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Chapter 1

International Relations and International Security

Wars, arms races, and weapons of mass destruction. Terrorism, insurgencies, and suicide bombings. Genocides, infectious diseases, and refugee crises. Oil depletion, global climate change, and economic collapse. Drug trafficking, cyber-war, and piracy. These and other international security problems continue to plague humanity and make disturbing headlines on a regular, even relentless, basis. In fact, the list of such daunting problems seems so endless that if economics is the original 'dismal science' then the study of international security must be a very close second to it (Kapstein, 2002/03). Yet this field can also be as exciting and fulfilling as it is depressing, for it forces us to answer two very simple, but very critical, questions about the human condition: *what do we really value*, and *how far will we go* to protect those valued things? One might even say we cannot even comprehend other philosophical questions about our existence, purpose, and destiny until these fundamental questions have been addressed – that is, until we feel more *secure*.

International security also occupies a central position in the broader academic discipline of international relations, yet there have been dramatic changes in the scope and content of these subjects since they emerged nearly a century ago. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the study of international relations focused on security affairs, particularly the problem of war. Today, however, the discipline includes a wider range of major research fields: international security, international political economy, international organizations and institutions, international law, foreign policy analysis, and area or regional studies. Each of these fields in turn has produced its own sub-fields, many of which pay varying degrees of attention to security issues. However, while international relations grew in the decades after World War II, international security as a major field within that discipline remained fairly narrowly construed – mainly in terms of the study of international war and strategy – for most of the twentieth century. Three twentieth-century conflicts in particular – the two world wars and the Cold War – helped to maintain this more narrow focus of international security even as other threats and problems emerged. International security in fact was largely synonymous with a range of

subjects often associated with the use of military force: national security policy, strategic studies, defence studies, military studies, war studies, and so on.

The past two decades, however, have seen a major expansion and reorganization of the field. Even during the Cold War, some scholars began questioning the strategic, war-focused approach to international security and to related fields within international relations (Ullman, 1983). America's inability to prevail in Vietnam despite its clear preponderance of military power; the rise of new centres of power in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere; the increasing prominence of non-state actors and international institutions; and the transformation of environmental, economic, health, and other (formerly) 'low politics' issues into 'high politics' security problems all put pressures on the traditional view of international security. These pressures increased dramatically starting in the late 1980s with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and since that time the field of international security has endured a great deal of fragmentation and contestation, more so perhaps in the past decade or two than at any other time in its history. These debates involve not only the types of threats thought to be relevant to contemporary international security affairs, but also the types of theories and concepts, and even general ideologies or world views, used to analyze and understand them.

These trends create multiple challenges for those who research and teach international security studies (Buzan, 1991; Walt, 1991; Baldwin, 1997; Betts, 1997). However, if we approach international security as a distinct academic discipline with its own unique research agenda, then two simple premises follow: First, that in undertaking any field of academic inquiry one must start by fundamentally problematizing the core concerns of that field while excluding other issues or holding them constant as working assumptions. Once these core concerns have been addressed through a combination of theoretical innovation and cumulative empirical research, we can then relax the initial working assumptions and extend the boundaries of the field into new or related areas of inquiry. The second premise is that despite the plethora of theories, concepts, and topics that increasingly complicate, if not confuse, the study of international security, there is in fact a single common thread running through most scholarly works on the topic, no matter how narrowly or broadly defined. That thread involves the idea that 'security' is not just a social concept or topic to be studied or analyzed; it also a problem to be managed or otherwise controlled by human communities on a regular basis if they hope to survive. The term 'control', however, implies some degree of power or authority, or in other words: politics.

International security: politics, policy and prospects

Anyone who hopes to teach or understand international security affairs as an academic subject must begin by considering three related debates about the appropriate boundaries of the field. The first debate is the most general but also the most critical. This involves how to balance the analysis of tangible trends, decisions and policies against speculation about what the world should be doing about certain security problems, whether actual or potential. Or more simply, this is the question of balancing description/explanation against prescription/advocacy, although both tasks are related. The second debate involves the appropriate frame of reference in terms of who or what, exactly, should be secured, and how. Specifically, 'international security' can be conceived more narrowly as states (meaning their governments, territories, citizens, and sovereign rights) and the state system itself, or far more broadly in terms of just about any valued thing on the planet. The third debate involves the role of force or violence in identifying major threats and in determining the most effective response to dealing with those threats. Again, this question can be framed more narrowly in terms of military threats met with a military response, or more broadly in terms of a range of threats, both military and non-military, met with a much wider range of policies.

