„Concepts of Comprehensive Security“

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Short Evolution of Security Studies
There has never been an universal definition of Security at any time. Security rather was a contested concept between power- and peace-research.
Before and after WW I, the dominant security concept was Great Power politics and geopolitics.
After WW II, this changed to an emphasizing of state or national security against external threats of hostile actors. Although this perception was weakly conceptionalized, it was politically very powerful.
In the 1980’s started a widening of the concept as the idea of international security emerged and reached more and more importance. This idea included economic and environmental problems. At this time, the scientific discourse shifted its emphasize from “peace” to “security”
In the Post Cold War-phase, security comprises more than military security or the security from an attack; Because of deep transformations in the international system, security now includes among others as well “societal” security, “human” security and “comprehensive” security.
Post Cold War-Period

The end of the East-West-Conflict in 1989/90 marked as well the end of the Bipolarity in the global power distribution. This caused a deep and rapid transformation of the entire international system.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and with a short interruption by a hegemonic moment of the United States, out of the former bipolarity emerged a complex polycentrism. However, today we understand that the United States are not able to deal with all the problems of the world and assure global security. Fortunately, Barack Obama is the first US president who realized that as well.

Surprising 1990s

After the demise of the USSR and the end of the Cold War arose the hope, that conflicts and violence worldwide would cease in the international arena and a new era of peace, stability and prosperity would start. However, while inter-state conflicts declined as anticipated, the 1990s have witnessed an unprecedented rise in intra-state conflicts and in violence centering on ethnicity, religion and separatism. As a result the world faced a new period of uncertainty, characterized by the feeling of insecurity.

Suddenly, crises stemming from refugee flows, malgovernance, economic downturn, environmental degradation, etc., have posed additional problems in safeguarding human freedom and security.

Therefore, the awareness came up, that understanding security only in military terms could not be enough, as negative developments in several socio economic factors could end in violent actions, conflicts and wars as well. New approaches were needed to deal with this changed environment. One of these approaches is to take the implications of Globalization into account.

Globalization

Globalization tendencies already took place during the phase of industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, but the current dynamics and the rapidness of Globalization is unique. Especially the political structures after the collapse of the Soviet Union tend to develop themselves to a one-world scenario. But not only the eastern countries have to change in this new situation in order to catch up with the West in this new world. There is also the need to raise the question how the West has to change in order to cope with the new world order, as we are facing a world, which turned from diversified, more or less independent regions into one single system.

Consequently, there are occurring new interdependency-problems such as air and soil polluting emissions, climate change, asymmetric warfare, terrorism, organized crime or illegal
migration. What all these disparate topics have in common is that all countries are highly needed to cooperate while facing these challenges.

Above all, Globalization causes increasing complexity and confusion in our society

**Mapping the War on Terrorism**

In 2005, after the experience of 9/11, scientists (Barnett 2003) at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island tried to map the war on terrorism. This map represents the way, how the US government understood this war. The area in the middle of the world marks the non-integrating gap. This gap shall identify the countries, which are not part of the growing welfare region and did not profit from or took part at the Globalization yet.

There is still a large region where states are not integrated in the global system and are not making progresses in their economic or political development. These are the regions, where the United States identify the need to intervene military or peacefully. By collaborating with certain countries, this region should get pushed into an integration process and thereby diminish this non-integrated part of the world.

The basic assumption of this strategy was that there exist root causes of conflicts and terrorism, which are mainly identified as socio economic factors and that it is the duty of the US to fight this causes. As we know today, this strategy wasn´t successful. In the present day, it cannot be observed that there has been a major improving of the economic situation in this region. On the contrary, overall spoken the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. One could state that the development of the west is the underdevelopment of this region.
Security
The traditional core content of security used to be the protection or defense of states against external threats or attacks. This perception of security is more or less equivalent with the aspiration after power. In Realist School, security is a derivate from power as states are in a constant struggle for objective or real power in order to ensure their security. This must be taken serious, as the Realist and Neorealist school is predominant in current international politics. In this tradition, power is measured in economic, military and human capital power.

„Security“: Change of Meaning
Comprehensive security (Barry Buzan 1991) has a quite different meaning. According to Buzan, security has to be understood not only as military and state security, but as well under the aspects of other socio economic factors and the integrated, subjective feeling of security or insecurity of individuals in a certain society.

„Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival“ (Buzan 1991, p.432).

