

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY AND SECURITY

Nicoleta LAȘAN

“Vasile Goldiș” Western University of Arad

Faculty of Humanities, Politics and Administrative Sciences, Arad

Tel: 0040-257-282324 E-mail: nicoclau2000@yahoo.com

Abstract

Security has been and will be an essential preoccupation of state leaders, at least until the division of the international system in states remains in place. Analyzing the international relations theory, it becomes obvious that there is no universal accepted definition of security. Each international relations theory/approach uses and promotes its own definition of security. The paper aims to present and analyze the ways in which the main theories of international relations have understood to define security. Besides the theories that dominate international relations, realism and liberalism, other theories such as socio-constructivism, the Copenhagen School, feminist approaches, critical theories and postmodernist approaches are taken into account.

Keywords: security, realism, liberalism, socio-constructivism

NEOREALISM / NEOLIBERALISM AND SECURITY

Neo-realism is the revised version of realism, and in spite of the evolutions from the international relations that were thought to lead to the demise of realism as main theory of international relations, this approach continues to dominate the field. The classical vision upon security overlaps with the realist vision upon security, and the starting point of the realist theory is the nature of the international system, which is anarchic, meaning that at the level of the international system there is no executive authority superior to the state to regulate its behavior (Miroiu, Soare, 2006, 103). As such, states, as the main actors in international relations, have the task to ensure on their own their survival at the international level through a constant accumulation of power.

The main representative of realism is Hans Morgenthau, who in *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace* presents the six main principals of political realism, as it follows:

- a. International politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature;
- b. The state interest is defined in terms of power;
- c. The interest defined in terms of power is an objective category, universally valid, but without a fix and final meaning;
- d. The universal moral cannot be applied to the actions of national states in their abstract form, but need to be filtered taking into account the concrete circumstances of space and time;

- e. There needs to be done a clear distinction between the moral aspirations at some time of one nation and moral laws;
- f. The principles of realism maintain the autonomy of the political sphere from all the other spheres that need to be subordinated to it (Morgenthau, 2006, 4-15).

Realism continued to dominate the security studies in the contemporary period, in the modern form of neorealism. According to this theory, the end of the Cold War did not lead to a change of the concept of security. Kenneth Waltz, the main representative of realism, underlies in its main work, *The International Political Theory*, the importance of the structure of the international system, and of their security (Waltz, 2006). The end of the Cold War did not lead to a change of this structure, which is anarchy, while the world is still one of constant competition between states.

There are some crucial differences, as noticed by Steven Lamy in his analysis, between the neorealism of Waltz and its predecessor, the classical realism of Morgenthau. Firstly, realism is an inductive theory, which explains the international politics through the analysis of interactions and actions of states in the international system, while for neorealism the structure of the international system, the anarchy, is the one that determines the options of states for their external policy. Secondly, if in classical realism power is in itself an objective, in neorealism power represents not only an objective but also a mean.

The third difference refers to the way in which states react to the state of anarchy at the international level. As such, for realists anarchy is a condition of the system, and states react to this state depending on their size, location, domestic power, and leader capacities, while for neorealists, anarchy defines the system, constrains the actions of all states in an equal measure (Lamy, 2005, 208-9). Despite these differences and despite the existence of more types of realism, there are some topics which remain constant, such as: the assumption according to which states are the main actors in international relations and their central preoccupation is to ensure their own security (Jervis, 1998, 980).

Having in mind the changes that took place at the international level, it is important to mention also some aspects related to the more and more encountered phenomenon of international cooperation. If neoliberals, as we shall see, emphasize the importance of international organizations in limiting the state of anarchy at the international level and consequently the incidence of war, for neorealists cooperation through international organizations is on the second place (Niou, 1991, 481). War is a constant state at the international level, while cooperation, although not impossible, is temporary because state are always concerned about the relative and not the absolute gains. This means that the states will choose not to cooperate when there is a possibility for another state to obtain more in relative terms, as this could hurt their own security.

John Baylis also noticed that there is a difference in what regards the importance of international organizations and cooperation between pessimist neorealists, which consider that the motives that make cooperation difficult are the

risk of being cheated and the concern for relative gains, and the optimist neorealists, in the opinion of which cooperation is not only possible but could also have an important role in maintaining the security of a state (Baylis, 2008, 497-98). Moreover, the pessimist do not consider that international organizations could have a role in preventing war, since they are the creation of states, while optimists consider that through international cooperation there can be created and maintained the international security (for more details on offensive and defensive realism see Dîrdală, 2006, 127-138).

In what regards the influence that globalization could have upon states, realists consider that these continue to be the most important actors, states being the only ones capable to manage the effects of globalization, although they recognize that up to a certain level the influence of states was reduced by transnational movements (Lamy, 2005, 218). There are also criticisms expressed towards the realist theory, among which: the lack of a definition of security, the refusal of realists to extend the concept towards other fields on the reason that any extension would make the concept incoherent (Krause, 1996, 230), and the impossibility to explain the role of non-state actors in ensuring security.