As this volume is concerned with examining the state of international security studies based on contemporary thinking and practice, I must justify how my treatment of the topic addresses the three debates above. First, this volume focuses on empirical research regarding the determination of whether certain problems 'qualify' as international security concerns. No community can devote its full attention to all types of policy problems all of the time, so we need to understand the general processes of selection by which security priorities are set by such communities. Second, I am concerned with the collective management of security problems once they have been identified as such. As problem determination and management involve politics and policy, it is appropriate to structure the discussion around the role of states as key referent objects to be protected, whether in terms of their territories, their citizens, their governments, or their sovereignty as political communities – or all of the above. States in particular are not only charged with providing security for their citizens, they also have the authority to set public priorities, make security policy, apply force, and extract private resources, in terms of physical and human capital, from the societies they ostensibly protect.

Of course, in speaking of states acting or deciding, I actually mean 'governments,' which in turn means the officials charged with providing a range of services in exchange for our allegiance and our compulsory contributions to the public welfare through taxes and, in some states, universal military service. To the extent that international security problems,

whether in part or in total, are explicitly delegated to states for resolution, we must pay attention to processes of national policy formation and international cooperation when analyzing those problems. Thus, although many *potential* security problems and referent objects may appear on the scene or attract the attention of security specialists, my primary concern here is with how these problems are 'politicized' (that is, made an explicit object of political action) into important international security issues. Finally, once states have become involved, it then follows that their wishes can be backed up by the threat of force as they continue to claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence (Weber, 1918). Although some security scholars define 'force' or 'violence' in military terms, this volume takes a broader view to encompass policing, border control, travel restrictions, and other types of official force to determine just how seriously the international community defines a specific threat (Jentleson, 2002).

Based on these considerations, this volume advances a *political analysis* approach, as compared to a *public policy* or *strategic analysis* approach, to international security, although the three are obviously related. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 3, a political analysis approach starts with the interests, power resources, and activities of major political actors involved in the management of international security affairs. It assumes that such actors have conflicting interests, security and otherwise, and multiple demands on their attention and resources. Interest definition and threat perception, which factor into all international security problems, are inherently political processes; they can be changed or interpreted according to domestic and international circumstances. Actors involved in these processes also must pay attention to not only international politics but national or domestic politics as well, and often simultaneously. Conversely, a policy or strategic approach starts with the nature of the security problem or strategic game itself – as first 'objectively' defined by the analyst – and then determines the mix of resources that should be mobilized to manage that problem, or to play that strategic 'game', most effectively (Schelling, 1966; Kennedy, 1991). Obviously politics, or competitions about power or status or influence, is involved in both approaches, yet the key question is how we prioritize these political contests: as a fundamental dynamic governing all major aspects of international security affairs, or as an *ad hoc* peripheral concern used, along with a range of other variables, to explain why actors effectively managed (or failed to manage) a security problem.

This volume deliberately treats politics as an essential dynamic behind a full range of contemporary international security problems. Yet the ways by which political debates influence outcomes will vary depending on the key referent objects or values to be secured, on the role of force as a means to secure those values, and on the range of actors, problems, or issues to be defined as threats. In light of these considerations, we shall need to adopt

a variable rather than rigid approach to these definitional questions, starting with the more orthodox, narrow and traditional views about international security (state-centric, focusing on military force, and defining issues in relation to threats to state survival) and moving on to more contested, broader, and somewhat less orthodox or less traditional views (non-state-centric, the use of other policy tools in addition to or instead of military force, and defining issues relative to other values beyond state survival). This approach – treating international security as an academic discipline bounded by a range of variously contested views about core conceptual and empirical elements – generally informs the selection and presentation of the problems covered in the volume, starting with the more traditional treatment of international war as a core security concern in Chapter 4 and then broadening the debate with each successive chapter.

