great powers. This was not just a function of differences in military power, but also differences in culture, history, regime type, governance and leadership styles.

International politics is supposedly distinct from domestic politics because there is no international government to manage and mediate between disputing actors. In international politics, the world is anarchic and states must fend for themselves and provide their own security, while domestic governments are supposed to be stable and able to provide security. This leads to a binary vision where domestic orders are stable while international orders are unstable.

The security of citizens is also supposedly guaranteed by the state. Anyone outside the state represents a potential or actual threat to citizens. But this is not the case in the developing world and in some parts of the developed world as well. Traditional paradigms assume that states provide security. In the developing world, sometimes it is the states themselves that are a source of insecurity.

Further, traditional paradigms assume that the point of origin of security threats is the interstate level. In other words, the main threats to states are supposed to be external. However, conflicts and tensions between states are rare and

in the developing world the main threats are often internal. Conflicts originate within states and are largely due to internal challenges facing states (Buzan, 1991: 100). Most conflicts in the developing world are intrastate, not interstate. Much of the reason for this is due to state weakness rather than the absence of a balance of power. Assumptions that were made about states in the developed world are not as applicable to the developing world. States in the developing world have not always been sovereign and lack autonomy (Ayoob, 1995). Many states emerged after independence without a clear national identity and without social cohesion.³ Subnational identities have challenged the legitimacy of the state. States emerged without the capacity to provide for their inhabitants.

Even when states are strong and sovereign, it is important to acknowledge that there may be other actors operating in global politics that are powerful. The notion that states are the most important actors becomes even more flawed, however, when you look at the developing world, where weak states abound. In contrast to realist assumptions, states in the developing world may be much weaker than other non-state actors.⁴

Box 1.1 Omni-balancing

Omni-balancing takes place when states offer support for a violent non-state actor, as a way of balancing against internal and external threats to their security. The logic of this theory was developed by Steven David (1991). As he sees it, states in the developing world may be much weaker both domestically and internationally. Domestically they have low levels of legitimacy and high needs to maintain survival. The weaker leaders are, the more likely they are to align with violent non-state actors to distract and appeal to different domestic groups. In a world where there are also large power disparities at the international level, weak states may also see the benefits of supporting terrorist groups. Supporting these violent non-state groups does not lead to huge challenges from either the domestic or external area. There are fewer costs of offering this support and higher gains. For these reasons weaker states may find it preferable to support non-state actors over states as alliance partners. Some examples of this include Syria's support for the Kurdish Worker's Party and Iran's support for Hezbollah.

Another issue is the notion that non-military phenomena should be excluded from the security studies agenda. Realists have tended to emphasize the anarchic international system rather than domestic affairs in their treatment of security issues. Similarly, the recent tendency to label the field 'international security' rather than 'national security' is likely to make it even harder to focus attention on domestic

³Ayoob (1995) claimed that neither traditional nor post-Cold War conceptions of security captured the predicaments of states in the developing world. These predicaments are due to when state formation took place, how it took place and how new these states are.

⁴In the 1990s as many states began to 'fail', scholars turned to use their theories that had been applied to interstate relations to explain internal conflict (Posen, 1993). Some states fail and do not erupt into conflict, and other states are stronger but face security threats.

aspects of security. Moreover, the issues that cause insecurity in the developing world may be non-security issues such as resource shortages, underdevelopment, overpopulation, educational crises, drug trafficking, migration and environmental hazards. The costs of poverty, ecological deterioration and ethnic fragmentation are more greatly felt in the developing world (Väyrynen, 1991). Because of this, the military dimension of security may be of less importance in the developing world (Thomas, 2001).

Another problem with traditional paradigms is that they have not completely understood how the structure of power within states may impact outcomes. Due to insecurities about political survival, states in the developing world are led by leaders who have different calculations than states in the developed world. Elites in the developing world may prioritize leadership survival over national security issues (see Box 1.1 on ‘omni-balancing’). Their preoccupation with political survival may lead elites in the developing world to pursue foreign policy decisions that do not reflect the national interest. In essence, self-preservation may take precedence over security interests.

