The concept of security*

DAVID A. BALDWIN

Redefining 'security' has recently become something of a cottage industry.[1] Most such efforts, however, are more concerned with redefining the policy agendas of nation-states than with the concept of security itself. Often, this takes the form of proposals for giving high priority to such issues as human rights, economics, the environment, drug traffic, epidemics, crime, or social injustice, in addition to the traditional concern with security from external military threats. Such proposals are usually buttressed with a mixture of normative arguments about which values of which people or groups of people should be protected, and empirical arguments as to the nature and magnitude of threats to those values. Relatively little attention is devoted to conceptual issues as such. This article seeks to disentangle the concept of security from these normative and empirical concerns, however legitimate they may be.

Cloaking normative and empirical debate in conceptual rhetoric exaggerates the conceptual differences between proponents of various security policies and impedes scholarly communication. Are proponents of economic or environmental security using a concept of security that is fundamentally different from that used by Realists? Or are they simply emphasizing different aspects of a shared concept? Do those who object to 'privileging' the nation-state rather than, say, the individual or humanity share any conceptual views with students of 'national security'? This article attempts to identify common conceptual distinctions underlying various conceptions of security.

Identifying the common elements in various conceptions of security is useful in at least three ways: First, it facilitates asking the most basic question of social science,

[1] E.g. Lester Brown, *Redefining National Security*, Worldwatch Paper No. 14 (Washington, DC, 1977); Jessica Tuchman Matthews, 'Redefining Security', *Foreign Affairs*, 68 (1989), pp. 162–77; Richard H. Ullman, 'Redefining Security', *International Security*, 8 (1983), pp. 129–53; Joseph J. Romm, *Defining National Security* (New York, 1993); J. Ann Tickner, 'Re-visioning Security', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 175–97; Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 313–26; Martin Shaw, 'There Is No Such Thing as Society: Beyond Individualism and Statism in International Security Studies', *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), pp. 159–75; John Peterson and Hugh Ward, 'Coalitional Instability and the New Multidimensional Politics of Security: A Rational Choice Argument for US–EU Cooperation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1 (1995), pp. 131–56; ten articles on security and security studies in *Arms Control*, 13, (1992), pp. 463–544; and Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton (eds.), *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order* (New York, 1992).

'Of what is this an instance?'.[2] Second, it promotes rational policy analysis by facilitating comparison of one type of security policy with another. And third, it facilitates scholarly communication by establishing common ground between those with disparate views. Perhaps scholars from different schools have more in common than is generally acknowledged.[3]

In many ways the argument presented here was foreshadowed in the classic essay by Arnold Wolfers entitled ' "National Security" as an Ambiguous Symbol', published more than forty years ago. Contrary to popular belief, Wolfers did not dismiss the concept as meaningless or hopelessly ambiguous. He was, however, concerned about the ambiguity of 'national security', as the following passage indicates:

> It would be an exaggeration to claim that the symbol of national security is nothing but a stimulus to semantic confusion, though closer analysis will show that if used without specifications it leaves room for more confusion than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford.[4]

Wolfers' 'specifications' refer not only to the concept of national security as a policy objective but also to the means for its pursuit, i.e., national security policy. In the discussion that follows, Wolfers' specifications will be developed and set in the context of more recent literature.

The discussion consists of seven parts. Sections 1, 2 and 3 provide background with respect to the approach to conceptual analysis to be used, the neglect of conceptual analysis by the field of security studies, and the possibility that conceptual analysis is futile with respect to concepts like security that are alleged to be 'essentially contested'. Section 4 develops a series of conceptual specifications that facilitate analysis of security policy. Sections 5, 6 and 7 discuss the implications of these specifications for determining the value of security, for the theory of neorealism, and for the 'new thinking' about security.

Although this discussion is especially concerned with the security of nation-states, most of the analysis is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to any level: individual, family, society, state, international system, or humanity.

1. Conceptual analysis[5]

Conceptual analysis is not concerned with testing hypotheses or constructing theories, though it is relevant to both. It is concerned with clarifying the meaning of concepts. Some would dismiss such undertakings as 'mere semantics' or 'pure logomachy'. Without clear concepts, however, scholars are apt to talk past each other, and policy-makers find it difficult to distinguish between alternative policies. Felix E. Oppenheim has argued that 'the elucidation of the language of political

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[2] I thank James Rosenau for this phrase.
[3] See Kjell Goldmann, '*Im Westen Nichts Neues:* Seven International Relations Journals in 1972 and 1992', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1 (1995), pp. 245–58.
[4] Arnold Wolfers, ' "National Security" as an Ambiguous Symbol', *Political Science Quarterly*, 67 (1952), p. 483.
[5] This section draws on the discussion in David A. Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 170–2.

science is by no means an idle exercise in semantics, but in many instances a most effective way to solve substantive problems of research'.[6]

Conceptual explication attempts to specify the logical structure of given expressions: Taking its departure from the customary meanings of the terms, explication aims at reducing the limitations, ambiguities, and inconsistencies of their ordinary usage by propounding a reinterpretation intended to enhance the clarity and precision of their meanings as well as their ability to function in hypotheses and theories with explanatory and predictive force.[7]

The explication of concepts is subject to a set of criteria summarized by Oppenheim: (1) Concepts should be operational in the broadest sense, although this should not be interpreted as requiring quantification. (2) Concepts that establish definitional connections with other terms are to be preferred. (3) Concepts that draw attention to the theoretically important aspects of the subject matter that might easily be overlooked are desirable. (4) Concepts should not preclude empirical investigation by making true 'by definition' what should be open to empirical inquiry. (5) Concepts should remain reasonably close to ordinary language. 'Ordinary language', however, does not necessarily mean the way most people would define the term, but rather the 'set of rules they implicitly follow when applying it to a given situation'.[8]

It is important to be clear about the limits of this approach. Explicating the concept of security does not provide empirical propositions, theories, or analytical frameworks. Although clear concepts are useful for constructing propositions. theories, and analytical frameworks, they are not a substitute for them.

This approach may be contrasted with those taken by Barry Buzan and Richard Ullman. Although Buzan casts his discussion as an exploration of the concept of security, his analysis intertwines conceptual analysis with empirical observations. For example, Buzan presents plausible arguments for the empirical proposition that security at the individual level is related to security at the level of the state and the international system. His insistence that 'security *cannot* be isolated for treatment at any single level', however, gives the impression that this is conceptually impossible rather than simply an unwise research strategy. His justification for mixing conceptual and empirical analysis is that 'the search for a referent object of security goes hand-in-hand with that for its necessary conditions'.[9] This approach, however,

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[6] Felix E. Oppenheim, 'The Language of Political Inquiry: Problems of Clarification', in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. I: Political Science: Scope and Theory* (Reading, MA, 1975), p. 284.

[7] Carl G. Hempel, *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science* (Chicago, 1952), p. 12.