A political approach to international security is justified further by several other considerations. One is that the term 'security' itself is often applied deliberately as a political tactic by some actors to stifle debate, assume more power, or gain control over resources in a human community; therefore we must be sensitive to this possibility throughout the discussion. State actors in particular assume a special capacity to define issues as 'security' problems, which may then undermine the ability of other actors to question how those problems should be governed (Ikenberry, Lake and Mastanduno, 1988). They also may claim that such problems, once defined, should then be considered as 'above politics', or de-politicized, a claim which itself is inherently political in nature. In this volume, no international security issues are inherently 'above politics.' States also claim a monopoly over security-related information, or intelligence, not normally privy to many other actors. This monopoly, combined with other factors outlined in Chapter 3, means we must be *more* rather than less sensitive to fundamental political questions operating 'behind the scenes': who benefits from the protection of certain values, who governs, and who pays? In other words, who wins and who loses in the high-stakes global politics of international security?

A second consideration is that the analysis of security problems often involves 'worst case' scenarios and assumptions. Once an issue has been framed as a security concern, policy-makers often think about the most terrible outcomes in order to avoid the maximum potential damage surrounding that threat. Typically this means thinking about the risks or damage caused by the most extreme situations, no matter how improbable those scenarios might be. In addition, this type of mentality might involve thinking the worst of an enemy or other adversary, even to the extent of demonizing those actors so much that trust or dialogue become virtually impossible. Sometimes this kind of thinking is just prudent planning by well-meaning policy specialists; at other times, however, it may be a political tactic to prioritize one security problem, or one branch of government,

over another. Again, a political analysis of international security means we must assume that all actors involved, no matter how well-meaning they may seem, typically possess a range of motives in adopting certain policies about security problems, not all of which are directly related to merely 'solving' that problem. Politics means that larger questions of status or influence or control are always involved in international security affairs, and in ways that go well beyond the need to manage a given security problem to the satisfaction of those who hope to be made secure by their political authorities.

Finally, security policies can be further prone to politicization in light of many other considerations, not the least of which is the political status such policies confer on certain actors, or the various resources those policies allow one to control. If security policies are meant to protect or maintain a current state of affairs (that is, a 'status quo posture') then actors who do not benefit from the status quo, such as the current distribution of global wealth, will find it extremely difficult to protect their interests or promote change in such a system. Conversely, if security policies attempt to change the current state of affairs (that is, a 'revisionary posture'), as in the case of 'regime change,' then this too will benefit some actors at the expense of others. Neither policy will necessarily improve *international* security, although the distribution of costs and benefits may change dramatically and can then be interpreted by some actors as a positive outcome for the international community.

In addition to the politics/policy-oriented approach to the topic, this volume is structured in light of three other major themes. These themes will be developed more fully in Chapter 2, yet it is worth flagging them here to help set the stage. The first theme involves the relationship between international and national (including domestic or homeland) security. As the title indicates, this volume is explicitly concerned with *international security* affairs rather than *security studies* or *national/homeland security*. Obviously there are no clear distinctions between these levels of analysis, and security problems that begin at the national level can easily migrate to the transnational and international levels (and vice versa). I shall return to this point in more detail in the following chapters, yet it should be clear at the outset that the most important criterion for including certain topics in this volume is that they have been explicitly defined as international security problems by a critical mass of both scholars and policy-makers. The term 'international' need not mean or imply 'global' either (that is, in the sense of affecting the entire planet or all of humanity); only that a problem has been identified by authoritative international actors as important or complex enough to require the sustained and focused attention of many states and other international actors.

A second theme running throughout this volume involves the specific relationship between state and non-state actors in defining and managing

various international security problems covered in later chapters. As I have noted, although the discussion throughout this volume assumes an essential role for states, particularly the UK, the US, and other leading players, it also pays close attention to state-based international organizations (IOs), including more traditional military alliances (such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO) or regional IOs that address certain international security problems (such as the European Union, or EU). It also attempts to incorporate the role of non-state actors as threats, referent objects, or even security providers (see below). These non-state actors might take the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private firms (especially multinational corporations, or MNCs), terrorist groups, organized criminal gangs, and others depending on the security issue at hand.

