Security According to Buzan: A Comprehensive Security Analysis.

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"Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a subtstantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence. Quite where this range of concerns ceases to merit the urgency of the "security" label (which identifies threats as significant enough to warrant emergency action and exceptional measures including the use of force) and becomes part of everyday uncertainties of life is one of the difficulties of the concept'– Barry Buzan," New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-first Century*" International Affairs,* 67.3 (1991), pp. 432-433.

INTRODUCTION

The question of security has long since preoccupied the minds of International Relationists. The traditional concept of security with the state as the main referent has been up for extensive debate. The realist view of security where it is seen as a "derivative of power"[1] reduces the complex concept of security to a mere "synonym for power"[2]. This view could be considered relevant during the period of the World Wars, where states seemed to be in a constant struggle for power. However, in the post-Cold War era, the concept of Security has become much more multifaceted and complex. In his book, ***People, States and Fear***, Barry Buzan points out that the concept of security was "too narrowly founded"[3], his goal was to, therefore, offer a "broader framework of security"[4] incorporating concepts that were not previously considered to be part of the security puzzle such as regional security, or the societal and environmental sectors of security. Buzan's approach is more holistic; and while he primes his analysis with neorealist beliefs such as anarchy, the depth of his analysis is constructivist in that he does not accept the given, but rather explores each element of what he considers to be the security package one by one in order to arrive at a more informed conclusion.

Buzan's approach is an interesting one as he looks at security from all angles going from micro to macro, also addressing the social aspects of security and how people or societies construct or "securitize" threats. Traditionally belonging to the English School, which can be considered a more pluralistic take on International Relations, Buzan is somewhat of an independent thinker and a reformer. This allowed him to broaden the analysis that existed and give his audience a more complete understanding of the complexities of security with the ability to then apply these concepts to current issues, for example, the war on terrorism. This constructivist approach allows the reader to not only discover Buzan's reading of security, but also the breakdown of every aspect that contributes to or affects security, from the individual and society to the main referent, which, for Buzan is the state. For Buzan, nothing is a given. This epistemological methodology can be considered one of his greatest contributions to the theory of IR. With this in mind, this paper will attempt to highlight the accomplishments and contributions that Barry Buzan has made to the discipline and theory of IR as well as emphasize the practical aspects of his writings which can allow for a broader understanding of conflicts and issues in the field of International Relations.

As Buzan's main lens is that of security, that will be the main focus of this work, using it as a means to analyze Buzan and his many contributions to the field. All of this will be done vis-à-vis the question: Does Buzan's work provide the reader with a greater understanding of the concept of security and how the different levels play

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[1] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 8.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 14.
[4] Ibid., 20.

into the concept as a whole, or does it merely deconstruct a highly complex issue piecemealing the levels together at the end leaving the reader and policy maker more unsure than before?

THREE-LEVEL SECURITY: INDIVIDUALS, STATES AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS

It is important to begin by stating that before Buzan, there was a gap in the literature concerning the concept of security. For an issue that seems to currently be on everyone's mind, the approach to security and the intricacies of the issue had been largely left blank. Perhaps this can account for some of the unpreparedness when facing national or international security issues? As previously mentioned Buzan set out to fill this gap and devoted himself to the study of security, or rather, to use security as an approach for International Studies, as it "is such a fundamental concept, the process of mapping it inevitably takes one on a grand tour of the field"[5].

As aforementioned, Buzan's analysis can be considered to be a loose melding of neorealism and constructivism, favoring constructivism. He accepts the neorealist's postulate that "the international political system is an anarchy, which is to say that its principal defining characteristic is the absence of overarching government"[6]. This being said, that is where the departure from neorealism occurs, for he feels that the realist approach to security as being a "pure struggle for power"[7] is obsolete, resulting in a myopic point of view, and something that can only hinder the policy maker or International Relationist in coming to a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

In his work, ***People, States and Fear***, Buzan veers towards a broader understanding of security based levels and sectors. The three levels that are referenced and addressed in detail in his work are individuals, states and international systems. The sectors, which he also addresses in the article "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", are Political, Military, Economic, Societal, and Environmental. These concepts cannot adequately address the issue of security separately, each one is intricately and complexly linked with the next forming a web of information that a Security Analyst or International Relationist must detangle to understand each concept individually in order to be able to see how they affect each other on the whole. This micro/macro methodology is something that, while infinitely complex, is also of the utmost importance in order to be able to get a better idea how to deal with what Buzan calls the "'National' Security Problem".