Another challenge to traditional paradigms is the notion that bipolarity created a stable international order. This was hardly the case in the developing world. Conflicts were permitted to take place in the developing world since this served as a safety valve to avoid direct confrontation between the two superpowers. Furthermore, when interstate conflicts did develop, this was also not due to an imbalance of power but due to internal conflicts spilling over across national boundaries that fuelled discord with neighbours. State boundaries are not honoured to the same extent as they are in the developed world. Additionally, the most effective instruments of the international order are not relying on achieving a global balance of power.

Another challenge to traditional paradigms is the focus on weapons of mass destruction. Scholars of security studies and strategic studies have placed an overwhelming emphasis on weapons of mass destruction. The focus was on nuclear strategies and deterrence. According to scholarly work, once massive retaliation was achieved and first and second strike capabilities were established, arms control, not disarmament, would achieve a nuclear balance. Nuclear weapons have had very little impact on the developing world and developed world. However, small arms which are spread easily have been responsible for high numbers of casualties (for more on this, see Box 8.1 in Chapter 8).

The traditional literature has understood security in the developing world in terms of how it affected the developed world with the main objective to preserve the status quo. However, the status quo in the developing world was the major source of insecurity. Security frameworks need to have a greater understanding of a broader range of issues – not just security issues but non-security issues as well – and should involve not just states, but non-states as well. A greater integration of security issues that face the developing world will help move beyond realist orthodoxy.

What is the nature of global politics when you also take into account weak and unstable states with complex demographics? In fact, very little from the dominant theories of international relations examines the security threats emanating from within states, and how these security threats connect with other threats outside the state, further adding to the complexity.

Box 1.2 Strategic Studies

Strategic studies is a strand of security studies that examines military strategy, military technology and the use of force. As military security has often been considered more important than other forms of security, strategic studies is often conflated with security studies. As an academic discipline, however, strategic studies is fairly limited to focusing on the means by which security is pursued, and the instruments of statecraft and management of military force (Baldwin, 1995: 129). Critics claim that the field of strategic studies focuses on the use of military force without really understanding the goals of security. The field is less interested in understanding how wars can be avoided, and more interested in understanding how wars can be fought in the most efficient way possible (Farrell, 1996, 2010).

WHAT IS THE FIELD OF SECURITY STUDIES?

Security studies are often thought of as a subfield of IR. In some ways, ‘security studies’ is a more encompassing field than IR and has become multidisciplinary, bringing together psychology, history, sociology and organizational theories. The focus of the dominant paradigms in IR was mostly on national security. In other words, the concept of security was limited to achieving security of the nation state (Beaton, 1972). The field of security studies looks at individuals and groups of individuals who both use violence and protect themselves from violence.

Security studies examines all of the issues pertaining to security and violence, including the causes of conflict, the conduct during conflict and the how conflicts end. Security studies may also look at intelligence, information technologies and security. It may also examine the use of military force in peace operations and peacekeeping and the role of ethics in security policy. Some studies focus on micro-level factors such as strategies in crisis management, conflict strategies and motivations for conflict. Other studies may focus on macro-level factors such as military spending and doctrines, and conventional and unconventional strategies of violence. More narrow definitions claim that security studies focus on ‘the threat, use, and control of military force...[that is] the conditions that make the use of force more likely, the ways that the use of force affects individuals, states and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war’ (Walt, 1991: 212; see also Mearsheimer, 1995).

COLD WAR SECURITY STUDIES DURING THE COLD WAR

Early scholars of security theories distinguished themselves from those who studied strategy and warfare. They took a broad approach to understanding security and argued that both military and non-military means could achieve security. In other words, coercive power was not the only means to attain security (Baldwin 1995: 130). The field originally grew out of debates over how to protect the state against external and internal threats.

