

The key questions in International Security Studies: the state, politics and epistemology

The beginning of chapter 1 briefly laid out four central questions that have been at the centre of ISS: Whose security should be protected and studied? Should the military be considered the primary sector of security? Should security be concerned exclusively with external threats or also with domestic ones? And, is the only form of security politics one of threats, dangers and emergency? This chapter will examine these questions in further detail and add a fifth: What epistemologies and methodologies should be brought to the study of security?

The majority of writings in ISS do not go to great lengths to discuss their analytical, philosophical, normative and epistemological assumptions, but it is nevertheless important to have a good understanding of these issues. Specific approaches to security always presume answers to these questions, even if they are not explicitly argued. These answers set crucial boundaries not only for how security is defined, but also for what kind of research projects and analyses are carried out. The dominant concept of security in ISS has been the one of 'national'/'international' security, it has been the concept of Realist Strategic Studies and it has been the concept that critical, widening perspectives have had to struggle with. This concept of security defines the state as the referent object, the use of force as the central concern, external threats as the primary ones, the politics of security as engagement with radical dangers and the adoption of emergency measures, and it studies security through positivist, rationalist epistemologies. But where does this concept come from? This chapter is devoted to an account of the historical processes and traditions of political thought that have been significant for producing this concept of security. Having a sense of these processes is important not only as a nice historical backdrop to the concrete perspectives and debates laid out in chapters 4–8, but because these perspectives provide particular resolutions to Classical political and normative problems.

The tendency within ISS to construct its choices in dichotomous terms means that security approaches have tended either to make the state or the

individual the referent object; to construct security as either military or non-military; to draw a rigid line between external and internal security problems; and to see international – and national – politics as either inherently conflictual or as susceptible to non-violence and emancipation. Contemporary debates usually relate to these Classical stances and there is undoubtedly a Classical response to ‘new’ positions. This chapter shows, however, that some of these dichotomies have deeper historical ties and therefore should be seen as connected rather than opposed: there is a link between individual conceptions of security and collective ones; there is a connection between external and internal threats; and an understanding of security politics as a rational account of material capabilities exists in tandem with one based on the need to make decisions in an ‘irrational’ environment.

This chapter starts with a more thorough account of the role of the state in ISS with a particular view to how the sovereign state was formulated in the attempt to provide security domestically and abroad. This understanding of the state still stands at the heart of debates over the referent object in ISS. The second section examines the impact of the French Revolution on questions of societal cohesion and the understanding of the relationship between internal and external as well as military and non-military threats. The third section lays out the constitution of the state and the way in which it presupposes a particular form of politics. The fourth section presents the major epistemological approaches in ISS. The fifth section provides a brief overview of the most frequently mentioned approaches to ISS and plots their responses to the five questions that guide security.

From medieval to sovereign states

It is impossible to understand the way in which debates in ISS have evolved without having a good sense of its key referent object: the state. This is not because there is agreement on what ‘state security’ implies, but because all debates on what security can be and who it should be for evolve around the status of the state.

The concept of national security as it took form after the Second World War draws upon a conception of the state that reaches back hundreds of years. As R. B. J. Walker and other political theorists have laid out, there were two historical transformations that crucially impacted the formation of the modern state. The first transformation was from a medieval to a modern territorial state system, the second from a monarchical form of

government to a national, popular one. The medieval world was organised through overlapping authorities rather than by a sovereign state, which meant that it was governed by two sets of authorities: churches (religious) and empires (political). In contrast to the modern state, which has supreme sovereignty over its territory, medieval authorities had to negotiate – and fight over – their claims to how a particular territory should be run. Overlapping authority was not only a feature of the relations between religious and political powers, but also of how political relations were organised. For large parts of the time, medieval Europe was governed by empires, and the centre of the empire was often too far away to project its authority effectively, at least compared to the modern state. There were multiple levels of political organisation stretching from the centre down to the village, and both authority and allegiances were less clear-cut as regional and local levels of governance supported, but also occasionally fought, higher powers. These overlapping, complex forms of organising territory meant that states or duchies could be part of a larger state or empire, giving some authority to the emperor or leader of the strongest state while still deciding over other issues.

