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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

The 21st century requires radically new thinking about national security. States have become increasingly interdependent and today face a multiplicity of threats from many different sources, not just other states. Moreover, the information age is posing a new set of challenges to security establishments around the world. Intelligence agencies no longer have to worry about too little information, but about too much. They have to try to make sense of the plethora of information available, distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant and the true from the false, and coordinate and share information with the appropriate government agencies. This all has to happen in real time. National security councils and other security decision-making bodies are no longer endowed with the “luxury” of having 13 days to deliberate and weigh their options during a state of national emergency, as John F. Kennedy and his staff had during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In past centuries, empires and states have come up with a variety of doctrines and strategies to protect their homeland from threats – which were, until recently, perceived as mostly state-based. After World War II, the United States (US) saw a need to coordinate security-related information and policy better among its different government departments and agencies. As a result, the United States was the first country to create a National Security Council, an institution tasked with assessing security threats and spotting emerging strategic challenges early; advising the executive on national security policy; and drafting strategy papers. The US model of creating a unified institutionalised setting within the government to deal with security policy and strategy has been adopted by several nations since. This study argues that a national security council or an equivalent institution in the 21st century is no longer just a “useful” addition, but an essential component of any state’s ability to provide security for its people.

This book takes a fresh look at national security – past, present and future. The remainder of this chapter briefly discusses the concept of and main approaches to national security. Chapter 2 puts the different security doctrines embraced by European powers and the United States in historical context, pointing out how national security doctrines have evolved with changing international circumstances and experiences during times of war and peace. Chapter 3 describes how some states organise their national security today. The chapter focuses particularly on states with a national security council, a type of institution that is extremely useful for governments when dealing with the complexity of today’s security threats. Chapter 4 identifies the nature and extent of the security threats that states face today, ranging from infectious diseases and state failure to transnational organised crime. It sets the stage for creating a new national security framework that takes account of the diverse threats in a comprehensive way. Chapter 5 puts forward a new approach to security and international relations in today’s instant and interdependent world, drawing on emerging concepts in international security studies. Chapter 6 describes how an ideal national security council in the 21st century would look, taking into account the new circumstances of today’s security environment. It puts forward a proposal for a new national security framework which builds on an innovative understanding of international relations and security in the 21st century.

## 1. Defining National Security

The concept of *security* is highly complex. Individuals and states may define it in different ways at different points in time. What all concepts of security have in common, however, is that “they are based on fear of actual and potential attacks on public authorities, persons and property”.<sup>1</sup>

To a certain degree, security has objectively definable physical aspects – such as whether a country’s borders are safe from attack and whether a state is able to guarantee a reasonable degree of law and order so that citizens can live free from physical harm. At the same time, there is also a more subjective dimension to the notion of security – the degree to which people perceive themselves to be secure from harm.<sup>2</sup> For instance, was the US population safer on 10 September 2001 than it was on 12 September 2001? Probably not, but the vast majority of US citizens probably “felt” safer before the realisation that

terrorists could strike at any time and cause widespread havoc and suffering. Political scientist Arnold Wolfers gave expression to the ambiguity of the security concept by stating “Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked”.<sup>3</sup>

The modern concept of *national security* is inextricably linked to the emergence of the nation state. National security policy can broadly be defined as “a framework for describing how a country provides security for the state and its citizens”.<sup>4</sup> The framework identifies and addresses both internal and external security threats and “seeks to integrate and coordinate the contributions of national security actors in response to the interests and threats deemed most important”.<sup>5</sup>

Graham Allison points out that the size and relative power of each state determines how independent a state is in pursuing its national objectives. For instance, some European states have voluntarily given up sovereignty over their currency and now defer to the European Central Bank as a way of enhancing their objective of increasing national and common prosperity. Moreover, to preserve their territorial integrity and protect themselves from outside attack, small and weak states often form alliances or accept protection from a stronger power, thus voluntarily giving up some of their freedom of action to advance their national security objectives.<sup>6</sup>

The national security concept of a country is strongly influenced by the country’s unique particularities – most importantly, the country’s historical experiences. For instance, a country that has been traumatised by repeated attacks from neighbouring states laying claim to its territory will have a different approach to national security to a country that has never been attacked. Moreover, a country’s geographical characteristics and its natural resources also influence national security thinking. For example, a state that is landlocked will have different national security needs to a state with a long coastline, and a country with no oil and gas resources will consider energy security a higher priority on its list of national security concerns than a state that is partly self-sufficient when it comes to meeting its energy needs.