In particular, the field was concerned with security problems facing the United States. The US focus is hardly surprising given that most specialists in security studies

are American. The downside of this is that most of the conclusions made were skewed by American thinking. Assumptions that were supposed to be universal were actually reflective of American culture. Another issue is that US scholars had a heavy focus on strategic studies (which examines the military element of security studies – for more on this, see Box 1.2). It was noted that ‘the Cold War not only militarized American security policy, it also militarized the study of security’ (Baldwin, 1995: 125).

Thus most scholars were interested in military statecraft. If military force was relevant to the issue at hand, it was then considered a security issue. On the other hand, if military force was not relevant then that issue was considered outside of security issues, and referred to as an issue of ‘low politics’.

Most theoretical work on security was dominated by the dangers of great power conflict and the effects of bipolarity. As such, power and the nation state were concentrated on. Military aspects of security were overemphasized (Buzan and Hansen, 2009). The advancements in sophisticated weaponry ushered in an era of focusing on how to deal with the threats of nuclear weapons. There was almost a universal acceptance of the realist paradigm that states needed to focus on their national interest and deter key threats to these interests. Nuclear strategies featured heavily in security studies (Walt, 1991). Works that looked at conflicts in the developing world came from practitioners rather than academics, usually examining case studies of guerrilla warfare. The Vietnam War reduced the interest in security studies, since most leading strategists knew very little about the mechanics of guerrilla warfare. The breakdown of *détente* and the military build-up that took place during US President Ronald Reagan’s tenure in 1980s stimulated renewed interest in security studies (Fierke, 2015).

However, the domestic dimension of national security tended to be neglected during the Cold War years. A big debate emerged about whether or not the concept of security should be broadened to fit a policy agenda that was more diverse.

EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY

The meaning and nature of security is constantly debated (Buzan, 1991). The concept has been debated because it has remained underdeveloped and vague for both realists and liberals. For realists, security is achieved when an actor has achieved enough power. For liberals, security is the result of peace, which provides security for all. Realists tend to focus on military threats to the security of states. But security is a very broad concept, and states may vary in terms of the value that they place on military security. States may want more than just military security. Scholars are calling for conceptualizations of security that go beyond the nation state.

Barry Buzan (1997, 2008) highlighted the importance of expanding on the concept of security. Buzan emphasized that security is not just military; it is also political, economic, societal and ecological. These are not just different concepts but constitute different forms of security. Military security was concerned with the interplay between the armed capabilities of states. Buzan argued that military security could be referred to as strategic studies (for more on this, see Box 1.2). Political security focuses on the organizational stability of states and government systems. Economic security revolves around the resources, finances and markets necessary to attain a healthy economy and provide welfare. Societal security refers to the sustainability and

evolution of language, religion, national identities and customs (Wæver, 1995). Finally, environmental security centres on the maintenance of the biosphere.⁵

Buzan also questions the assumption that all actors have the same values. Realists assume that security is the prime concern of states. However, security may also include economic welfare, autonomy, psychological well-being, and so on. Another question is how much security is actually needed. Waltz (1964) claims that states need enough security to ensure their survival. But how much assurance is enough? At what point can resources be put towards other things? There is also a cost to pursuing security. Some goals may be sacrificed in order to pursue other objectives. Not all resources can be devoted to security.

Buzan also questions the realist assumption that security is a zero sum concept. According to realists, more security for one actor means less security for another. However, not everything that states do to enhance their security will necessarily make other states feel more insecure. For example, states can improve their economies and environments in ways that lead to positive outcomes for other states.

Buzan also questioned the idea that security should only be concerned with the nation state. The state has traditionally been thought of as the most important thing to be secured, usually through military power and attaining sovereignty. Though Buzan acknowledges that the state is still the referent object of analysis for international security (since it is states that have to cope with most security problems), he also emphasizes the importance of 'human security'.