[8] Oppenheim, 'Language', pp. 297–309. See also Felix E. Oppenheim, *Political Concepts: A Reconstruction* (Chicago, 1981). For criticisms of this approach, see William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1983), and Richard E. Little, 'Ideology and Change', in Barry Buzan and R. J. Barry Jones (eds.), *Change and the Study of International Relations: the Evaded Dimension* (New York, 1981), pp. 30–45.

   Regardless of whether one accepts the criteria suggested here, it is necessary to identify some criteria for conceptual analysis. Barry Buzan's contention that security is 'weakly conceptualized' and 'underdeveloped' would be more telling if he were to identify criteria for distinguishing between weak and strong conceptualizations or between underdeveloped and fully developed concepts. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO, 1991), pp. 3–5.

[9] Buzan, *People, States*, pp. 20–1, 26. Italics added. See also, Barry Buzan, 'Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations', *Journal of Peace Research*, 21 (1984), pp. 109–25.

risks conflating conceptual analysis with empirical observation. Understanding the concept of security is a fundamentally different kind of intellectual exercise from specifying the conditions under which security may be attained. Indeed, conceptual clarification logically precedes the search for the necessary conditions of security, because the identification of such conditions presupposes a concept of security.[10]

This failure to recognize the logical priority of conceptualization is also reflected in Ullman's observation that 'one way of moving toward a more comprehensive definition of security' is to ask what one would be 'willing to give up in order to obtain more security'. Such a question, however, has little meaning until one first has a concept of security. Likewise, his statement that 'we may not realize what it [i.e. security] is . . . until we are threatened with losing it'[11] is difficult to comprehend. If one has no concept of security, one cannot know whether one is threatened with losing it or not. Inquiry into the opportunity costs of security is an excellent way to determine the value of security, but it is no help at all in determining what security is.

2. Security as a neglected concept

It would be an exaggeration to say that conceptual analysis of security began and ended with Wolfers' article in 1952—but not much of one. The neglect of security as a concept is reflected in various surveys of security affairs as an academic field. In 1965 one such study lamented that 'thus far there have been very few attempts . . . to define the concept of national security'.[12] In 1973 Klaus Knorr began a survey of the field by stating his intention to 'deliberately bypass the semantic and definitional problems generated by the term "National Security" '.[13] In 1975, Richard Smoke observed that the field had 'paid quite inadequate attention to the range of meanings of "security" '.[14] In 1991, Buzan described security as 'an underdeveloped concept' and noted the lack of 'conceptual literature on security' prior to the 1980s.[15] Although Buzan sees some progress in the 1980s, there are still indicators of neglect. Two recent surveys of security studies, for example, did not bother to define security.[16] And none of the eleven course syllabi described in *Security Studies for the 1990s* includes Wolfers' seminal article on the concept of national security.[17]

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[10] 'The elaboration of hypotheses presupposes, logically, a conceptual framework in terms of which clear hypotheses may be formulated'. Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven, CT, 1950), p. x.

[11] Ullman, 'Redefining Security', pp. 130, 133.

[12] P. G. Bock and Morton Berkowitz, 'The Emerging Field of National Security', *World Politics*, 19 (1966), p. 124.

[13] Klaus Knorr, 'National Security Studies: Scope and Structure of the Field', in Frank N. Trager and Philip S. Kronenberg (eds.), *National Security and American Society: Theory, Process and Policy* (Lawrence, KS, 1973), p. 5.

[14] Richard Smoke, 'National Security Affairs', in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 8: International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1975), p. 259.

[15] Buzan, *People, States*, pp. 3–4.

[16] Stephen M. Walt, 'The Renaissance of Security Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 35 (1991), pp. 211–39; and Joseph S. Nye, Jr and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'International Security Studies: A Report of a Conference on the State of the Field', *International Security*, 12 (1988), pp. 5–27.

[17] Richard Schultz, Roy Godson, and Ted Greenwood (eds.), *Security Studies for the 1990s* (New York, 1993). A recent forum on security in *Arms Control*, 13 (1992), including ten authors, never mentions Wolfers' article.

Considering the plethora of attempts to 'redefine' security since the end of the Cold War[18], one might question whether security should be described as a neglected concept. Two reasons for doing so are compelling. First, security is an important concept, which has been used to justify suspending civil liberties, making war, and massively reallocating resources during the last fifty years. Despite the flurry of recent works, it seems fair to describe security as a concept that received far less scholarly attention than it deserved during that period. And second, most recent works on security would not qualify as conceptual analysis in the sense described in the previous section. Security has not received the serious attention accorded to the concepts of justice, freedom, equality, obligation, representation, and power.[19]

Buzan suggests five possible explanations for the neglect of security.[20] First, is the difficulty of the concept. As Buzan admits, however, this concept is no more difficult than other concepts. Second, is the apparent overlap between the concepts of security and power. Since these are easily distinguishable concepts, however, one would have expected such confusion to motivate scholars to clarify the differences. Third, is the lack of interest in security by various critics of Realism. This, however, does not explain why security specialists themselves neglected the concept. Fourth, is that security scholars are too busy keeping up with new developments in technology and policy. This, however, is more an indication that such scholars give low priority to conceptual issues than an explanation for this lack of interest. And the fifth explanation considered by Buzan is that policy-makers find the ambiguity of 'national security' useful, which does not explain why scholars have neglected the concept.[21] On balance, none of Buzan's explanations is very convincing.

Paradoxical as it may seem, security has not been an important analytical concept for most security studies scholars. During the Cold War, security studies was composed mostly of scholars interested in military statecraft. If military force was relevant to an issue, it was considered a security issue; and if military force was not relevant, that issue was consigned to the category of low politics. Security has been a banner to be flown, a label to be applied, but not a concept to be used by most security studies specialists. Buzan's puzzlement as to how a central concept like security could be so ignored disappears with the realization that military force, not security, has been the central concern of security studies.[22]

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[18] For an overview of these attempts, see Tickner, 'Re-visioning Security'; and Emma Rothschild, 'What is Security?', *Daedalus*, 124 (1995), pp. 53–98. See also references in n. 1 above.

[19] Peter Digeser, 'The Concept of Security', paper delivered at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 14 September 1994. Unlike most recent works on security, this paper seriously engages conceptual issues.

[20] Buzan, *People, States*, pp. 7–11.

[21] The only instance that has come to my attention of a scholar suggesting that the ambiguity of security might be an asset is Buzan, 'Peace, Power', p. 111.

[22] I have found few security specialists willing to defend the label 'security studies'. The characteristic response may be paraphrased as follows: 'This is merely a semantic issue. Personally, I don't care whether the field is called security studies, military studies, or war studies. Security studies, however, is widely used; and it seems to make the subject more acceptable in academia'. If security were really the central focus of the field, one would expect a more vigorous defence of the label.