In terms of political identity the medieval system was characterised by what Walker (1990: 10) calls the principle of hierarchical subordination: ‘an understanding of the world as a continuum from low to high, from the many to the few, from God’s creatures to God, from the temporal to the eternal’. All individuals were located at particular levels of society: at the top stood God, and under God, the Pope and the Emperor. The Church owned property and was thus a major economic and political player in its own right, but it also functioned to provide the Emperor with religious legitimacy: if God was at the top of the hierarchy of identities, and the Pope right under him, it was crucial for political authorities to get the Pope’s blessing.

The transformation from the medieval to the modern system was significant in that it reorganised both the key principle of governance (from overlapping authority to territorial sovereignty) and the way in which political identity was understood. A central component in this transformation was the formation of the sovereign territorial state, where the interlocking levels of local, regional and empirical authorities gave way to one sovereign centre and the territorial boundary became the significant dividing line. This transformation was one where political authorities gained ground compared to the religious ones. It meant that the state became more secular and that this secularity was played out in interstate relations as well as domestically. The rise of the sovereign

state was also connected to the emergence of private property (Ruggie, 1983, 1993). In the interstate arena, the birth of the territorial secular state was closely linked to the religious wars that haunted Europe in the wake of the Reformation. The Peace of Westphalia which concluded the Thirty Years' War in 1648 is dated as the founding moment when states decided no longer to interfere in each other's religious choices. One should note, however, that Westphalia was the beginning of a long historical process that through twists and turns moved towards the sovereign territorial state, not a complete break from one day to the next (Osiander, 2001).

As the international system evolved, the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs retained its central status and was seen as the precondition for creating international stability and order. Even if conflicts and wars could not be fully prevented, they could be minimised. Moving into the latter half of the twentieth century, the principle of non-interference was no longer tied to religious differences as in the mid seventeenth century, but to ideological ones, most crucially the one between the capitalist West and the communist East. By this time, domestically, the secular state principle meant that individuals were given the right to practise their (state sanctioned) religion, yet this was a private matter taking place in the private sphere or in churches. Religion was not to be directly involved in the governance of the state. What this implied, argues Michael C. Williams (1998), was not only a shift in which institutions governed society, but also in how politics was understood. Religious conflicts were seen as faith-driven and based on emotional claims to conviction and conscience. These were by their very nature based in immaterial entities and defied logical reasoning and there was therefore no way in which conflict between opposing religious positions could be solved. The clue to early modern Liberal thinkers was therefore to separate private conviction from public deliberations and to argue that the latter should be based on material, observable factors and hence on rational and objective reasoning.

The creation of peaceful relations domestically was also expressed through Hobbes's famous understanding of the sovereign state as the Leviathan providing the solution to the problem of individual security. The individual, argued Hobbes, confronted the problem of the state of nature: in the state of nature there was no authority to secure survival and individuals lived in constant fear of other individuals seeking to steal their possessions. Individuals had to sleep to survive, but sleep also made them supremely vulnerable, hence the need for a sovereign institution

that would guarantee security. The 'contract' between the individual and the state is one where the individual grants the state the right to protect – and define – individual security in exchange for an acknowledgement of its sovereign authority. To Hobbes, argues Walker (1997: 67), the fear of the state of nature was so strong that 'whatever the sovereign does cannot be as bad as the condition of unrestrained competition'. But many others, including central Liberal thinkers such as John Locke, 'have been deeply skeptical of this judgement, and a large proportion of contemporary debate about security continues to oscillate around it' (Walker, 1997: 67). Conceptions of individual and collective/state security are thus inextricably linked: state security implies a particular resolution to the problem of individual security, and individual security must, since the individual is always located in relation to other individuals, assume a collective authority. Security is thus 'a condition both of individuals and of states' and 'a condition, or an objective, that constituted a *relationship* between individuals and states or societies' (Rothschild, 1995: 61). Since much of the widening debate in ISS has evolved around dichotomously opposed individual concepts of security on the one hand and collective-state defined concepts on the other, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that there is no concept that does not, implicitly if not explicitly, comprise the other.