A third and final theme involves the relationship between public and private authority, or states and markets. Here things get somewhat more complicated, but also more representative of contemporary politics and economics, as the borderline between 'public' and 'private' activity is becoming increasingly blurred, even in the realm of international security affairs. Public officials must be increasingly responsive to private demands for more security, a process that becomes more complicated as new issues are added to an ever-expanding agenda. Even more interesting is the greater role of private actors in *providing* security services, either directly or indirectly. The *direct* private supply of security services typically takes the form of private military contractors (PMCs), who may supply a large share of material and services, including armed personnel, to governments for the purposes of managing a range of security problems, including peacekeeping and war-fighting. In other words, 'non-state' actors can be contracted to take on 'state-like' functions, even to the extent of using force. The 2003 war in Iraq in particular has involved a very large number of PMCs amounting to thousands of individuals (Spearin, 2003; Singer, 2007), all of whom provide services similar to those of traditional national armies, yet this trend has been evident for years. In 1991, for example, there was roughly one PMC employee for every 100 US soldiers; ten years later – before the 2003 Iraq war – the figure had already risen to about ten PMCs per 100 soldiers. This trend is even more difficult to measure, but just as important, in terms of analyzing the public–private balance regarding many new security issues, such as organized crime and pandemic disease.

The *indirect* private supply of security services might involve the role of medical firms, banks, internet service providers (ISPs), and other companies who assist governments with their various forms of expertise to help provide security. Individual citizens and firms also may hire their own security services to protect their interests, conduct investigations, or recover lost assets, which can involve the use of armed personnel with quasi-policing

capabilities. Security has always been big business, and the use of mercenaries and privateers by states and firms has a long and complicated history (Thomson, 1990), yet the modern expansion of private involvement ranging from arms manufacturers to armed security providers has greatly increased the profits to be earned from various international security missions. To the extent that these profits involve the legal extraction of resources from individual citizens in the form of tax revenues, public oversight becomes an issue. These trends, all of which have been growing over the past few decades, make it increasingly difficult to determine the appropriate, effective, and legal lines of authority and accountability we typically associate with government activities. Moreover, they mean we need to take a critical look at how states actually exercise their (supposed) monopoly over the (supposedly) legitimate use of violence; in other words, violence can be, and has been, sub-contracted or out-sourced to other actors, not all of whom can easily be made accountable. The same holds true of other security activities covered in this volume, in both traditional and non-traditional problem areas.

Theory and research design in international security

As we shall see in Chapter 2, the expansion of international security as a field of study has been accompanied by a similar expansion of theories and concepts. These can be based on widely diverging views about not just the fundamentals of international security but about knowledge creation, or epistemology, itself. What we study is strongly influenced by what we want, what we value, and what we think is right; these priorities can greatly complicate the pursuit of knowledge, particularly in the social sciences. Realism in particular has been dominant in part because it helped to legitimize the conduct and values of certain states during the Cold War, when international security developed into a distinct field of study. And scholars study war more generally often because they want to end wars, or make them less likely or destructive, or make their own state's victory in war more likely, not merely because war is a fascinating example of human behaviour. In other words, both policy-makers and theorists may be less interested in understanding behaviour and more interested in defending a certain viewpoint or making a decision on an important issue, even if these goals might be suboptimal or ineffective because of an incorrect analysis of the problem, time constraints, or similar obstacles.

This tendency to offer incomplete or quick prescriptions in addition to, or even instead of, furthering our basic understanding of international security affairs, is directly related to the fact that security is often driven by current events, and involves issues of life and death. These facts can profoundly influence the kinds of research that specialists conduct; the

dramatic rise of terrorism studies in the past few years is a case in point, as with the dramatic rise of strategic (nuclear) studies in the 1950s. Yet these problems and events do not lead, automatically, to a specific theory; instead, one's choice of a theory strongly pre-conditions how one frames or *problematizes* a research question. Thus the choice of one's theory must not be taken lightly, nor taken for granted; it should be made as explicitly as possible in any respectable research effort, and then defended.

As international security is very value-laden as a discipline, it can be difficult to study objectively or scientifically. One must constantly be aware of the value claims of the researcher, particularly when they are not stated at the outset (and they usually are not). In addition, the modern study of international security can be extremely complex, and involve history, politics, economics, culture, law, ethics, military studies, strategy, technology, and many other factors. Although I defend a political approach to the topic in more detail in Chapter 3, it should be clear at the outset that answering specific research questions about international security might involve concepts or factors from all of these areas. Yet how do we organize all of these disciplines and, more importantly, compare our findings with those of other researchers? With the systematic and rigorous use of theory and data.