3. Security as a contested concept

Some scholars have depicted security as an 'essentially contested concept'.[23] This contention must be addressed before we proceed to analyse the concept of security, for three reasons: First, there is some ambiguity as to what this means. Second, security may not fulfil the requirements for classification as an 'essentially contested concept'. And third, even if security were to be so classified, the implications for security studies may be incorrectly specified.[24]

Essentially contested concepts are said to be so value-laden that no amount of argument or evidence can ever lead to agreement on a single version as the 'correct or standard use'.[25] The stronger variants of this position lead to a radical sceptical nihilism in which there are no grounds for preferring one conception of security to another.[26] Acceptance of this position would make the kind of conceptual analysis undertaken here futile. There are, however, weaker forms of this position that allow one to differentiate between better and worse conceptualizations, even though ultimately none of the better conceptualizations can ever be said to be the best.[27] Since the analysis undertaken here purports only to improve on current usage, and not to identify the single best usage, it is compatible with the weaker variant of the essential contestedness hypothesis.

It is not clear, however, that security should be classified as an essentially contested concept. Of the several requirements for such a classification, two are especially questionable with respect to the concept of security. In the first place, the concept must be *'appraisive* in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement'.[28] W. B. Gallie uses the concept of a 'champion' in sports to illustrate the point, i.e., to label a team as champion is to say that it plays the game better than other teams. Is the concept of security similar to the concept of a champion? Neorealists seem to imply that it is. For them security is the most important goal a state can have in the same way that winning a championship is presumably the goal of all teams in Gallie's example. Just as teams compete to be champions, so states compete for security. And just as the champion is better at playing the game than other teams, so states with more security than other states are

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[23] Buzan, *People, States*, and 'Peace, Power'; and Little, 'Ideology and Change'. For the original formulation, see W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, N.S., 56 (1956), pp. 167–98.

[24] It should also be noted that the concept of an 'essentially contested concept' has itself been contested. For references, see Christine Swanton, 'On the "Essential Contestedness" of Political Concepts', *Ethics*, 95 (1985), pp. 811–27; Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts', *Ethics*, 84 (1973), pp. 1–9; John N. Gray, 'On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts', *Political Theory*, 5 (1977), pp. 330–48; and Oppenheim, *Political Concepts*, pp. 182–5.

[25] Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', p. 168.

[26] Gray, 'On the Contestability', p. 343; Swanton, 'On the "Essential Contestedness" ', pp. 813–14.

[27] Swanton, 'On the "Essential Contestedness" ', pp. 813–14.

[28] Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', p. 171. Not all value judgments are appraisive. Appraisal presupposes an accepted set of criteria. Examples suggested by Oppenheim include 'grading apples or student papers, evaluating paintings in terms of their market value, [and] wine tasting'. *Political Concepts*, pp. 170–6.

better at playing the neorealist version of the 'game' of international politics.[29] From the neorealist perspective, then, it is plausible to treat security as an appraisive concept.

Wolfers, however, presents a different view of security. He contends that states vary widely in the value they place on security and that some states may be so dissatisfied with the *status quo* that they are more interested in acquiring new values than in securing the values they have.[30] From this perspective, saying that one state has more security than another does not imply that one state is better than another any more than saying that one state has more people or land area implies that one state is better than another. For Wolfers international politics is not a 'game' in which all states play by the same 'rules' and compete for the same 'championship'.

Is security an appraisive concept? For neorealists, it may be. For others, such as Wolfers, it is not. The purpose of this discussion is not to settle the issue, but only to point out that this question is more difficult to answer than those who classify security as an essentially contested concept imply.

A second requirement for classifying a concept as essentially contested—indeed, the defining characteristic of such concepts—is that it must actually generate vigorous disputes as to the nature of the concept and its applicability to various cases. Gallie deliberately rules out policy disputes in 'practical life' that reflect conflicts of 'interests, tastes, or attitudes'. These, he suggests, are more likely to involve special pleading and rationalization than deep-seated philosophical disagreement.[31] Thus, much of the contemporary public policy debate over whether to treat the environment, budget deficits, crime or drug traffic as national security issues does not qualify as serious conceptual debate by Gallie's standards. For Gallie essential contestedness implies more than that different parties use different versions of a concept. Each party must recognize the contested nature of the concept it uses, and each must engage in vigorous debate in defence of its particular conceptual viewpoint.[32] Yet the security studies literature, as the previous section pointed out, is virtually bereft of serious conceptual debate. The neorealists may have a different conception of security than Wolfers, but they do not debate his position; they ignore it.[33] Writers often fail to offer any definition of security. And if one is offered, it is rarely accompanied by a discussion of reasons for preferring one definition rather than others. This is hardly the kind of toe-to-toe conceptual combat envisioned by Gallie with respect to such matters as what constitutes justice, democracy, or a good Christian.

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[29] Cf. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1979), and 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, 18 (1993), pp. 44–79; and John J. Mearsheimer, 'Disorder Restored', in Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton (eds.), *Rethinking America's Security* (New York, 1992), pp. 213–37.

[30] Wolfers, 'National Security', p. 491–2.

[31] Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', p. 169.

[32] Ibid., p. 172.

[33] In Waltz's *Theory*, for example, security is posited as the principal goal of states; but little attention is given to defining it or defending the definition against other conceptions of security. Wolfers is never cited. What Tickner ('Re-visioning Security', p. 177) describes as 'a fully fledged debate about the meaning of security' beginning in the 1980s is better characterized as a series of attacks on Realism and neorealism. A debate implies that there are two sides. With the possible exception of Buzan, no example of a Realist or neorealist engaging critics in serious conceptual debate has come to this author's attention. And Buzan cannot fairly be described as a defender of traditional Realist or neorealist conceptions of security.

Even if security were to be classified as an essentially contested concept, some of the implications suggested by Buzan are questionable. One cannot use the designation of security as an essentially contested concept as an excuse for not formulating one's own conception of security as clearly and precisely as possible. Indeed, the whole idea of an essentially contested concept is that various parties purport to have a clearer and more precise understanding of the concept than others. Yet Buzan explicitly disavows any intention of formulating a precise definition and suggests that to attempt to do so is to misunderstand the function of essentially contested concepts in social science.[34] 'Such a conclusion', as Ken Booth points out, 'is unsatisfying. If we cannot name it, can we ever hope to achieve it?'[35]

Another consequence Buzan attributes to the essential contestability of security is a set of 'contradictions latent within the concept itself'.[36] It is not entirely clear what this means, but such 'contradictions' seem to include those between the individual and the state, between national and international security, between violent means and peaceful ends, between blacks and whites in South Africa, between the Jews and Nazi Germany, and so on. Indeed, Buzan's assertion that the 'principal security contradiction' for most states is between their own security and that of other states suggests that the Cold War itself could be described as a 'contradiction' between the security of the NATO allies and the Warsaw Pact countries.[37] It is true, of course, that the state's pursuit of security for itself may conflict with the individual's pursuit of security; but this is an empirical fact rather than a conceptual problem. Most of the phenomena designated by Buzan as conceptual 'contradictions' could more fruitfully be called instances of empirically verifiable conflict between various actors or policies.