Related to this, is the way in which Buzan uses an epistemological methodology throughout his work. From the first level of analysis, Buzan acknowledges that in order to complete this complex study of security where the state is assumed as the

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[5] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 21.
[6] Barry Buzan*, People, States and Fear*. 146.
[7] Ibid., 8.

main referent, one has to first ask oneself; what is the nature of a state? When thinking along the lines of individual security, we can understand that security can be considered as a factor of "life, health, status, wealth, freedom"[8] amongst a few examples. These elements "are complicated and many of them cannot be replaced if lost"[9]. The concept of threat can, therefore, be relatively easily understood for an individual. However, as pointed out above, the concept of security does not follow a cookie-cutter model, and we cannot copy-paste individual security and expect the same concept to work for national security. Buzan, therefore, considers the nature of the state in order to be able to understand the security of "larger and more complicated entities"[10] that are "more amorphous in character"[11]. Buzan takes this consideration of the essence of the state all the way to a figure provided in his work, which represents the idea of the state, the physical base of the state and the institutional expression of the state on the three points of a triangle. This is to show that the components of the state can be discussed as security issues alone, but that they are interlinked and the "examination of the linkages between them is a fruitful source of insight into the national security problematique"[12].

SECURITY IN FIVE "SECTORS": MOVING FROM THE TRADITIONAL NATIONAL SECURITY TO NEW SECURITY SECTORS

Along similar lines to that of addressing the *levels* essential to understanding security, Buzan also addresses the different *sectors* of security. In his article "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", Buzan analyses how five sectors of security (Political, Military, Economic, Societal, and Environmental) might affect the "periphery" based on changes in the "center". The five sectors of security are an important concept to understand when studying Buzan.

As Buzan points out in his article, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", the "five sectors do not operate in isolation from each other. Each defines a focal point within the security problematique, and a way of ordering priorities, but all are woven together in a strong web of linkage"[13]. This is clearly seen in his book when he examines the different sectors of security in relation to threats. The obvious threats that would seem to present the most pressing concerns are military, which are capable of posing threats to the state on several levels. ***Military* threats** can affect all components of the state. It can put into question the very basic duty of a state to be able to protect its citizens as well as have an adverse effect on the "layers of social and individual interest"[14]. The level and objectives of military threat can take on different levels of importance, and the fact that they

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[8] Ibid., 36.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 57.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 65.
[13] Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century", *International Affairs*, 67.3 (1991), 433.
[14] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 119.

involve the use of force puts them in a special category when it comes to security. *Political* **threats** represent a constant concern for a state as well; however, they can be more ambiguous and difficult to identify in relation to military threats. As the state is, itself, a political entity, a political threat with the purpose of weakening that entity can be considered to be on par with a military threat. They can take the form of competition amongst ideologies, or an attack to the nation itself. However it is important to distinguish between intentional political threats and "those that arise structurally from the impact of foreign alternatives on the legitimacy of states"[15].

ECONOMIC, SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITES

The political and military sectors of security identified by Buzan are accompanied by three others that are more difficult to define: Economic, Societal and Environmental or ecological. **Economic threats**, for example, are difficult to determine due to the nature of economics itself. As Buzan points out, "the normal condition of actors in a market economy is one of risk, aggressive competition and uncertainty"[16], this insecure nature makes economic security hard to disentangle. The threshold of what is acceptable based on an inherent instability and what is a threat can be difficult to identify. As has been seen with the current economic crisis, there is a significant amount of debate as to what parts of the US's economy should be "saved" by the government and what should not. The banking system that was addressed as an economic threat was considered to have crossed this threshold. The economic sector is also a clear example of how the different sectors interact with on another. Buzan address the important linkage between economic security and military security. It is easy to see that they military security is dependent on economic security due do budget constraints and limits. Furthermore, economic security can be considered a key indicator as to the general security of a state. If developed and developing countries are compared, it is clear that with economic security other levels of security become easier to establish.