Though the idea of thinking in terms of human security is incredibly popular, especially in policy circles, the conception of human security is still vague. It can denote everything from physical security to psychological well-being. This makes it hard to prioritize how to achieve security when the concept is so expansive. According to the United Nations Development Programme, human security encompasses economic security, or freedom from poverty; food security, or access to food; health security, or access to health and protection from disease; environmental security, or protection from pollution and depletion; personal security, such as physical safety from all types of violence; societal security, or survival of identities; and political security, or freedom from oppression. Other governments have tried to promote more restrictive definitions of human security to focus on freedom from threats to safety, but most governments have accepted that human security may mean the achievement of some level of quality of life.

Furthermore, because security should not always be defined in terms of the state, security can be pursued and attained by a wide variety of means. Realists have a tendency to territorialize violence, seeing threats from non-conventional forms of violence as a threat to the state. Realists assume that violent non-state actors can only survive with the support of states. This leads to a response that only considers the use of force against another state. Realists also promote a view that only force will change the behaviour of an armed group (for more on the response to violent groups, see Chapter 12). However, many different policies can be adopted in the pursuit of security. Only conceiving of security in terms of the threat, control and use of military force can lead to confusion as to how security can be pursued, favouring military solutions over non-military ones.

⁵The UN Secretary General High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change identified six clusters of threats: poverty, disease, environmental degradation, interstate conflict, internal conflict, terrorism and transnational organized crime.

WHY ARE STATES SO DIFFERENT FROM NON-STATE ACTORS?

Though assuming the state is the most important actor can lead to a misunderstanding of the complexity in global politics today, eliminating the state from the analysis would also be problematic. States are critical for understanding why non-state actors emerge. In fact, we do not dispute the notion of realists that states are important. However, it is important to underscore that states are very different from non-states – and we cannot make the assumption that they operate according to the same logic and constraints. Achieving order between states is much easier than within states.

States may respond to different tools such as diplomacy, fear of economic sanctions and threats of force. In contrast, non-states may not be influenced by diplomatic carrots and sticks. In many instances, non-state actors have little to lose. Therefore, a diplomatic offering may provide little incentive to cooperate. As there is no formal trade taking place with non-state actors, this means that economic sanctions will also fail to make an impact. In many cases threatening to use force only enhances the image of the violent non-state actor, making threats of violence another ineffective tool. States have to respond to the needs of their domestic populations, while non-state actors often do not have much of a population to answer to. In some cases, the views of the population matter but in other cases the non-state actor can just use force and coercion to exact compliance and obedience.

States also differ from non-state actors because they can formally trade with one another. Non-state actors are involved in all sorts of trade and financial transactions, but most of this trade is done illegally and without much regularity. The lack of certainty may impede the logic of economic interdependence that emerges when states are involved in mutually beneficial trading relationships. Trade restrictions may also make it difficult to generate revenues (Bahcheli et al., 2004). De facto states such as Abkhazia have been cut off from the international community and are completely isolated. For much of the 1990s there was no telephone link to the outside world and no Internet (Lynch, 2004: 93).

States are also involved in international institutions, while non-state actors are not able to take part, though some may receive an observer status. Non-state actors are not considered legitimate internationally and do not get to reap the benefits of belonging to a large institution. As a result, states have more formal channels of communication and they can communicate with one another in a regular fashion. Non-state actors must rely on informal methods of communication which may lead to lower levels of trust.

Realists assume that actors act in their national interest. They maintain that the laws of international politics remain the same regardless of actors' identity and regime type (Cederman, 1997: 17). States in theory should prefer secure environments and want to eliminate threats. But, violent non-state actors may not operate in terms of any national interest. Violent non-state actors often thrive on insecurity and instability. They may prefer to perpetuate this insecurity in order to justify their very existence or in order to operate illegal activities or control territory.

According to realists, states may want to achieve a balance of power; violent non-state actors may not have that objective. Violent non-state actors may not be involved in typical balancing behaviour. States may offer clandestine support as might other violent non-state actors, but this may be motivated by factors other than achieving a balance of power, such as the need to support like-minded ideals or norms.