Identity and integrity were no relevant concepts in the classical security definitions. The Realists and Neo-Realists rather focused on material or objective means of security as military or economic measures. This new perception of security opens the view on the feeling of the people or the society of being secure or insecure.

„(…) the urgency of the „security‘ label (which identifies threats as significant enough to warrant emergency action and exceptional measures including the use of force) and becomes part of everyday uncertainties of life is one of the difficulties of the concept."   

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Affiliated concepts

As a response and an advancement to the concept of comprehensive security, came up several new perceptions of security with far reaching implications for international politics.

**Human Security**

In the concept of human security, the referent object shifted from the nation-state to that of „people“ („subjective“ security), meaning

„…whether people are afflicted by conflict or peace“\(^2\). UNDP, Human Development Report

This approach broadened the meaning of the term of security beyond defense into „universal concerns“ and „conflict prevention“. This was criticized because the conceptual definition of security means here everything and therefore nothing, as it is not longer distinguishable from other phenomenon.

The implication of this idea is, that in the case of a crisis or other threats to human security, the first responsible actors are the involved states. If they are not able to face the threat, then the international community could step in and fulfill their responsibility to protect.

**Societal Security**

Another affiliated concept is the societal security, which is the

„Ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats“\(^3\)

This approach underlines the subjective aspects of security and lays emphasizes on the identity of a society. (Constructivist approach)


\(^3\) Waever et al., Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe, London 1993, p.23
“Securitization“ in International Relations

Securitization is a so-called constructivist approach to International Security. Traditional security approaches focus on the material dispositions of the threat, which are power, military and polarity. Securitization examines how a certain political issue is transformed by an actor into a matter of security. Securitization is in its core an extreme version of politicization that enables the use of extraordinary means in the name of security. If the securitizing act shall be successful, it has to be accepted by the audience. Securitization studies therefore aim to understand

"…who securitizes on what issues (threats), for whom (referent object), why, with what results, and not least, under what conditions."\(^4\)

This is but one reason, why President Bush started the war against terrorism in the delicate moments after 9/11. Due to the shocking attack, most of the world accepted the concept that the west was attacked for the first time by international terrorism and that it has to be stopped as soon as possible. Bush’s „war“ against international terrorism became a widely, if not globally accepted metaphor.

The metaphor of a necessary war, as if global terrorism is a group of people who could be fought, killed and the problem would be solved, refers to the transformation of this issue to a matter of global security.

However, as scientists of international relations rightly state, terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, which arises sequently in history. Especially under the aspect of Globalization, international Terror becomes a quite easy task. Therefore, it is impossible to eradicate or clearly spot concrete actors, which are promoting or planning the international terror. Terrorism is rather a strategy of asymmetric warfare and not an organization or group of people.

Thus is Al Qaida not as good connected or has such a large organization as the international media try to promote. To a greater degree, it became a political movement, which attracts sympathizers all over the world. All this and the broad consensus about the justness of this war make an exit strategy or an end of this war very unlikely out of today’s point of view.

Overall could be declared that in following the call for a war against terror of President Bush, the western world has started to play the part of the terrorists. Namely, we responded on the same communication level, which is characterized by violence, threat and anguish. By accepting this metaphor, we entered in a violent conflict with parts of the world we don’t know. We went into a war with at least elements of the Islamic world, which cannot be won,

\(^4\) Waever, Ole: 1995.
since, as mentioned before, terrorism cannot be related to certain group or actors that could be beaten ultimately.

**Some Clarification: Barry Buzan et al.**

As some of the western military and political actors misunderstood the idea of comprehensive security, and thought that all the different security problems could be fought with military actions, Buzan clarified his idea. In a later publication, he shed light on the assumption that we have to handle these topics primarily with the related political instruments.

> "In this view, the military sector is about relationship of forceful coercion; the political sector is about relationship of authority, governing status and recognition; the economic sector is about relationship of trade, production and finance the social sector is about relationship of collective identity; and environmental sector is about relationship between human activity and the planetary biosphere (Buzan et al. 1998, p.7."

The understanding of comprehensive security is strongly related to the understanding that in a more and more interdependent world as we have experienced it to be in the past 20 years, cooperation across national borders and over administrative bodies is strongly necessary. Even in the perception of the United States, as Obama lately stated that in fact the United States as well have to cooperate with the international community in their security agenda. Finally should therefore be mentioned, that if international terrorism shall be diminished, cooperation is indispensable.
**Literature**


Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, Dezember 2007 (online source)


Buzan, Barry/Lene Hansen, „International Security Studies“, Cambridge 2009