In sum, the alleged essential contestedness of the concept of security represents a challenge to the kind of conceptual analysis undertaken here only in its strong variants. There are some grounds for questioning whether security ought to be classified as an essentially contested concept at all. And even if it is so classified, the implications may be misspecified. Insofar as the concept is actually contested this does not seem to stem from 'essential contestability'. Security is more appropriately described as a confused or inadequately explicated concept than as an essentially contested one.

4. Specifying the security problematique

National security, as Wolfers suggested, can be a dangerously ambiguous concept if used without specification. The purpose of this section is to identify some specifications that would facilitate analysing the rationality of security policy. The discussion begins with specifications for defining security as a policy objective and proceeds to specifications for defining policies for pursuing that objective.

[34] Buzan, *People, States*, pp. 16, 374; and 'Peace, Power', p. 125.
[35] Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', p. 317. On Buzan's claim regarding the essential contestability of security, see also Digeser, 'Concept of Security'.
[36] Buzan, *People, States*, pp. 1–2, 15, 364.
[37] Ibid., p. 364.

The point of departure is Wolfers' characterization of security as 'the absence of threats to acquired values',[38] which seems to capture the basic intuitive notion underlying most uses of the term security. Since there is some ambiguity in the phrase 'absence of threats', Wolfers' phraseology will be reformulated as 'a low probability of damage to acquired values'. This does not significantly change Wolfers' meaning, and it allows for inclusion of events such as earthquakes, which Ullman has argued should be considered 'threats' to security.[39] The advantage of this reformulation can be illustrated as follows: In response to threats of military attack, states develop deterrence policies. Such policies are intended to provide security by lowering the probability that the attack will occur. In response to the 'threat' of earthquakes, states adopt building codes. This does not affect the probability of earthquakes, but it does lower the probability of damage to acquired values. Thus the revised wording focuses on the preservation of acquired values and not on the presence or absence of 'threats'. With this reformulation, security in its most general sense can be defined in terms of two specifications: Security for whom? And security for which values?

Security for whom?

As Buzan rightly points out, a concept of security that fails to specify a 'referent object' makes little sense.[40] For Buzan, however, a simple specification, such as 'the state' or 'the individual', does not suffice. Since there are many states and individuals, and since their security is interdependent, he argues that the 'search for a referent object of security' must go 'hand-in-hand with that for its necessary conditions'.[41] As noted above, however, this approach confuses concept specification with empirical observation. For purposes of specifying the concept of security, a wide range of answers to the question, 'Security for whom?' is acceptable: the individual (some, most, or all individuals), the state (some, most, or all states), the international system (some, most, or all international systems), etc. The choice depends on the particular research question to be addressed.

Security for which values?

Individuals, states, and other social actors have many values. These may include physical safety, economic welfare, autonomy, psychological well-being, and so on. The concept of national security has traditionally included political independence and territorial integrity as values to be protected; but other values are sometimes added. The former American Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, for example, includes the maintenance of 'economic relations with the rest of the world on

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[38] Wolfers, 'National Security', p. 485.
[39] Ullman, 'Redefining Security'.
[40] Buzan, *People, States*, p. 26.
[41] Ibid.

reasonable terms' in his conception of national security.[42] Failure to specify which values are included in a concept of national security often generates confusion.

Wolfers distinguished between objective and subjective dimensions of security.[43] His purpose was to allow for the possibility that states might overestimate or underestimate the actual probability of damage to acquired values. In the former case, reducing unjustified fears might be the objective of security policy; while in the latter case, a state might perceive itself as secure when it was not. The definition proposed above clearly includes the objective dimension, and the subjective dimension can be accommodated by designating 'peace of mind' or the 'absence of fear' as values that can be specified. Whether one wants to do this, of course, depends on the research task at hand.

It should be noted that specification of this dimension of security should not be in terms of 'vital interests' or 'core values'. For reasons to be discussed in the next section, this prejudges the value of security as a policy objective, and thus prejudices comparison of security with other policy objectives.

Although the two specifications above suffice to define the concept of security, they provide little guidance for its pursuit. In order to make alternative security policies comparable with each other and with policies for pursuing other goals, the following specifications are also needed.

How much security?

Security, according to Wolfers, is a value 'of which a nation can have more or less and which it can aspire to have in greater or lesser measure'.[44] Writing during the same period as Wolfers, Bernard Brodie observed that not everyone views security as a matter of degree. He cited as an example a statement by General Jacob L. Devers:

National security is a condition which cannot be qualified. We shall either be secure, or we shall be insecure. We cannot have partial security. If we are only half secure, we are not secure at all.[45]

Although Brodie, Wolfers, and others have criticized such views, the idea of security as a matter of degree cannot be taken for granted.

Knorr has noted that treating national security threats as 'matters of more or less causes a lot of conceptual uneasiness'.[46] And Buzan refers to similar difficulties:

The word itself implies an absolute condition—something is either secure or insecure—and does not lend itself to the idea of a graded spectrum like that which fills the space between hot and cold.[47]

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[42] Harold Brown, *Thinking About National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World* (Boulder, CO, 1983), p. 4.

[43] Wolfers, 'National Security', p. 485.

[44] Ibid., p. 484.

[45] Bernard Brodie, *National Security Policy and Economic Stability*, Yale Institute for International Studies Memorandum No. 33 (New Haven, CT, 1950), p. 5.

[46] 'Economic Interdependence and National Security', in Klaus Knorr and Frank N. Trager (eds.), *Economic Issues and National Security* (Lawrence, KS, 1977), p. 18.

[47] Buzan, *People, States*, p. 18.

If this were true, it would be necessary to depart from common usage in defining security as an analytical concept. This, however, does not appear to be the case. It is quite common in ordinary language to speak of varying degrees of security.

One reason it is important to specify the degree of security a country has or seeks is that absolute security is unattainable. Buzan recognizes this, but treats it as a 'logical problem' arising from 'the essentially contested nature of security as a concept'.[48] If security is conceived of as a matter of degree, Buzan observes, 'then complicated and objectively unanswerable questions arise about how much security is enough'.[49] This, of course, is precisely why security should be so conceived. It is not clear why such questions should be described as 'objectively unanswerable'. They are precisely the kind of questions that economists have been addressing for a long time, i.e., how to allocate scarce resources among competing ends.[50] Nor is there anything peculiar about the unattainability of absolute security. As Herbert Simon notes, the 'attainment of objectives is *always* a matter of degree'.[51]

In a world in which scarce resources must be allocated among competing objectives, none of which is completely attainable, one cannot escape from the question 'How much is enough?' and one should not try.

From what threats?