Reading these early modern debates on the individual, the state and interstate relations through the lenses of twenty-first-century debates in ISS, one should note that there is often a move between different levels of analysis. Hobbes's understanding of the Leviathan as the solution to the state of nature was an abstract, speculative thought experiment that attempted to work through different solutions to questions of authority and insecurity. Those challenging the privileged role accorded the state by Hobbes and by Realists in ISS have usually done so on one of two empirical grounds. One line of argument goes that many real existing states are too weak or too failed to be able to provide 'their' individuals with the promised security: think of Somalia, Afghanistan, Haiti or the Democratic Republic of Congo. The other line goes that states, mainly but not only undemocratic ones, often threaten their own citizens not only by making arbitrary, harmful decisions (like going to war or allowing pollution), but also directly by prosecuting them, detaining them or murdering them: think of Burma (Myanmar), Stalin's Soviet Union, Mugabe's Zimbabwe or almost any other dictatorship. From the point of view of these critiques, to grant the state the Hobbesian, Realist privilege is not only to overlook these empirical deficiencies in how concrete states fail to provide security,

but it is, perhaps even worse, to put it in a position where it is immune to criticism and does not have to justify itself. The Hobbesian response is to acknowledge that most states are far from ideal providers of security, but that the alternative to the state is far worse, an argument that shifts the empirical assessment of the state back to the speculative, abstract realm of the state of nature. What is at stake in security debates is thus often that empirical arguments and abstract ones challenge each other and this stacks the arguments in such a way that it is hard to find a resolution or even a common ground from which to debate. It also means, as Walker (1997) has pointed out, that those approaches challenging the state need to come up with alternative abstract answers to the problem of political identity and who is going to provide security in the absence of the sovereign state.

The French Revolution and domestic cohesion

The second historical transformation that is crucial to understanding the conception of the state in ISS is the birth of modern nationalism with the French and American revolutions. The transition from the medieval to the early modern state heralded a significant beginning of the dismantling of a hierarchy of identities, but early modern territorial states were still governed by largely non-democratic rulers. The French and American revolutions were thus a major shift in that the beheading of the monarch, either concretely or symbolically, and the introduction of popular sovereignty, accelerated the disintegration of hierarchies between different categories of people inside the state. Nationalism as a modern ideology heightened the emphasis not just on equality within the state, but also on commonality, such that citizens would see themselves as bound by a deeper sense of identity, community and belonging. The nation became in Benedict Anderson's words an 'imagined community', 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1991: 7) whose members shared a common social, cultural and political identity. This creation of a common historic identity worked to stabilise further the distinction between the national and the international domain. Inside the state, one had similarity, solidarity and progress, whereas the international domain was destined to be ruled by relations of alienation, domination and conflict (Wight, 1966; Walker, 1993). Nationalism also introduced new possibilities for social mobility, particular as it was coupled to a burgeoning capitalist, industrial society (Gellner, 1983). Individuals were not, as in early modernity,

confined by birth to a particular location within societal structures, but could rise beyond the class into which they were born through cunning and hard work.

The fusion of nationalism with the sovereign territorial state had several implications for how security was conceptualised and thus how debates have evolved within ISS. Nationalism was connected to popular sovereignty and eventually democracy, and therefore to the idea that the legitimacy of the sovereign state was based not on divine or monarchical inherent rights, but on the government's ability to rule according to the values, interests and identity of the people. This meant that the simple Hobbesian solution to the problem of security was thrown into question: the argument that the governors should not be questioned because the alternative was the state of nature, was no longer sufficient. If the government did not act according to the interest of its people it should be toppled.

From this followed an important shift in how the relationship between the state and citizens was approached. Put simply, the territorial state was concerned with threats to its territorial security and the ruler of the state with contenders to the throne. Military capabilities and the use of force were central in keeping external enemies at bay – or in conquering new territory – and in defeating domestic threats. The introduction of nationalism and popular rule changes this by making the domestic component of state security not only a matter of force and control but one of legitimacy and societal cohesion. The extent to which society was homogenous and supportive of 'its' government became a central security concern for rulers on two grounds: first, because it impacted the security of their own positions; second because it impacted the security of the state domestically, most crucially in that the absence of cohesion might lead secessionist parts of the state to seek independence or, as in the American Civil War, cause violent ideological conflict. Torn societies would also be more susceptible to fifth-column activities of enemy states. This concern with societal cohesion runs through Classical Realist writings such as those of Kennan (1947: 581), who warned that 'exhibitions of indecision, disunity and internal disintegration within this country have an exhilarating effect on the whole Communist movement', to Huntington's post-Cold War fear of immigration, decaying family values and the 'internal rot' of American society (Huntington, 1996: 303–305). The emphasis on social cohesion also implied a potential broadening of the concept of security beyond the military. Since defence was not only a matter of defending the

territorial border, but also of securing domestic consensus, the internal threats a society might face could, if severe enough, be considered security problems.