Societal security is possibly the most intriguing of the five to consider. While it is difficult to separate it from the political sector, societal threats are about identity and the balance (or lack there of) that can be found within any given state. Weak states are often ill-equipped to deal with differences in identity and culture. If Afghanistan is used as an example, one can see that the differences in culture, ideology and ethnicity, which make up tribal boundaries found within the state are not easily reconciled with the state itself, "a Western construction" – according to some critics. These issues spill over into neighboring Pakistan, which shares ethnicities and identities. It is clear with this example that societal security is deeply connected with political and even military security. Most conflicts that are prevalent now are those that have a societal element. It is therefore, important to take this sector into account when studying security on a macro level. However, it is also important to stress that the notion of "societal security" is difficult to apply since it

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[15] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 120.
[16] Ibid., 124.

deals with identities and cultures – essentially subjective and contextual constructions – it can easily lead to politics of discrimination and exclusion.

The **environmental sector** also proves difficult to define and can be considered the most controversial of the five sectors. When thinking of possible ecological threats, one often thinks of the "struggle humans have with nature" such as earthquakes and hurricanes. These events, in themselves, are impossible to control. The more recent issues of human impact on the planet that are resulting in phenomena such as global warming, pollution, and the ozone layer to name a few, is where we can see more clearly a controllably variable in relation to the environment. If these issues come to the forefront in years to come, the ecological sector will be getting more attention. Possible initiatives to address these issues will be dependent of economic security as well as political security, as these issues can be considered not only a threat to an individual state, but also global threats that will have a widespread effect.

Each one of these sectors has importance in its own merit, and while military threats have traditionally taken precedence, with the evolution of the perception of security has exposed the importance of other sectors such as economic and ecological. All sectors should be taken into account when analyzing national and international security, both separately and together.

REGIONAL SECURITY: A "RELATIONAL PHENOMENON" AS PART OF A SECURITY COMPLEX

Another dimension that is important to consider is Buzan's contribution to the study of regional security. The concept of regional security, while seeming obvious to some, is one that, like the issue as a whole, had not been adequately addressed before Barry Buzan. When studying this aspect of security Buzan states, "security is a relational phenomenon. Because security is relational, one cannot understand the national security of any given state without understanding the international pattern of security interdependence in which it is embedded."[17] In his analysis of regional security and how it affects the concept of security as a whole, Buzan offers several interesting and important concepts. The first is that of "amity and enmity among states"[18], in other words relationships between states that can represent a spectrum from friendship or alliances to those marked by fear. According to Buzan, the concepts of amity and enmity cannot be attributed solely to the balance of power. The issues that can affect these feelings range from things such as ideology, territory, ethnic lines, and historical precedent. This is important to understand as the concept of amity/enmity leads to the idea of what Buzan refers to as "security complex" which is "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."[19] This interpretation takes into consideration a security

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[17] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 187.
[18] Ibid., 189.
[19] Ibid., 190.

complex that is at odds as well as one that is unified under shared interests. Security complexes can be useful in terms of policy and they also provide a good framework to discuss issues that are endemic to any one region. If the solution can be found only from within the context of the complex, then the policy should be made from within this context as well.

The ideas of regional security and security complexes are important as every state can put its security in relation to at least one complex. Many examples of this can be easily identified; perhaps the most extreme can be considered that of Israel and its Arab neighbors. If we use Israel and the Middle East security issues as an example, we can clearly see how Israel's security is tied up with its regional complex of the Middle East and vice versa, and how it undoubtedly takes this into consideration when considering its national security. The same works for the daily security of the Palestinians which is dramatically dependent on the Israeli politics of security. This brings us to the most important point about regional security: the fact that regional security is a part of the hierarchy of the security problem, sitting between domestic and global or international security and cannot be left out of the puzzle. The consequences of not taking regional security into consideration could be disastrous for any state that chooses to do so.