Those who use the term security usually have in mind particular kinds of threats. Home security systems, for example, are usually directed at potential burglars; and national security systems are often directed at other states. Since threats to acquired values can arise from many sources, it is helpful if this dimension is clearly specified. Vague references to the 'Communist threat' to national security during the Cold War often failed to specify whether they referred to ideological threats, economic threats, military threats, or some combination thereof, thus impeding rational debate of the nature and magnitude of the threat. The concept of threat referred to in this specification differs from that used by many students of international politics and national strategy. Such scholars often use the term threat to refer to actions that convey a conditional commitment to punish unless one's demands are met.[52] In ordinary language, however, one often finds references to epidemics, floods, earthquakes, or droughts as 'threats' to acquired values. Ullman and others have argued

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[48] Ibid., p. 330.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Cf. Thomas C. Schelling, *International Economics* (Boston, MA, 1958), pp. 518–19; Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough?* (New York, 1971); Charles J. Hitch and Roland N. McKean, *The Economics of Defense in the Nuclear Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); James R. Schlesinger, *The Political Economy of National Security* (New York, 1960); and Thomas C. Schelling and Malcolm Palmatier, 'Economic Reasoning in National Defense', in Alan A. Brown, Egon Neuberger, and Malcolm Palmatier (eds.), *Perspectives in Economics: Economists Look at their Fields of Study* (New York, 1971), pp. 143–59.

[51] Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behaviour*, 3rd edn (New York, 1976), p. 177. On this point, see also David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, 1985), p. 131.

[52] On the concept of threats, see Baldwin, *Paradoxes*, pp. 45–81.

that the concept of security should be expanded to include such phenomena.[53] There seems to be no reason not to use this more expansive concept of threats, especially since it comports with common usage. Those who wish to refer to conditional commitments to punish by social actors as security threats may make that clear when specifying this dimension of security.

By what means?

Like wealth, the goal of security can be pursued by a wide variety of means. Wolfers devotes considerable attention to making it clear that many different policies may plausibly be adopted in the pursuit of security.

Specification of this dimension of security is especially important in discussions of international politics. Since the publication of Wolfers' article, 'security studies' has emerged as a recognized subfield in international relations. The tendency of some security studies scholars to define the subfield entirely in terms of 'the threat, use, and control of military force'[54] can lead to confusion as to the means by which security may be pursued. It can also prejudice discussion in favour of military solutions to security problems.

At what cost?

The pursuit of security always involves costs, i.e., the sacrifice of other goals that could have been pursued with the resources devoted to security. Specification of this dimension of security policy is important because writers sometimes imply that costs do not matter. One writer, for example, defines national security in terms of the protection of core values, which he describes as 'interests that are pursued not-withstanding the costs incurred'.[55] From the standpoint of a rational policy-maker, however, there are no such interests. Costs always matter. Another writer asserts:

There is, in fact, no *necessary* conflict between the goal of maintaining a large and powerful military establishment and other goals such as developing independence from Persian Gulf oil, promoting self-sustaining development in poor countries . . . and promoting greater public tranquility and a more healthful environment at home. All these objectives could be achieved if the American people choose to allocate the resources to do so.[56]

Only the assumption of a cost-free world would eliminate the necessary conflict among such goals as they compete for scarce resources. In thinking about security, as in thinking about other policy goals, it is helpful to remember the TANSTAAFL principle, i.e., 'There ain't no such thing as a free lunch'.[57]

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[53] Ullman, 'Redefining Security'. See also, Allison and Treverton (eds.), *Rethinking America's Security*.
[54] Walt, 'Renaissance', p. 212. See also, Knorr, 'National Security Studies', p. 6; and Schultz et al. (eds.), *Security Studies*, p. 2.
[55] Melvyn P. Leffler, 'National Security', *Journal of American History*, 77 (1990), p. 145.
[56] Ullman, 'Redefining Security', p. 132. Emphasis in original.
[57] Edwin G. Dolan, *TANSTAAFL* (New York, 1971), p. 14.

Another way to imply that costs do not matter is by silence. During the last ten years, neither the Realists/neorealists nor their critics have paid much attention to costs. Although critics frequently state or imply that 'too much' is being spent on armaments, this is usually treated as self-evident rather than requiring evidence and argument.

Wolfers suggests an additional reason for specifying this dimension of security. Arguing against those who would place national security policy beyond moral judgment, he contends that the sacrifice of other values for the sake of security inevitably makes such policies 'a subject for moral judgment'.[58] Given the crimes that have been committed in the name of 'national security', this is a helpful reminder.

In what time period?

The most rational policies for security in the long run may differ greatly from those for security in the short run. In the short run, a high fence, a fierce dog, and a big gun may be useful ways to protect oneself from the neighbours. But in the long run, it may be preferable to befriend them.[59] Short-run security policies may also be in conflict with long-run security policies.[60]

Summary

In response to Wolfers' contention that specifications are needed in order to make national security useful for 'sound political counsel or scientific usage',[61] one could specify security with respect to the actor whose values are to be secured, the values concerned, the degree of security, the kinds of threats, the means for coping with such threats, the costs of doing so, and the relevant time period.

The question remains, however: 'How much specification is enough?' Must all of these dimensions be specified in detail every time one uses the concept of security? Obviously not. Both the number of dimensions in need of specification and the degree of specificity required will vary with the research task at hand. Each of the dimensions can be specified in very broad or very narrow terms. Not all of the dimensions need to specified all the time. For most purposes, however, meaningful scientific communication would seem to require at least some indication of how much security is being sought for which values of which actors with respect to which threats. For purposes of systematic comparison of policy alternatives, the last three specifications, i.e., means, costs, and time period, must be specified.

Although the dimensions of security can be specified very broadly, the utility of the concept does not necessarily increase when this is done. For example, if security

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[58] Wolfers, 'National Security', pp. 498–9.
[59] Cf. Kenneth E. Boulding, 'Towards a Pure Theory of Threat Systems', *American Economic Review*, 53 (1963), pp. 424–34.
[60] See Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (New York, 1953), pp. 50–1.
[61] Wolfers, 'National Security', p. 483.

is specified in terms of threats to *all* acquired values of a state, it becomes almost synonymous with national welfare or national interest and is virtually useless for distinguishing among policy objectives.[62]

5. The value of security

Security is valued by individuals, families, states, and other actors. Security, however, is not the only thing they value; and the pursuit of security necessitates the sacrifice of other values. It is therefore necessary to ask how important is security relative to other values. Three ways of answering this question will be discussed: (1) the prime value approach, (2) the core value approach, (3) and the marginal value approach. It will be argued that the marginal value approach is preferable to the other two.

The prime value approach

One way of determining the value of security is to ask what life would be like without it. The most famous answer to this question is that by Thomas Hobbes to the effect that life would be 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.[63] Such reasoning has led many scholars to assert the 'primacy' of the goal of security.[64] The logic underlying this assertion is that security is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other values such as prosperity, freedom, or whatever.