The shift to a concern with societal cohesion also implied a change in how territory was considered. The Peace of Westphalia had sought to limit the number of wars through its codification of the principle of non-interference. This, however, did not mean that states did not go to war in the attempt to conquer or defend territories, 'merely' that these wars were not fought on the basis of religious beliefs. Territories were valued for their geopolitical and strategic importance and the material, economic capabilities they generated, while the identities and allegiances of the people inhabiting those territories were given little concern. From the perspective of people of conquered territories this had the positive effect that rulers, especially in large imperial states, often did not interfere much in local cultural and political relations. The advent of nationalism changed this. With its claim that nations had particular identities and that they should rule the territories on which they lived, nationalism sacralised territory (Mayall, 1990). As nationalist movements worked to install a common identity amongst the members of 'their' nations, territories could no longer be shifted around with no concerns for the status of the people and nations who lived there. This made territorial acquisitions less attractive as a hostile population would resist the 'occupier', but it also provided justifications for the political centre to nationalise, coercively if necessary, those on its territory. Although nationalism claimed that each nation had its unique essence, there was far from agreement on which nations were the right ones, who should be ruling whom and who indeed had the right to be in a particular territory. This became particularly outspoken in the social Darwinist beliefs of the nineteenth century, in which more powerful nations gave themselves the right to subjugate – through force or 'civilising colonialism' – less 'advanced' peoples.

For the majority of Cold War ISS, the focus was clearly on external threats, as shown by the *International* in International Security Studies, but this closer scrutiny of the roots of the state in ISS reveals this as somewhat misleading. Realists have privileged the security of the state and have understood security largely through the use of (military) force, but they have also paid attention to a series of other issues and capabilities, including domestic cohesion, that may impact the state's ability to project military force. The reason why the majority of Cold War ISS, at least in the form of Strategic Studies, focused on the external dimension of security was because domestic cohesion and the values to be protected

were largely taken for granted, at least in the Western world. There were, however, also traditionalists such as Kennan pointing to the need to shore up internal weaknesses and dissent in the face of the Soviet threat and there was a good deal of concern in the US in the wake of the Second World War about the domestic cohesion of Western European countries with strong communist parties. Resources were put into keeping the Left out of power in Italy, and Franco was tolerated in Spain. The reason why the internal dimension of security was not emphasised by mainstream approaches to ISS during the Cold War had therefore more to do with the empirical, political context (one overwhelming, nuclear opponent overshadowing all other concerns) than with an inherent trait within the concept of national security. As the Cold War ended and ethnic conflict and civil wars came to the fore, so did questions of domestic stability and cohesion (Posen, 1993; Van Evera, 1994; Kaufmann, 1996). Many widening approaches also spoke directly to the question of societal cohesion, as in the Copenhagen School's concept of societal security (Wæver *et al.*, 1993; Buzan *et al.*, 1998).

Nationalism was also significant in that it opened up several understandings of international security. It claimed in its classical revolutionary form that all men (and later women) were equal as citizens, and that each individual had a set of universal rights. If the state was organised in accordance with these rights and the ideals of democracy, then there would be a move towards a better society within states. The Realist reading held, however, that while progress – economically, politically and culturally – was possible within states, abstaining from setting a common normative/religious standard that the Peace of Westphalia entailed made it impossible internationally (Walker, 1990). In this ideal-type Realist understanding of the international, no durable 'international security' is possible, only temporary accommodations within an essentially conflictual international system. There is no normative or analytical conception of the need to protect the security of other states (unless this improves the security of one's own) or the security of individuals or groups located within other states (again, unless this can be used to improve one's own strategic position).