To begin, all research or knowledge production starts with a question. Although this initial question can be specific or general (that is, explaining one war or all wars), most research is typically oriented towards the creation of cumulative knowledge, which means the researcher must constantly be thinking about how to *generalize* the facts or findings specific to one case to draw broader lessons from it, then test and gradually build upon those lessons by looking at other related cases. This is where theory comes in, and the problem of generalizability raises the more specific question of inductive versus deductive research designs. An *inductive* approach would attempt to examine evidence or data first, then try to draw general conclusions based on certain patterns within the evidence. *Deductive* research designs reverse this process: they start with a theory (or set of theoretical causal propositions, usually known as *hypotheses*), then attempt to find evidence to support or reject that theory. In doing so they attempt to relate individual phenomena (such as a war) to larger classes of phenomena (such as all wars or political violence) in order to prove theoretical linkages between them.

One might assume that an inductive approach is best as it (supposedly) reduces the chance of bias on the part of the researcher, yet a critical problem here is that the study of social phenomena is fundamentally different from the study of natural phenomena. As there are no social laws equivalent to physical laws in the universe, there really is no such thing as purely inductive (that is, totally objective and atheoretical) social science research. The study of international security therefore is not like that of the physical

sciences, where experiments and other inductive observations, even unintentional ones, can often yield insightful theoretical findings. Finally, one also must be aware of the so-called 'inductivist illusion', as cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) once put it. The illusion is that social facts will 'speak for themselves' if one merely collects enough data; the reality, however, is that empirical observations and experience rarely if ever lead directly to robust and convincing causal explanations. They may yield puzzles, questions, and even educated guesses (hypotheses) to help generate 'quasi-theories' or 'pre-theories' but not much more. In fact, in the social sciences one could easily be overwhelmed by a mass of useless detail depending on where one looks for answers: public opinion polls, diplomatic archives, military statistics, voting records, newspaper articles, elite interviews, and so on. Especially when studying highly complex social phenomena like wars and disease and poverty, one must be prepared to generalize first, and then attempt to find supporting evidence later through the use of specific methodologies to reduce the possibility of bias: this is the process of rigorous deductive empirical research. In other words, it is better to be explicit 'up front' about one's views of the world and attempt to control them through solid research design rather than assert that one is going to look at a topic with completely fresh eyes and (supposedly) defend no values whatsoever. However, if one adopts such a deductive approach to research, then one must in turn be very specific about how a given theory is used. In this volume, 'theory' simply means a *proposed* explanation whose status is still conjectural in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact. More persuasive theories will inspire or motivate a specific research programme or agenda, which then attempts to prove, disprove, or revise the theory at hand to help accumulate knowledge and move academic inquiry forward (Rosenau and Rosenau, 2000).

Theories and the research programmes they inspire can also vary in terms of their scope, which introduces another consideration into the effort. At one end of the spectrum, theories as defined above can apply to large classes of events or long periods of historical time or to basic features of the human condition, such as the role of violence in politics, whose specific expression or form can vary widely depending on the circumstances. This approach is often termed 'grand theory' or 'macro-theory' and some scholars believe that such an approach is both possible and desirable within the realm of international relations and security (see Waltz, 1979). At the other end of the scale one can construct far more narrow explanations, or 'micro-theories', that apply to a much smaller class of events or even to single events, such as a unique policy or decision. Obviously there is a trade-off here: grand theories may be very ambitious yet they may be nearly impossible to prove or test empirically, or so abstract that they cannot explain most of the 'day to day' behaviours that

concern international security specialists without a major refinement or relaxation of certain assumptions. Conversely, micro-level theories might be so unique to one case that it becomes difficult to generalize across time and space in hopes of making better use of the findings. This debate will become much more prominent as we move from the more traditional topics of international security affairs, mainly involving war, to less traditional ones.