The fallacy in this line of argument is exposed by asking the Hobbesian question with respect to breathable air, potable water, salt, food, shelter or clothing. The answer is roughly the same for each of these as it is for security; and a plausible case for the 'primacy' of each can be made. This exercise, of course, merely underscores a truth King Midas learned long ago, i.e., that the value of something—gold, security, water, or whatever—is not an inherent quality of the good itself but rather a result of external social conditions—supply and demand. The more gold one has, the less value one is likely to place on an additional ounce; and the more security one has, the less one is likely to value an increment of security.

To the extent that the prime value approach implies that security outranks other values for all actors in all situations, it is both logically and empirically indefensible. Logically, it is flawed because it provides no justification for limiting the allocation of resources to security in a world where absolute security is unattainable. Empirically it is flawed because it fails to comport with the way people actually behave.

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[62] 'Virtually' rather than 'totally' useless because even the term 'national interest' distinguishes between national interests and international or subnational interests. And even a very broad concept of security distinguishes between protecting *acquired* values and attempts to acquire additional values.

[63] *The Leviathan* (1651), Part I, Ch. XIII.

[64] See Smoke, 'National Security Affairs', pp. 247–8; Mearsheimer, 'Disorder', pp. 221–2; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 126; Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), p. 39; Robert G. Gilpin, 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, 1986), p. 305; and Lawrence Freedman, 'The Concept of Security', in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, vol. 2 (London, 1992), p. 730.

Prehistoric people may have lived in caves for security, but they did not remain there all the time. Each time they ventured forth in pursuit of food, water or adventure, they indicated a willingness to sacrifice the security of the cave for something they presumably valued more. And in choosing places to live, settlers often forgo the security of high mountain-tops in favour of less secure locations with more food or water. Likewise, modern states do not allocate all of their resources to the pursuit of security, even in wartime. Even the most beleaguered society allocates some of its resources to providing food, clothing, and shelter for its population.

Even if 'absolute' security were a possibility, it is not obvious that people would seek it. As Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom observed long ago, 'probably most people do not really want "absolute" security, if such a state is imaginable; "optimum" security would probably still leave an area of challenge, risk, doubt, danger, hazard, and anxiety. Men are not lotus-eaters'.[65]

The core value approach

The core value approach allows for other values by asserting that security is one of several important values. Although this approach mitigates the logical and empirical difficulties associated with the prime value approach, it does not eliminate them. One is still confronted with the need to justify the classification of some values as core values and other values as non-core values. And if core values are always more important than other values, this approach cannot justify allocating any resources whatsoever to the pursuit of non-core values.

The marginal value approach

The marginal value approach is the only one that provides a solution to the resource allocation problem. This approach is not based on any assertion about the value of security to all actors in all situations. Instead, it is rooted in the assumption that the law of diminishing marginal utility is as applicable to security as it is to other values. Asserting the primacy of security is like asserting the primacy of water, food, or air. A certain minimum amount of each is needed to sustain life, but this does not mean that the value of a glass of water is the same for a person stranded in a desert and a person drowning in a lake. As King Midas learned, the value of an increment of something depends on how much of it one has.

According to the marginal value approach, security is only one of many policy objectives competing for scarce resources and subject to the law of diminishing returns. Thus, the value of an increment of national security to a country will vary from one country to another and from one historical context to another, depending

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[65] Dahl and Lindblom, *Politics, Economics*, p. 50. Recent writers who have expressed similar doubts about the value of security include: Barry Buzan, 'Response to Kolodziej', *Arms Control*, 13 (1992), p. 484; James Der Derian, 'The Value of Security: Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard', in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York, 1995), pp. 24–45; and Ole Waever, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', ibid., pp. 46–86.

not only on how much security is needed but also on how much security the country already has. Rational policy-makers will allocate resources to security only as long as the marginal return is greater for security than for other uses of the resources.

There is nothing new about treating national security as one of many public policy objectives competing for scarce resources and subject to diminishing returns. Wolfers and his contemporaries used this approach, and defence economists have long advocated it.[66] Its neglect in recent writings on national security, however, suggests the need to reiterate its importance.[67]

Critical theorists, feminist theorists, Realists, neorealists, liberals, Third World theorists, and globalists all live in a world of scarce resources. In the end, all must confront the question posed by Booth of 'how many frigates to build'.[68] Even pacifists, who answer 'none', must decide how to allocate resources among competing non-military uses. The analytical tools of marginal utility analysis are available for use by any or all of the schools mentioned above.

It is not always clear whether statements about the importance of security as a goal are empirical observations or part of the definition of security. The 'high politics/low politics' distinction, however, suggests that some scholars may be making the value of security a matter of definition. Buzan, for example, includes in security only those concerns that 'merit the urgency of the "security" label', thus suggesting that urgency is part of his definition of security. And when he refers to 'attempts to *elevate* particular economic issues onto the national security agenda', he seems to imply the inherent superiority of that agenda. Likewise, the intensity of the threat seems to be a defining characteristic of security for Buzan.[69]

Ullman's proposed definition of national security threats also includes elements that prejudge the importance of security. Thus, he does not include all threats that 'degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state', but only those that do so 'drastically' and quickly. And he does not include all threats that 'narrow the range of policy choices available to the state', but only those that do so 'significantly'.[70] Both Buzan and Ullman seem to rule out the possibility of a minor or trivial national security threat by conceptual fiat.

Policy advocates, of course, often try to win acceptance for their proposals by declaring them to be 'security issues'. Navies wanting frigates, educators wanting scholarships, environmentalists wanting pollution controls, and so on are likely to portray their respective causes as matters of 'national security'. In this context the declaration that something is a security issue is a way of asserting its importance.

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[66] E.g. Wolfers, 'National Security'; Frederick S. Dunn, 'The Present Course of International Relations Research', *World Politics*, 2 (1949), p. 94; Bernard Brodie, 'Strategy as a Science', *World Politics*, 1 (1949), pp. 467–88; Schelling, *International Economics*; Charles J. Hitch, 'National Security Policy as a Field for Economics Research', *World Politics*, 12 (1960), pp. 434–52; and Schlesinger, *Political Economy*.
    'It is peculiar to the training of an economist that he is continually aware of the need to optimize rather than just to maximize, of the need to weight explicitly the value of more progress toward one objective at the expense of progress toward another. By training, he is suspicious of any analysis that singles out one conspicuous variable, some "dominant" feature, on which all attention is to be focused, and which is to be maximized by putting arbitrary limits on the other variables'. Schelling and Palmatier, 'Economic Reasoning', p. 148.
[67] Buzan's *People, States* contains only passing references to costs and no reference to diminishing returns.
[68] Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', p. 325.
[69] Ibid., pp. 19, 131, 134. Emphasis added.
[70] Ullman, 'Redefining Security', p. 133.