But this Realist conception of state sovereignty and national security has not been uncontested. Looking at the claims to universal rights that the French and American revolutions entailed, the universal-particular tension can be argued in a way that emphasises the commonality between all human beings, not only the ones with whom one shares a nation. This implies the possibility of a referent object other than the state for

one's own nation, to the extent that nation and state are not aligned, but also of 'individual security' and 'group/societal security', where others are made insecure by their own states. This understanding of the universality of individual rights also allows for a reading of the international as less conflictual than in Realism. This Idealist tradition of thought, which continues through Peace Research up to present Critical Security Studies, argues that if individuals are granted the possibilities of security, freedom and self-expression, then that will lead to the absence of violent conflict, not only within, but also between communities: 'global' or 'world' security is thus deemed possible. In this respect, we have a normative commitment that reaches beyond one's own state or fellow citizens and the beginning of the debates over the referent object of security: whether the international should be approached as a question of order or whether it is possible to have an international concept of justice (Bull, 1977).

The conception of politics in ISS

The Peace of Westphalia was significant for how it sought to take religious emotion out of politics, both between and within states. As Williams (1998: 215) has argued, there was a Liberal, rationalist philosophy at work which held that conflicts were more easily handled if understood in material rather than ideational (religious) terms. 'Defining threats in *material* terms (like all other phenomena) was held to allow a reasoned discourse surrounding them. To place the discourse of war and peace within the bounds of *physical* threat and the capacity for it was a *pacifying* move' (Williams, 1998: 215; see also Toulmin, 1990). Tracing this up to contemporary debates on security shows that the inclination of traditional ISS approaches to adopt positivist epistemologies and methodologies, rooted in material and empirically verifiable factors, has longer and thoroughly political, normative roots (Deudney, 2007). It implies that the assumptions about whether the state is a rational actor *and* the epistemologies that should be adopted in the study of security are linked to one another.

Clearly, the question of whether the state is a rational actor or not has major consequences for security theories: since 'international security' is at the most general level about the threats states (or other political entities) face and the responses they can and should adopt to defend themselves, it makes a huge difference what kind of actors those states are. If states are rational, it is possible to predict their behaviour – and thus define appropriate security policies – to a much greater extent than if they are not. However, exactly what it means to be 'rational' is itself a contested issue in ISS. Critics argue that to presume a rational actor is to claim that the state

is and should be acting according to Realist principles. These, however, are neither objective, nor analytically or politically neutral. Theories of security are trying to explain the behaviour of states, while they themselves may have an impact on what they seek to explain. At its most basic, many Classical Realists see their analysis as a disposition to understand politics in the terms in which political actors understand themselves, and this points towards a mainly historical and empirical form of analysis. But in the period since the Second World War, IR Realism, particularly in America, took on increasingly theoretical forms, first in the supposedly timeless principles of power politics set out by Carr and Morgenthau, and later in the more formalised Neorealism of Waltz. This development paralleled that of ISS, and to the extent that ISS is, as we characterised it above, 'the specialist military-technical wing of the Realist approach to IR', it was these theoretical forms to which ISS mainly related. In its theoretical forms, Realism imposes assumptions on reality and, to the extent that it is influential, may therefore create the reality it assumes.

Rationality assumptions are intertwined with levels of analysis decisions. Structural theories, most prominently Neorealism, assume a general conception of the state that applies throughout the international system. This does not mean that each and every state will always behave rationally, but that those who do not will be punished by the structure, and will eventually either fall by the wayside or learn how to behave. Structural theories differ from those explanations that can be found at the level of foreign policy-making or other domestic-factor issues. Here, there is much greater room for asking whether states are rational or not. An important Cold War deterrence debate evolved, for example, around whether the rationality assumption held up. Could the Communist, or indeed the American, leadership be presumed to act 'rationally' in the face of nuclear escalation or would they follow a different logic or no decipherable logic at all? The problem was that deterrence logic required a certain modicum of rationality and predictability, but that there was no sure way of knowing whether such logic existed beforehand, or would continue to exist under the extreme conditions of nuclear war. The question of rationality has arisen again after 9/11, as we shall see in chapter 8.

Yet, while rational assumptions are central to many mainstream ISS theories, there is simultaneously a tension between them and the other side of 'national security' logic which is concerned with the drama, urgency and exception in security. The latter tradition has more recently been identified with Carl Schmitt, but it resonates with some of the harder elements of Realism as well. The central elements of this tradition are,

argue Williams (2003) and Huysmans (2006b: 124–144), that security is about making exceptional decisions, it is about that point of danger where the distinction between Self and Other is made absolutely clear. These decisions may be influenced by material capabilities – as laid out in the account of the move to a rational security politics – but they are not rational in the sense that those who make decisions have complete information, nor are decision-makers able to fully predict what the consequences of actions and non-actions will be. This underscores the decisionist element in security politics, and the understanding of the political as a field into which policy-makers – and others – must act forcefully even under stress and without perfect information.