HOW TO APPROACH POLICY: INSECURITY, THREATS AND VULNERABILITY

The idea of state and nation evoked earlier leads Buzan into another level of his analysis: insecurity, threats and vulnerabilities. It is important to address this here, as the concepts of threats and vulnerabilities are "a key divide in security policy"[20]. These concepts serve to highlight the internal debate within national security: should it focus outward, concentrating on cutting off threats to the state at the source, which Buzan refers to as international security strategy or inward, reducing the state's vulnerabilities, which Buzan refers to as national security strategy? Once the reader has a thorough understanding of Buzan and is able to apply his methods to this problematique, it is easy to see that neither one of these options would work as successfully alone as they could work if applied together. If, for example, a state focuses all its efforts on maintaining national security and reduces as much vulnerability as possible, the state will no sooner find itself in a situation where its international security is threatened and it is unprepared to respond to the threat. Buzan states that finding a "policy which mixes elements of a national security strategy with elements of an international security one"[21] is optimal, but that it is not without difficulty. Combine this with the perceptual and political elements that further complicate security policy and we can start to understand why it is so difficult to come up with security policy that works on multiple levels.

This takes us to the problem that is often associated with policy, that of ends and

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[20] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear,* 112.
[21] Ibid., 335.

means. The fact is that absolute security is never going to be attained. The sacrifices any given state and its citizens would have to make to attain this would be too great. Thus we see the eternal conundrum when it comes to successful security policy: when do the ends justify the means? While this concept may seem to be obvious, it is far from being such. Security is a delicate concept, one that everyone takes seriously, especially in a post 9/11, globalized world. Therefore, it is not surprising that we find ourselves amongst security policy where the ends might not justify the means, or rather where the road and repercussions of these policies do not justify the means. The issue of policy is one that is highly complex and adds the variant of the perceptions of the elite into the mix along with the different levels and sectors of security. Buzan acknowledges that this, if any, is the area where he has left a gap. However one can understand as to why this has been done; policy changes from one day to the next, and security as a whole, as well as its separate parts, are constantly evolving issues which means that policy should be capable of evolving with it. Anything concrete that Buzan could have contributed to this might have been considered obsolete in a mere six months depending on the political climate. However, Buzan has offered a solid foundation of analytical tools that can be useful to any policy maker. As previously stated, by understanding the global idea of security as well as the breakdown of the different intricacies that affect security, a policy maker should be able, not only to calculate when a security policy's ends justify its means, but also to see beyond the now and make decisions that take security policy to the next level.

SECURITY IN THE WAKE OF 9/11: MACRO-SECURITIZATION AND THE WoT

The final and more contemporary contribution that Buzan has made to the discipline and theory of IR that is to be discussed is that of "macro-securitization". This idea is based on the concept of *securitization* that was formulated by Ole Waever, a close colleague of Buzan's, where an issue is "securitized" when it gets constructed into a threat. According to Waever, "something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so"[22], and something becomes securitized when it has been declared a security problem and this problem is accepted by the audience. The idea of macro-securitization, is the same idea, but on a much larger scale: "macro-securitisations are aimed at, and up to a point succeeding, in framing security issues, agendas and relationships on a system-wide basis,"[23] they "are based on universalist constructions of threats and/or referent objects."[24] Buzan offers two possible reasons for this recent phenomenon, one being globalization, and the other a "belief in a universalist ideology"[25]. In the article, Buzan cites the Cold War as a historical example of macro-securitization and states that this

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[22] Ole Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization", *On Security*, Ed by Ronnie Lipschutz, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 6.
[23] Barry Buzan, "The 'War on Terrorism' as the new Macro-Securitization", Oslo Workshop papers, Oslo, 2006, 1.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

phenomenon was "capable of structuring the mainstream security dynamics of interstate society for several decades"[26]. Buzan wonders if the War on Terrorism could possibly rise as a macro-securitization to the same level. He even offers the possibility that states (in particularly the U.S.) need securitization "as a part of their day-to-day functioning"[27] and that after the Cold War, there was, in fact a threat deficit that was filled by the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent "War on Terrorism".