Thus one may argue that building urgency into the concept of security is a common practice.[71] If this practice is followed, however, the concept becomes useless for rational policy analysis because the value of security relative to other goals will have been conceptually prejudged.

6. Security and neorealism

The specifications of security presented here are also relevant to theorizing about national security. No theory of international politics emphasizes security more than neorealism, which posits it as the primary motivation of states. Given the importance of security in neorealist analyses, they have devoted remarkably little attention to explaining what security means. In an often quoted passage, Kenneth Waltz observes:

In anarchy, security is the highest end. Only if survival is assured can states seek such other goals as tranquility, profit, and power.[72]

This passage represents a simplification for the purpose of building a theory. Such simplifications are permissible up to the point that they, to paraphrase Wolfers, leave room for more confusion than scientific usage can afford. When dealing with a particularly slippery concept like national security, a lack of specifications can be especially worrisome. The specifications outlined earlier serve as a useful checklist for deciding whether Waltz's simplification goes too far.

The equation of security with survival provides little or no guidance with respect to how to answer the question: 'Survival of which values?' To say that states strive to ensure their own survival does not tell one very much. This is especially true for Waltz, who defined states in terms of the functions they perform, including the making and enforcement of laws, defence against external attack, and the provision of food, clothing, housing, transportation, and other amenities consumed by the citizens.[73] If all of these functions are included as part of the acquired values that define security, the concept becomes so broad that it loses its utility for distinguishing among policy goals. It might rule out subnational or international security interests as well as acquisitive and self-destructive ones, but it rules out little else.

With respect to the question of the degree of security to which states aspire, Waltz's answer is: enough to assure survival. But this answer begs the question of how much assurance is enough. Completely assured survival is a goal that can be approximated but never attained. Regardless of what policies states adopt, there is always *some* chance of survival and thus *some* assurance of security. The crucial question is not whether security is 'assured', but rather, 'How much assurance is enough?'.[74]

The cost of security also receives little attention in neorealist theory. The passage quoted above does not mention the possibility of diminishing marginal returns to security policy, but it allows for them by implying that there is some (unspecified)

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[71] For a strong defence of this approach, see Waever, 'Securitization and Desecuritization'.

[72] Waltz, *Theory*, p. 126.

[73] Ibid., p. 96.

[74] This assumes that neorealists are treating 'assurance' of security as a matter of degree rather than as a dichotomous variable. This is a point on which neorealists are not always as clear as one might wish.

level of assured survival that would justify shifting resources to the pursuit of other goals.[75] Waltz's comparison of the goal of profits for a firm with the goal of security for a state, however, raises questions about the treatment of security costs.[76] It makes no sense to describe firms as forgoing an increment of profit because the marginal costs outweigh the marginal benefits, since profits are defined in terms of *net* revenues. Thus, economic theory portrays firms as always seeking more profits. By contrast, it makes a great deal of sense to describe states as forgoing an increment of security because the marginal costs outweigh the marginal benefits. And any political theory that portrays states as always seeking more security would be seriously misleading.

Whether neorealist theory provides enough specification of the concepts of security and security policy is ultimately a matter of judgment and cannot be reduced to a simple formula. In making this judgment, however, it would be prudent to consider its treatment of values to be protected, the degree of security to be sought, and the costs to be incurred.

There is one additional aspect of the neorealist treatment of security that should also be considered. Do neorealists view security as a zero-sum concept in the sense that more security for one actor (unit) means less for another? When states are described as 'competing' with one another for security, such a conception seems to be implied.[77] This suggests that the 'winner' of such a competition could be a state surrounded by insecure states. The question of whether insecure neighbours are good neighbours, however, should be carefully considered.

There are, of course, situations in which one state's efforts to increase its security reduce the security of other states—the well-known 'security dilemma'—and any concept of security that did not allow one to describe such situations would be seriously defective. Not everything states do to enhance their security, however, takes this form. Thus, a concept of security that required all security relations to be described in zero-sum terms would be equally defective. The concept of security explicated in previous sections of this article allows for the security dilemma, but it does not make it a conceptual necessity.[78]

7. New security concepts?

The last decade has witnessed an outpouring of attempts to rethink the security problematique. Whatever the merits of this literature as an aid to coping with the

[75] Although Waltz models his theory after microeconomic theory, his treatment of security makes little use of marginal analysis, which is one of the central ideas of microeconomic theory.

[76] Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 90–2.

[77] Cf. Mearsheimer, 'Disorder'; Waltz, *Theory*, and 'Emerging Structure'. One might object to the contention that competition implies a zero-sum relationship by reference to mixed-motive games. This objection, however, conflates competition and conflict. The concept of competition implies a special type of conflict in which the parties play the same game in pursuit of the same goal. Competition implies winners and losers, but in mixed-motive games each player wins or loses in terms of his own value system. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), p. 4. In such games, everyone can gain ('win'), and everyone can lose. This cannot happen in competitions.

[78] Although it is sometimes suggested that the concept of national, as opposed to international, security blinds one to the security dilemma, this was clearly not the case with Wolfers. He not only discusses it, but also identifies an early version in Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of International Law*, Essay IV. 'National Security', pp. 494–5.

post-Cold War world, it has added little to our understanding of the *concept* of security. Emma Rothschild argues that many of the 'new ideas' about security have eighteenth-century antecedents.[79] It has been argued here that the basic conceptual tools for rethinking security have been available at least since the publication of Wolfers' article in 1952.

The multidimensionality of security is not a new discovery. Wolfers pointed out the need for specification with respect to which values to protect, from which threats, by what means, and at what cost. The dimensions of security have not changed with the end of the Cold War, but the substantive specifications of these dimensions that were appropriate during the Cold War are likely to differ from those appropriate for the 1990s. Economic security, environmental security, identity security, social security, and military security are different forms of security, not fundamentally different concepts. Each can be specified in terms of the dimensions discussed above. Changing world circumstances and new issues do not necessarily require new concepts. Voting power, military power, economic power, and persuasive power are different forms of the same social phenomenon, i.e., power. The adjectives indicate the differences, while the noun draws attention to the similarities. Both are important.

Conceptualizing security at levels other than the nation-state is also not new. Although Wolfers focused on *national* security, he acknowledged that security could be discussed on higher and/or lower levels as well. And a book published the year after Wolfers' article still provides one of the most penetrating and useful accounts of security in many forms at many levels.[80]

Although the approach to security presented here might seem to be incompatible with the literature on identity politics and security,[81] this incompatibility should not be exaggerated. Individuals and nation-states are sometimes insecure about their identities, and they sometimes adopt policies to cope with this insecurity. Individuals, for example, may consult a psychiatrist; and nation-states may revise their immigration laws. Either situation could be described by the analytical scheme offered above.[82]

In sum, to the extent that the new thinking about security focuses on conceptual issues rather than empirical or normative issues, not much is new. Most of the 'new ideas' about security can be accommodated by the conceptual framework elucidated by Wolfers in 1952. The United Nations Secretary-General recently called for a 'conceptual breakthrough' which goes 'beyond armed territorial security' to include 'the security of people in their homes, jobs and communities'.[83] It may well be that the world needs a theoretical breakthrough that provides a better understanding of the post-Cold War world, a normative breakthrough that expands the notion of a moral community, an empirical breakthrough that facilitates recognition of increased interdependence, and a political breakthrough that strengthens the will to pursue an expanded security agenda. But none of these requires a *conceptual* breakthrough that goes beyond the specifications identified by Wolfers.