Epistemology and security debates

The historical processes that have underpinned the constitution of the modern concept of security have, as laid out above, also had consequences for how security should be studied. Going all the way back to Westphalia, the attempt to make security a material and rational field of deliberation was one that connected the attempt to pacify interstate relations and how knowledge was defined. There is, in other words, as argued by Williams (1998), a clear connection between the concept of security and epistemology.

Epistemology concerns the principles and guidelines for how knowledge can be acquired, and thus, in the context of ISS, the question of how one should study security. ISS was not during the Cold War much concerned with epistemological issues, although there were divisions spilling over from ‘traditionalist’ vs. ‘behaviouralist’ debates about IR theory. This, however, changed to some extent in the late 1980s and 1990s as wider debates on epistemology within the social sciences flowed first into IR and from there into ISS. Since epistemology is both a part of the Classical foundation of security and of the widening debates of the past twenty years, it is useful to have some idea of how it has been discussed.

The first epistemological distinction central to ISS is the one between objective, subjective and discursive conceptions of security. The definition of objective and subjective security was laid out by one of the early classic texts of ISS, ‘National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol’, by Wolfers (1952). Wolfers (1952: 485) argued that ‘security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked’. It was, continued Wolfers, never possible to measure security ‘objectively’ in that subjective evaluations played an inevitable part in states’ assessments. Yet, ‘[w]ith

hindsight it is sometimes possible to tell exactly how far they deviated from a rational reaction to the actual or objective state of danger existing at the time' (Wolfers, 1952: 485). Wolfers's formulation illustrates well the tension between an objective conception of security (the absence/presence of concrete threats) and a subjective one (the feeling of being threatened or not). This tension has run through ISS during the Cold War and after, where Strategic Studies focused largely on assessing supposedly objective security threats. Objective conceptions of security usually, but not always, define security in material terms: the probability of states posing a threat or being able to deter enemies is based on their material capabilities.

Subjective approaches to security emphasise the importance of history and norms, of the psychologies of fear and (mis)perceptions, and of the relational contexts (friends, rivals, neutrals, enemies) within which threats are framed. States, like people, can reside anywhere on a spectrum from paranoid (seeing threats where there are none), through rational (assessing threats correctly), to complacent (not seeing, or not caring about, actual threats). These approaches argue that at a minimum the traditional focus on material military capabilities should be supplemented with non-material factors such as the culture of the armed forces, the level of national cohesion or the norms about the legitimate use of, for instance, chemical weapons or assassinations (Johnston, 1995; Kier, 1995; W. Thomas, 2000; Tannenwald, 2005). These studies argue that both material and ideational factors impact the actual (military) resources that states have at their disposal. More broadly, the Liberal security dilemma occurs because states misperceive each other's intentions: each state is merely striving to be defensively secure, but in doing so others falsely perceive it as being threatening. To move, as did Walt, from a balance of power to a balance of threat is itself to acknowledge the importance of intersubjective processes (Walt, 1987). Yet, while a significant number of studies in ISS have integrated subjective conceptions of security, primarily through acknowledging perceptions (Jervis, 1976), it is worth noting that this conception is still tied to the objective one. The subjective understanding of security can be a more or less accurate reflection of objective security as measured by material capabilities or objective threats. Subjective approaches do not, in other words, dispense with an objective definition of security, but contrast it with the 'filter' of the subjective.