The WoT was something that, right from the start was framed by the American government in a macro-securitizing way, this can be clearly understood in Bush's "*you are with us or against us*" ultimatum, creating an atmosphere much like the Cold War where everyone found themselves, in a way, "choosing a side". Buzan points out, however, that we cannot consider the macro-securitization of the WoT to be durable as of yet, and whether or not the WoT will one day be considered alongside the Cold War as an example of macro-securitization depends on different possible situations, none of which can be predicted. However, what is significant is that we can see how the macro-securitization of the WoT could potentially affect all levels of security, all the way down to the individual if terrorism is securitized in a way that affects policy choices that in turn infringe on liberal values. Perhaps even more interesting is the alternative that is offered by Buzan, in making terrorism a "part of normal politics"[28] which means equating terrorist attacks with that of car accidents or other everyday risks that people are aware of and willing to take. This concept can be considered similar to that of not negotiating with terrorists as it legitimizes their cause. This option, however, is one that, politically, no country could afford. The effects of terrorism on society and the macro-securitization of the WoT have already taken their toll. The idea is interesting, but one that is unlikely to take hold. Buzan acknowledges this and therefore offers three options for securitizing policy on terrorism: *insulation*, where a state prefers measures "hardening the state both against penetration by terrorists and vulnerability of infrastructure to terrorist attack"[29], at the expense of liberal values and economic liberalization, *repression*, is what Buzan calls "the sharp end of the WoT" which is "is about carrying the fight to the terrorists in an attempt to eliminate them by police and/or military action"[30], repression, like insulation, undermines certain core liberal values that are of the utmost importance in democratic societies. Finally, there is *equalizing*, which gets its name from the assumption that the world is inherently unequal, and that terrorism stems from these "inequalities and injustices". Buzan insists on the third option for policy stating that whether or not the assumption that inequality is the root-cause of terrorism, that liberal market economies are not readily equipped to take on this kind of policy. The potential imbalance that this could cause in the short-term could outweigh the success that it might have in the

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[26] Ibid., 2.
[27] Ibid., 5.
[28] Ibid., 20.
[29] Barry Buzan, "The 'War on Terrorism' as the new Macro-Securitization", 20.
[30] Ibid., 20.

long run, this due to the already existing disparities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the works of Barry Buzan can be considered to be a great tool for Security Studies as well as International Relations. Buzan's constructivist lesson to never take information for granted and question what you know is of the utmost importance. His epistemological methodology allows for a freedom that could not be found if knowledge was merely accepted at face value. The new aspects of the security puzzle that are offered by Buzan, such as regional security, societal security and environmental security are helpful tools for a professional or policy maker handling national or international security concerns. A policy maker should be aware that, while military security might still dominate, that the other sectors are still, by and large, present and could bypass military security at any moment. Here, one tends to think of environmental security and the possibility that if global warming and rising sea levels start to impact the lives of citizens and states alike, that they will have no choice but to reassess their security priorities. The hierarchical concept of security that one gains from Buzan is a concept that will infinitely serve that person no matter their domain. While the regional complexes or degrees of sociopolitical cohesion might shift and change, the basic tenants of the model can be reapplied to fit the current international order. Perhaps the most striking contribution that has been addressed in this paper is that of macro-securitization. The concept of macro-securitization's relation to the war on terrorism is one that should be understood, even if one does not agree with all the arguments. The historical reference of the Cold War as a form of macro-securitization makes the concept clear and provides the professional with a solid referent. The possibility of the War on Terrorism becoming a durable macro-securitized issue is something, which would ultimately affect security policy. The spin off effects that could take place from a durable macro-securitization of the WoT could be endless. The possibility that the macro-securitization of the WoT might become a durable issue, and how to counteract possible side effects from the subsequent policy is, therefore, invaluable. Barry Buzan's work is successful in deconstructing the security issue and breaking down each aspect in order to obtain a greater sense of the complexities of security and what is needed to address it. The final product is one that, while complex, shows the importance of the connectedness of the different levels and sectors of security. As Buzan says:

> The 'national' security problem turns out to be a systemic security problem in which individuals, states and the system all play a part, and in which economic, societal and environmental factors are as important as political and military ones. From this integrative perspective, the levels and sectors appear more useful as viewing platforms from which one can observe the problem from different angles, than as self-contained areas for policy or analysis.[31]

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[31] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 368.

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