IS REALISM STILL RELEVANT?

Though realist thought has been critiqued throughout the chapter, the paradigm offers important insights about the behaviour of actors in the international system. It is true that actors are often self-interested. Actors are often power-hungry and concerned with relative gains. Actors are also usually concerned with their own survival. This helps to explain why so many politically motivated actors eventually turn to organized crime to fund themselves. In fact, rational choice approaches are examined extensively throughout the book to offer explanations for why actors behave the way they do.

Additionally, states are still very important. The state has not disappeared and withered away. The key issue is that realism does not address that states face different challenges. Moreover, these challenges manifest themselves differently depending on the context. Thus, part of the solution does involve the state; building strong states is still an important step to tackling insecurity. But utilizing only a military response will not work given the new threats facing states. Given all of these new realities, realism can update itself to the 21st century. It can apply to non-states a revised version of the logic that it applies to states in order to make predictions that are more relevant to understanding security today. States are no longer only threatened by other states. Thus the balance of power logic at the international level needs to be revisited.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated how security needs to be redefined to be relevant in the contemporary era. Though traditional views of security were useful in understanding great power behaviour during the Cold War, there is general acceptance that scholars and practitioners need to re-examine the way we think about security and expand on the definition. In the world today, we have an overabundance of military power yet new types of violence threaten civilians today more than ever. Why is this the case? Who are the main actors that threaten security? How do these actors differ and why have they emerged? What is the best way of responding to these actors?

The next chapter explains what is meant by unconventional violence, such as terrorism, guerrilla warfare, organized criminal violence and hybrid wars. New types of violence are often written about but undertheorized, under-conceptualized and poorly understood. Thus, the following chapter explains how violent non-state actors should be categorized. A clear categorization helps us to better understand the threats that they pose to security and how to respond accordingly.

Summary Points

- States are still important actors in security, but non-state actors are equally important.
- Most threats are due to internal factors that have little to do with the balance of power or the international system.

- Previous theories that focus on a state-centric model misunderstand that states operate by a completely different logic than non-states.
- State boundaries are no longer as relevant in providing security as they were in the past.
- All theories of international security (especially realism) should update the logic of their arguments to include the role of non-state actors and how they threaten security of the state and society.

Key Questions

- 1 What have been the primary critiques launched at realists' interpretations of the causes of insecurity and how security is achieved?
- 2 How did the Cold War shape realist interpretations of security?
- 3 How is security in the developing world conceived?
- 4 What is security studies and how has the conception of security changed over time?
- 5 What are the ways in which states are different from non-states, in particular, from violent non-state actors?
- 6 Theory: In what ways is realism still relevant in understanding security today? How can the theory be applicable to understanding violent non-state actors?

FURTHER READING

For students of international relations, there are many good sources that can provide a useful starting point.

Jackson, R. and Sørensen, G. (2016) *Introduction to Theories and Approaches* (Oxford University Press). Clear introduction to the two dominant traditions in contemporary realism and neo-liberalism, as well as constructivism.

Keohane, R. (2011) 'Neoliberal institutionalism', in *Security Studies: A Reader*. A short overview of the benefits of neo-liberal institutions.

Mingst, K.A. and Arreguín-Toft, I.M. (2013) *Essentials of International Relations* (6th international student ed.) (Norton). A reader that offers a thorough summary of the key terms International Relations.

Stears, J., Pettiford, L., Diez, T. and El-Anis, I. (2013) *An Introduction to Theory: Perspectives and Themes* (Routledge). Overview of alternative perspectives to the dominant paradigms such as constructivism, critical theory and green and feminist perspectives.

Waltz, K.N. (2000) 'Structural realism after the Cold War'. *International Security*, 25 (1), 5–41. Important commentary on structural realism and why it is not obsolete even after the fall of bipolarity.