Discursive approaches, in contrast, argue that security cannot be defined in objective terms, and hence both the objective and subjective conceptions are misleading. Security is, argues the Copenhagen School, a speech act and 'by saying "security," a state representative declares an emergency condition, thus claiming a right to use whatever means

Table 2.1. *Epistemological distinctions*

Objective conceptions	Subjective conceptions	Discursive conceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The absence/presence of concrete threats - Usually defines security in relative material terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The feeling of being threatened or not - Emphasises social context, history and the psychologies of fear and (mis)perceptions - Maintains an objective reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security cannot be defined in objective terms - Security is a speech act - Focuses on the intersubjective process through which 'threats' manifest themselves as security problems on the political agenda

are necessary to block a threatening development' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 21; see also Wæver, 1995). What is central to security analysis is thus understanding the process through which particular 'threats' manifest themselves as security problems on the political agenda. 'Threats' in that sense are 'objective' when they are accepted by significant political actors, not because they have an inherent threatening status. Security is, in short, a self-referential practice (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 24). This does not imply that anything can become 'security', first, because not all political issues can be given the priority of 'security importance' at the same time, and second, because the discursive construction of 'security threats' will be influenced by a state's history, its geographical and structural position, and the (discursive) reactions it generates from others, internationally and domestically. For security speech acts to be successful, they also need to convince their relevant audiences.

The objective, subjective and discursive conceptions are summed up in Table 2.1, and they concern the status that security has, how it can be identified and studied. Another key epistemological distinction addresses the principles that should be adopted for analysing security. Here, as in IR in general, the major distinction runs between scientific and positivist approaches on the one hand, and philosophical, sociological and constitutive ones on the other. Substantially, the debate between the two approaches concerns the extent to which social science should mirror the hard sciences, that is should seek to establish causal theories of (state) behaviour. Causal theories require that variables are identified and analytically and temporally separated, so that if X causes Y, then Y has to happen if X occurs, and if X does not happen then Y must not occur

either (King *et al.*, 1994). Since IR and ISS are not like a laboratory, they can only approximate the positivist research programmes of Chemistry or Physics, yet, argue positivists, one should strive to concord with positivist principles to the greatest extent possible. Post-positivists, on the other hand, insist that many of the problems with which the social sciences engage, including the one of security, are better dealt with through the use of non-positivist theories. The process through which threats are identified and given meaning is, for instance, better understood through an analysis of identity building and institutional transformation that does not lend itself to causality or quantification.

Most Realist and Liberalist approaches have followed the positivist route, combining in what Keohane coined in 1988 as 'rationalism', while Critical Constructivists, Poststructuralists and most Feminists have opted for a post-positivist, 'reflectivist' approach (Keohane, 1988). But as with the objective, subjective and discursive conceptions, one should be aware that there are many who fall outside these neatly arranged camps. Large parts of ISS during the Cold War were more concerned with the empirical evolution of the arms race and the superpower relationship than with establishing fully fledged theories. Classical Realists and Liberals were writing before the turn to positivism gained force, and one does not find causal research programmes in the seminal articles by Kennan (1947), Herz (1950) or Wolfers (1952). Yet although consciousness of epistemology is a fairly recent arrival in ISS, its presence and consequences have been influential from the beginning.

Mapping concepts of security

The first two chapters have already mentioned the labels of a number of approaches to ISS. Since we will be making much use of these labels in what follows, we conclude this chapter by linking these and their concepts of security to the discussions above. Readers might find it useful to have both a glossary of terms, and a quick guide to the similarities and differences of the various approaches. We also indicate the geographical focus of each approach, a theme we develop as we unfold the evolution of ISS in chapters 4 to 8.

- *Conventional Constructivism* – presents a counterpoint to materialist analyses by highlighting the importance of ideational factors, that is culture, beliefs, norms, ideas and identity. Usually centred on analysing state behaviour, includes positivist as well as post-positivist epistemologies and is primarily located within the US.