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[79] Rothschild, 'What is Security?'
[80] Dahl and Lindblom, *Politics, Economics*, esp. pp. 49–54.
[81] See, for example, David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN, 1992). See also Digeser's cogent critique of Campbell ('Concept of Security').
[82] For an earlier discussion of identity politics, see Dahl and Lindblom, *Politics, Economics*.
[83] Quoted in Rothschild, 'What is Security?', p. 56.

8. Conclusion

Despite widespread use of 'security' by scholars and politicians during the last forty years, not much attention has been devoted to explicating the concept. Although the concept of power has generated a veritable mountain of explicative literature,[84] the comparable literature on security is more of a molehill. Although some scholars contend that this is due to the essential contestability of security, it is probably more accurate to describe the concept of security as insufficiently explicated than as essentially contested. This essay has attempted to explicate the concept of security broadly enough for use at any level, but with special reference to the nation-state. The purpose is to define security as a policy objective distinguishable from others. Since security competes with other goals for scarce resources, it must be distinguishable from, yet comparable with, such goals. This requires that the relative importance of security be left open rather than built into the concept in terms of 'vital interests' or 'core values'. In 1952 Wolfers argued that specifications were needed in order to make the concept of national security useful for 'sound political counsel or scientific usage'. It is especially important to reiterate and clarify such specifications in the aftermath of the Cold War. Since much of the current public policy debate focuses on whether and how to reallocate resources from security to other policy objectives, it is more important than ever to have a concept of security that facilitates comparisons of the value of security with that of other goals.[85]

Oppenheim's criteria for evaluating scientific concepts may be applied to the concept of security explicated above.

(1) Operationalization

The multiple dimensions of security discussed above will not be easy to operationalize. They are not reducible to a simple formula, but each is operationalizable in 'principle'.

When I say 'in principle' I mean only that no data are demanded by the definition that we cannot imagine securing with combinations of known techniques of observation and measurement. The observations may be exceedingly difficult but they are not inherently impossible: they don't defy the laws of nature as we understand them.[86]

(2) Definitional connections

Unlike 'power', the concept of security easily connects with a verb. A variety of values can be secured by a variety of means. Also, the use of adjectives permits reference to many different kinds of security, e.g., economic security, environmental security, military security, social security, physical security, identity security,

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[84] For references, see Baldwin, *Paradoxes*.
[85] Both Tickner ('Re-visioning Security') and Booth ('Security and Emancipation') have described pressures to revise the concept of security as stemming partially from concerns about excessive defence spending.
[86] Robert A. Dahl, 'The Concept of Power', *Behavioural Science*, 2 (1957), p. 214.

emotional security, and so on. This family of terms provides the security analyst with a useful vocabulary without undermining the basic intuitive notion of security.

(3) Factual connections

The specifications recommended above direct attention to a number of theoretically important and policy-relevant aspects of the subject matter that might easily be overlooked. These include the facts that the values to be secured are variable, the degree of security sought is variable, the potential threats to security are multiple, the means by which security may be pursued are many, the costs of security are inescapable, and the time period matters.

(4) Not precluding empirical investigation

The specifications discussed here do not preclude empirical investigation by making true 'by definition' what had better be left open to empirical inquiry. For example, the importance of security as a policy objective is not built into the concept by including 'vital interests' or 'core values' in the definition. Also, the means by which security may be pursued are not confined to the 'threat, use, and control of military force',[87] as some definitions of security studies seem to imply. Both the importance of security as a policy objective and the means most appropriate for its pursuit are matters best left open to empirical inquiry. It should also be noted that the question of whether domestic threats to national security are more important than foreign threats is left open.

(5) Ordinary language

None of the specifications suggested above deviates unnecessarily from ordinary usage. It might be argued that common usage tends to equate national security issues with important issues. As one study put it, 'everyone agrees that "security issues" are important and deserving of national prominence and financial support'.[88] To the extent that this is true, the approach suggested here represents a necessary departure from ordinary language. If national security issues are *defined* as important, attempts to compare them with other issues will be prejudiced from the start.

There is no shortage of labels to substitute for 'security' in referring to issues of extraordinary importance, e.g., urgent issues, important issues, vital issues, core issues, high priority issues, etc.

It is sometimes stated or implied that the conceptual problems of 'national security' can be eliminated or greatly mitigated simply by substituting 'international'

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[87] Walt, 'Renaissance', p. 212.
[88] Schultz et al. (eds.), *Security Studies*, p. 1.

or global' for 'national' security.[89] Although such adjectival shifts are meaningful and useful for some purposes, they are not substitutes for the specifications suggested by Wolfers. They pertain primarily to the first specification, 'Security for whom?'. The ambiguities arising from failure to specify the other dimensions are as applicable to international or global security as they are to national security. Although it is often asserted that international security, unlike national security, denotes the interdependence of nation-states with respect to their security relations, the logic of such an assertion is unclear. No matter which adjective is used, the concept of security explicated here implies nothing whatsoever about the degree of interdependence among states with respect to their security relations. This matter is better left to empirical investigation and should not be built into the concept of security. Those who believe that states are mutually dependent in their security relations should make the case with evidence and argument rather than by definition. Nor can it be argued that the concept of national security blinds one to the security dilemma or to the more general interdependence of states in their security relations. Wolfers explicitly recognized both matters without the help of the concept of international security.[90]

National security has figured prominently in academic and political discussions of foreign policy and international politics since the end of World War II. Usually, the specifications suggested by Wolfers have been ignored. No social science concept has been more abused and misused than national security. If the concept is to be salvaged for use in policy analysis or theory construction, specifications of the sort advocated here seem to be necessary. To argue that they are necessary, however, is not to say that they would be sufficient. Careless use and abuse of the concept may have already rendered it useless for everyone but the politicians.

[89] See, for example, Joseph S. Nye, Jr, 'The Contribution of Strategic Studies: Future Challenges', *Adelphi Paper* No. 235 (1989), p. 23; Nye and Lynn-Jones, 'International Security Studies', p. 7; Haftendorn, 'Security Puzzle', pp. 5–11; and Richard Schultz, 'Introduction to International Security', in Schultz et al. (eds.), *Security Studies for the 1990s*, pp. 45–6.
[90] Wolfers, 'National Security', pp. 494–6.