## **2. An Evolving Concept**

Traditionally, states have made a clear distinction between internal and external security. Already in the 16th century, the Italian diplomat

and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli distinguished internal threats to a ruler, which came from domestic attempts at subversion or internal rebellion, from external threats posed by hostile foreign powers.<sup>7</sup> This distinction is still reflected in the security apparatus of states today.<sup>8</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, however, the distinction between internal and external security has become increasingly blurred. At the same time, the definition of what constitutes a security threat to a state has been broadened. Growing global economic interdependence, dynamic cross-border migration patterns, the multiplicity of transnational interactions and the rapid, global dissemination of information through new global communications technology such as the Internet make it much more difficult for states to maintain a sharp distinction between internal and external security challenges.

Moreover, states, particularly in the developed world, are no longer primarily concerned about so-called traditional security threats. Today, most developed states are not so much concerned about a conventional military conquest because their neighbours do not harbour any territorial ambitions. It is arguable, however, that this may only be a temporary condition, and national survival might well again become a priority security concern for states. With regard to internal security, most governments in the industrialised world are secure because most citizens inside these countries accept their government as legitimate. In particular, most liberal democracies face few internal or external political and ideological challenges to their system of government. Most developed states have democratically elected governments, and democracies purportedly do not wage war against each other.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the case of most developed states, “territorial integrity and political autonomy”, the very basis of state sovereignty, is not in jeopardy.<sup>10</sup> Current state borders – at least in the developed world – enjoy broadly based international legitimacy, and international law explicitly outlaws territorial conquest.

Clearly, the external conditions of states have changed, and so has their concept of national security. As Vincent Ferraro explains, the threat of terrorism, which currently dominates the security discourse in the United States, does not pose a traditional threat to the territorial integrity of states, nor are terrorists in a strong enough position to take over governments in the developed world. Instead, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the US cities of New York and Washington, DC, did something else. Ferraro writes “What these attacks did appear

to threaten was the quality of life of American citizens: most specifically, the ability of Americans to live free of fear”.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, “traditional” security threats have given way to a series of “non-traditional” threats that have been given increased prominence in the past two decades. Among them are, for example, human-induced environmental threats, infectious diseases, large migration flows, state instability and international organised crime. Certainly, this is not to suggest that such non-traditional threats have not existed in the past. For millennia, human beings have died from environmental catastrophes and contagious diseases, as well as other threats that did not involve foreign armies or domestic armed rebellion. However, these so-called non-traditional threats have received increased prominence in the security discourse, partly due to the relative decline of more traditional military threats to states. In other words, they have become “securitised”, that is, identified as threats to human, national and international security on a par with more traditional national security concerns. These security issues have also become more threatening to the dominant states in the system – the wealthy, developed West – which is another reason why they have gained increased prominence in the international security discourse.

What is more, non-traditional threats to states have acquired increased urgency in recent years because some of these threats have become more severe in the past few decades (e.g., as a result of rapid population growth and unprecedented levels of environmental degradation), and partly because of the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of states as a result of globalisation. Hence, a threat to one country can spill over to other countries much faster and more easily than before. Moreover, states have come to understand that other states are no longer the only relevant actors in international politics. Instead, states have started to recognise that “non-state actors” can be both “threats and partners”.<sup>12</sup>

Taking into account the new context in which government officials operate, Richard Ullman broadened the definition of national security. He defined a threat to national security as “an action or sequence of events that (1) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, nongovernmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state”.<sup>13</sup>