- *Critical Constructivism* – looks to other collectivities than the state, yet mostly concerned with military security. Adopts narrative and sociological post-positivist methodologies. Its origins are predominantly in the US, but it has since the late 1990s gained a strong standing in Europe.
- *The Copenhagen School* – partly about widening the threats and referent objects, especially societal/identity security, partly about paying more attention to the regional level, but mainly about focusing on securitisation (the social processes by which groups of people construct something as a threat), thus offering a Constructivist counterpoint to the materialist threat analysis of traditional Strategic Studies. Particularly strong in Scandinavia and Britain, and influential in most of Europe.
- *Critical Security Studies* – similar to Peace Research in its normative aims, especially regarding the emphasis on human security over state security, but using mainly post-positivist methodology. A branch of Critical Theory in IR generally, with emancipation as a key concept. Particularly strong in Britain.
- *Feminist Security Studies* – covers a variety of approaches ranging from Peace Research to Poststructuralism. Holds that women support the security policies of states through military as well as non-military functions, and that they face a series of gender-specific security problems that are never acknowledged within a state-centric conception of security. Points to the role that hegemonic masculinity plays in sustaining militaristic security policies. Originated in the mid-1980s in the US and Britain and has grown to have a global presence.
- *Human Security* – closely related to Peace Research and Critical Security Studies. Dedicated to the view that human beings should be the primary referent object of security, and therefore that ISS should include issues of poverty, underdevelopment, hunger and other assaults on human integrity and potential. Seeks to merge the agendas of ISS and Development Studies. Human Security has academic presence across the West and Japan and has been embraced by the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and Canadian, Norwegian and Japanese governments.
- *Peace Research* – the Classical normative counterpoint to Strategic Studies, looking to reduce or eliminate the use of force in international relations, to highlight and critique the dangers in the (especially nuclear) strategic debate, and to give standing to individual security alongside, or sometimes against, state (national) security. Overlaps with Strategic Studies in its interest in arms control and disarmament, and arms racing,

and in some branches also in the use of quantitative and game-theoretic methods. Peace Research became quite strongly institutionalised in the Scandinavian countries, Germany and Japan, and to a lesser extent in Britain and, with different theoretical orientations, the US.

- *Post-colonial Security Studies* – points to the Western-centrism of ISS and argues that the study of the non-Western world requires security theories that incorporate colonial history as well as the attention to the specific state formations in the Third World. As the First and Third World are connected, Post-colonial Security Studies argues that it provides insight into the dynamics of both the First and the Third Worlds. Usually critical of state-centrism and has been developed by Western as well as non-Western scholars.
- *Poststructuralist Security Studies* – adopts the concept of discourse rather than ideas, argues that state sovereignty and security are products of political practices. Critical of how state-centrism constrains the possibilities for other referent objects of security, but refuses the traditional Peace Research turn to individual security. Began in North America in the mid-1980s, but from the early 1990s stronger in Europe.
- *Strategic Studies* – the Classical, traditionalist literature that defines the subject in political–military terms and focuses on military dynamics. This includes its own sub-literatures, such as those on war, nuclear proliferation, deterrence theory, arms racing, arms control, etc. Strongly materialist in approach with a tendency to take a state-centric normative position as given rather than as a subject of discussion. Generally strong across the West, but particularly in the US and Britain, and with a separate tradition in France.
- *(Neo)Realism* – Realist approaches generally have strong links to Strategic Studies in that they underpin its essentially state-centric, materialist, power-political and conflictual (and thus ‘objective’) assumptions about the nature of international relations. Neorealist concepts, most notably polarity (Waltz, 1979), played a big role in thinking about nuclear deterrence, arms control and arms racing. Mainstream in the US, influential, but much more contested, in Europe.

Table 2.2. maps the way in which the ISS approaches above answer the five questions laid out in this chapter.

Table 2.2. *ISS perspectives in relation to the five questions*

ISS perspective	Referent object	Internal/external	Sectors	Views of security politics	Epistemology
Strategic Studies	The state	Primarily external	Military (use of force)	Realist	Positivist (from quite empirical to formal modelling)
Neo(realism)	The state	Primarily external	Military–political	Realist	Rationalist
Poststructuralist	Collective–individual	Both (constitution of boundaries)	All	Change of Realism possible, but not utopian/Idealist	Deconstructivist and discursive
Security Studies	States and collectivities	Both	All	Change of Western dominance possible, but difficult to accomplish	Critical Theory, deconstructivist, historical sociology
Post-colonial Security Studies				Transformation possible	Positivist (from quantitative to Marxist materialists)
Peace Research	State, societies, individuals	Both	All (negative: predominantly military)		
Human Security	The individual	Primarily internal	All	Transformative	Mostly highly empirical or soft-constructivist
Feminist Security Studies	Individual, women	Both	All	Mostly transformative	From quantitative to Poststructuralist
Critical Security Studies	Individual	Both	All	Transformative (emancipation)	Critical Theory (hermeneutics)
The Copenhagen School	Collectivities and the environment	Both	All	Neutral	Speech act analysis
Conventional Constructivism	The state	External	Military	Transformation possible	Soft-positivist
Critical Constructivism	Collectivities	Mostly external	Military	Transformation possible	Narrative and sociological