To deal with these problems, this volume attempts to find some common ground between these contending positions regarding grand versus micro-level theories. This generally involves paying attention to 'middle-range' theories to explain more specific, though still quite generalizable, questions, such as: Is one geographic region or type of governing regime more prone to war than others? What factors increase the likelihood of foreign military intervention in a civil war? What accounts for the defeat or disappearance of some terrorist groups but not others? And so on. Then, as one builds up knowledge within these middle-range areas, it might be possible – and more persuasive – to build grand theory from the bottom up, as it were, with solid concepts and empirical evidence about causal relationships among various factors, rather than from the top down. This approach avoids the pretensions of grand theory by adopting a more modest scope of analysis, such as a shorter historical period, as with the dynamics of the Cold War, or a smaller class of phenomena, such as security relations among democratic states, but one still wide enough to draw meaningful generalizations across a range of cases or events as compared to more micro-level theories. Much of the research cited throughout this volume involves precisely this compromise between grand international relations theories and more micro-level theories of single foreign policy decisions or policies.

Evolution of the international security research agenda

The need for a general analytical framework to understand, and teach, contemporary international security affairs can be seen in the evolution of the research agenda over the past two decades. Although this volume takes for granted the ideas that international security is not a 'self-evident' end in itself that must be achieved at any cost, and that it can be contested like any other social goal or political problem, this was not always the case. We should remember that the field, particularly in the US (Smith, 2002), largely developed in response to the dynamics of the Cold War, which included the assimilation of the 'lessons' of the interwar period. During the Cold War era, scholars and policy-makers focused on a highly unique and competitive bilateral relationship where the possession of strategic nuclear weapons, and the possibility of total global destruction, created a

permanent shadow of fear unlike that experienced in any other adversarial relationship in history. However, the fact that there has been no such thing as a global nuclear war, and that the superpowers ended their conflict without resorting to a 'hot' war, meant that analysts had a very limited amount of information on which to base their predictions and recommendations. In addition, the novelty of a bilateral *nuclear* strategic competition would almost certainly raise questions about how lessons from the management of that relationship – assuming it did not end in mutual destruction – really could apply to other contemporary problems of international security.

This highly unique Cold War combination – an unprecedented type of deadly strategic rivalry coupled with an absence of empirical data about how to conduct such a relationship – resulted in an overwhelming reliance on the assumption of unitary and rational state (that is, government) action, where both superpowers attempted to avoid the same two least desired outcomes: global thermonuclear war (that is, mutual assured destruction, or MAD), and defeat or submission at the hands of the other party. In hopes of avoiding these extremes, analysts devised a range of hypothetical strategic scenarios or 'games' to help guide national policies on weapons development and deployment, alliance creation and maintenance, military intervention (Walt, 1991), and even economic policy, such as the use of trade or financial embargoes (Mastanduno, 1993), in the absence of actual knowledge, historical or otherwise, about how a bilateral strategic nuclear competition actually might end (Oye, 1986).

As we shall see in Chapter 2, the legacy of the Cold War analytical agenda still influences international security studies and provides much of the background scholarly material for the more traditional problems covered in this volume. This legacy, however, raises two critical problems. First, many of the theoretical arguments about the Cold War rivalry, particularly the question of how states might conduct an actual nuclear war (Kahn, 1960), simply could not be supported by empirical evidence as no one has ever fought a nuclear war. Second, any supposed lessons generated by the Cold War may not be applicable to the kinds of security threats, and the range of possible responses, now confronting decision-makers. This problem is compounded by our limited knowledge about how actors – states and otherwise – are likely to manage non-traditional security threats. The result is that some researchers might be tempted to conclude that each contemporary international security problem must be treated on its own merits, as self-contained analytical puzzles, as it were, and that the search for underlying processes or principles that transcend individual security problems is futile. Such an attitude, of course, may also contribute to the overall fragmentation and disorganization of the discipline, yet if the security agenda itself is increasingly fragmented and disorganized, so that virtually any topic is 'fair game' as a security concern, then we can hardly expect academic researchers to do much better.

The problem of finding a consensus about fundamental principles in researching international security is even more complicated in light of the overwhelming focus in the discipline on *Western* values, security problems, and analytical tools. To the extent that the roots of contemporary international security studies, if not international relations in general, are found in Cold War policy debates, American scholars in particular helped to set the agenda for the field (Hoffman, 1977; Wæver, 1998), although various European schools of thought increasingly challenged that dominance even before the end of the Cold War. As we shall see in the next chapter, the emergence and dominance of the realist school of thinking about international security is difficult to disentangle from the politics of the Cold War, although most realist scholars insist that its insights are based on deeper historical 'patterns' in world politics.