The US “Commission on America’s National Interests” also reflects this evolution of the concept. Following World War II, the Commission defined the goal of the US national security strategy as “to preserve the US as a free nation with our fundamental institutions and values intact”.<sup>14</sup> Today’s version of the document formulates the same goal as “to safeguard and enhance the well being of Americans in a free and secure nation” – thus adding prosperity as a primary national security objective.<sup>15</sup> The dilemma that governments now face is that by defining national security too narrowly, that is, just in terms of hard-power threats from other states, they miss other significant threats to state security. By defining security too broadly, however, states run the risk of watering down the concept while failing to distinguish between threats that jeopardise their very existence and those that “merely” compromise the quality of life of their citizens.

### **3. Interests versus Issues**

The multiplicity of definitions of national security and of ideas about how to prioritise and deal with different types of threats can all be grouped into two broad categories. Stephen Cambone suggests that we distinguish between two main approaches to national security policy making: one based on issues and the other based on interests. As the term suggests, the issues-based view focuses on the issues that cause security threats to states. This approach thus maintains that national security is inextricably linked to international security. By improving the quality of life of the world’s population as a whole, there would be fewer conflicts and less suffering in the world and, consequently, fewer threats to the security of states.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the issues-based approach stresses the need for countries to confront security threats together and encourages multi-lateral actions in conformity with international law and norms. According to this view, the particular interests of an individual state sometimes have to be subordinated for the greater good of the international community. According to Cambone, “issues” advocates usually put socio-political issues, such as human rights or transnational crime; economic issues, including economic sources of conflict; and military-strategic issues, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism at the top of the national security agenda.<sup>17</sup>

The interests-based approach is much more state-centric, in the sense that the national interest and the security of one's state and citizens trump any other obligation – legal or otherwise – the state may have towards the international community. In the example of WMD proliferation, Cambone explains, the interests-based approach would primarily be concerned about “preventing, deterring, and reducing the threat of a WMD attack” on one's own state. Only after this “vital interest” has been met, this view would maintain, should a state become involved in helping to prevent, deter and reduce WMD use in the rest of the world (which the interests-based view considers an “extremely important” but not a “vital” interest).<sup>18</sup> Issues such as international human rights and environmental protection would, in this view, be classified as “important” because massive human rights violations abroad and environmental degradation would have major negative consequences for one's own state, but these threats would definitely have a lower priority than those national interests classified as “vital” or “extremely important” for the survival of the state and the safety of its citizens.<sup>19</sup>

In short, advocates of this approach focus on geopolitical and geo-economic issues and thus look for ways in which “competition among states can be prevented, managed, or successfully conducted”.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, those who concentrate on global rather than national security (the issues-based view) want their state to be much more active in promoting international cooperation and collective action to tackle common threats. While identifying some of the same security issues, the two approaches prioritise these security issues differently.

The national security structures of states today are forged to support the interests-based approach rather than an issues-based security policy. Especially in democracies, it can be difficult for policy makers to convince voters and taxpayers that a particular issue – be it a humanitarian crisis or a failed state in a far-flung corner of the world – will directly affect the security of their nation if the issue is not addressed immediately. Writing in 1995, Cambone wonders whether taxpayers are willing to support the spending of resources and perhaps even the sending of troops to address a crisis that does not – and may never – directly affect the security of their own state.<sup>21</sup> Yet, in the case of the United States, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have to a certain extent shifted public perception regarding the origins of national security threats. The attacks demonstrated to many US citi-

zens that failed states, poverty, local conflicts, real or perceived injustices and the spread of extremist ideologies far away from their nation's shore can indirectly lead to deadly attacks on their own territory. In other words, events that seem not to have anything to do with a state's national security may come to haunt the state later on. Such are the national security consequences of an instant and interconnected world.

While national security policies today are still dominated by an interests-based approach, the 21st century security environment is increasingly forcing states to think globally and multilaterally – thus becoming more issues-centred. Chapter 2 considers the way the national security doctrines of some of the key players in international politics have evolved over time.