Thus it is no surprise that studies of nuclear policies, crisis decision-making, and alliance politics tended to dominate the international security research agenda for much of the Cold War period. Why concern yourself with the emergence of a new infectious disease in sub-Saharan Africa that fatally depresses the immune system when the superpowers had tens of thousands of nuclear warheads on constant alert? Why devote attention to the nuisance of organized crime when America and its allies apparently faced communist-supported armies and insurgencies in a range of hotspots around the globe? And why study global climate change as a potential threat to international security when actual US/Soviet intervention in less developed countries (LDCs) threatened to disrupt important sources of raw materials and change the overall global balance of power? This tendency is still reflected in some scholarly works and academic journals, which treat the subjects of 'US national security policy' and 'international security' as virtually synonymous. If we are indeed still living in a 'unipolar moment' (Krauthammer, 1990/1; Mastanduno, 1997) where America's wealth and military power put it in a class by itself as a great power, then the US is better positioned than other actors in its ability to set the international security agenda. On some topics, then, it is tempting to conclude that 'international security' is largely what the US says it is. However, although this volume stresses the political analysis of international security affairs, and pays special attention to the role of leading states such as the US, it does not fall into the trap of prioritizing American views on all security issues for several reasons.

First, even during the Cold War a number of scholars were attempting to broaden the agenda of policy issues and theoretical concepts in international security well beyond the realist focus on strategic superpower military confrontation. Second, it became clear to many scholars that US influence could vary widely across topics, and that the chief measure of US political power – military force, or 'hard power' – can either be stretched too thin or be completely ineffective for certain types of security problems.

The possibility that America is becoming overstretched as the dominant power, or may even be in terminal decline, while other powers, such as China, assert themselves, also calls into question the idea that international security is largely synonymous with America's interests (Kupchan, 1998). Third, even with its military might, other actors are catching up to America in terms of various forms of 'soft power' (Nye, 2005) – finance, trade, reputation, values, and so on – that may be very useful for addressing many contemporary security problems. These actors will increasingly assert their interests and power at the international level. Fourth, to the extent that America desires some degree of international support for its policies, it must attempt to find allies and build stable coalitions, activities that allow other actors – chiefly states and IOs – to play key roles. Fifth and perhaps most interestingly, the US is most certainly not a monolithic actor. No respectable study of US policy and policy-making would deny that multiple actors attempt to speak for the US, even in the realm of foreign/security policy, and not always with a single voice; or that US policies are often contradictory and may even work at cross purposes; or that the US policy process in security affairs is just as politicized as in other policy domains, so that numerous actors within the US must compete to set the agenda and control key resources. These political processes, which are at work in varying ways in all states (especially democratic ones), can seriously undermine national leadership, and the broader assumption of unitary rational state action, over international security affairs (Hill 2003).

To summarize, the overall tone of this volume is sceptical, and the overall analytical approach is political. It is sceptical because I take very little for granted in analyzing contemporary international security problems, and I attempt to treat them with a common analytical framework that interprets all international security threats according to the same standards. It is political because the process of determining what is protected from what types of harm is inherently power-oriented. No political actor has the capacity to manage all security problems equally effectively all of the time, so we must understand the political process of choice in the face of competing values and priorities. Power is always required to collectively define valued things and then to marshal the resources needed to protect those valued things, even when the need to do so seems abundantly self-evident to a political community – which is rarely the case. As we shall see in the next chapter, most alternative approaches to international security are in fact power-oriented; they merely adopt a different view of power and assume different referent objects or values as compared to more traditional theories.

Similar attempts to frame international security problems through the normative lenses of human rights or justice or equity also tend to reinforce Western, and even transatlantic or European, values rather than universal values about what all people should value across space and time. This

conceit among scholars and policy-makers about 'fundamental' values and the actual international community to be protected from harm will become increasingly apparent as we traverse the range of contemporary security problems covered in this volume, and will be examined in more detail in the conclusion. Moreover, actors in any culture will sacrifice freedom or justice or equity for all kinds of other values, and not just security of life and property: these include religion, social unity or stability, fairness, status, and others. In fact, international security can be defined as much by a clash of values rather than a harmony of them, so we need to consider how international power is marshalled to put one set of values ahead of another, which requires some form of political analysis. Before attempting such an analysis, however, we need to understand the more general evolution and current context of the field of international security as an academic discipline and as a set of policy objectives. This task is taken up in the next chapter.

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