On the other side, neoliberalism, the second theory of international relations as importance, is the successor of liberalism. For liberals, international peace and security can be ensured through international law, international organizations, political integration and democratization. Neoliberalism starts from the assumption that there is cooperation between states at the international level, through institutions. Furthermore, the institutions are defined by Robert Keohane, one of the most prominent representatives of neoliberalism, as “persistent and connected set of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” (Keohane, 1989, 3).

One of the main ideas of neoliberalism can be summarized as being: anarchy is the structure that characterizes the international system, but this is limited by cooperation through international institutions. According to this theory, states are the main actors at the international level, but not the only ones, as the intergovernmental organizations as well as non-state actors complete this image, while power remains the main concern of state but this does not mean that states always search for power (Dîrdală, 2006, 141).

Regarding the debate between the two main theories of international relations, neorealism and neoliberalism, it is important to emphasize that while neorealism concentrates on war and security problems, neoliberalism analyzes issues such as cooperation, economic relations between states and international politics. The institutions have an important role in the neoliberal vision in ensuring international security in comparison with neorealists, and, for neoliberals institutions can be represented by formal as well as informal arrangements between states. Neoliberals consider that states have common interests and as such, they can cooperate. From this perspective, important for states are the absolute and not the relative gains, in contrast with the neorealist view. According to neoliberals, the

international institutions offer advantages such as providing information, reducing the costs of transactions, credible arrangements. These cannot limit the incidence of war but can contribute to the raise of the level of cooperation between states.

There are still common points between the two theories, the neorealism and neoliberalism. Firstly, both consider the international system as being anarchic, and both consider that the institutional structure, cooperation and coordination in international relations are endogenous, meaning that they are products of the actions of the system's constituent parts. Secondly, both theories consider states as being unitary actors and as being the main constituent parts of the international system. Finally, states are considered by both theories to be rational actors that act strategically in international relations (Niou, 1991, 483).

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND SECURITY

Socio-constructivism emerged at the beginning of the 90s, once the international relations analysts realized that the dominant theories of neorealism and neoliberalism cannot explain the changes at the international level, such as the end of the Cold War. From a general point of view, it can be appreciated that socio-constructivism is not a theory but an approach which is based in the idea that international relations are socially constructed (Karacasulu, Uzgoren, 2007, 29). The term constructivism was introduced in international relations in 1989 by Nicholas Onuf, but lately this approach was developed mainly by Alexander Wendt. Nowadays, socio-constructivism is a largely accepted approach. Its popularity is a consequence of the following factors: the end of the Cold War, the importance of identity problems in contemporary international relations, the disappointment on big theories of international relations and the importance attributed to the material issues and hard security issues in international relations (Todorean, Apahideanu, 2006, 156).

There are more types of socio-constructivist approaches in international relations. The specialty literature makes a distinction between conventional and critical socio-constructivism, between interpretative and positivist socio-constructivism, but also a classification of socio-constructivists according to the level of analysis taken into account. Despite these differences, there are some assumptions that stay at the basis of all socio-constructivist works, and these are:

1. Social factors influence human interaction;
2. Social structures help at constituting the interests and identities of actors;
3. The agents and structures mutually constitute each other (Frederking, 2003, 364).

In what regards security, the main idea of socio-constructivists is that security is not an objective condition, that threats to security do not represent only an issue of correct perception of more material forces, and that the object of security is not stable or unchanging (Krause, 1996, 242). In other words, socio-constructivists do not see security as being something that exists somewhere and waits to be discovered and analyzed by analysts and theoreticians, but see security

as being constructed and re-constructed through intersubjective human understandings (Smith, 2002, 7). Surely, the socio-constructivist approaches extend and deepen the concept of security, and in this sense we cannot but mention some important differences named in the literature between the vision of security common to socio-constructivists and the security approach in the rationalist theories.

1. Constructivists prefer a social ontology in comparison with the rationalism favored by the individualist ontology. Consequently, socio-constructivism does not regard international relations from the perspective of the international structure of power, but is instead concerned by the impact that norms, identities, and strategic cultures have upon international security.
2. The rational understanding of power is narrow and usually materialist. On the other side, constructivists consider socially constructed knowledge as being a factor of power that affects the states' interests and identities.
3. Constructivists consider that states try to make what is adequate in a certain situation and not what is rational in order to maximize their benefits.
4. While for realists the interests are pre-determined and fixed, constructivists consider that the actors' interests are redefined during interaction.
5. Rationalists emphasize the regulatory rules that govern the existent activities and behavior, while constructivists underlined the importance of constitutive rules that create new actors, interest and types of actions.
6. For constructivists, security and the threats to security are neither objective nor fixed, but socially constructed.
7. Anarchy, sovereignty, and identities are socially constructed and can be modified in time, while the main theories of international relations consider these terms as being perennial (Karacasulu, Uzgoren, 2007, 37-8).

The identities and interests that rationalists take as fixed and which they consider as resulting in the international politics that we see today, are not fixed or given in fact, but are created by us. Since we created them, we are also capable of changing them, although this process can be a difficult one as we have internalized the world as it is.

Despite the advantages offered by socio-constructivism in what regards the study of security, we cannot but mention also some weak points of this new approach in international relations. As such, Ted Hopf considers that the main weaknesses of socio-constructivism are: the impossibility for a cultural theory to replace a theory of politics and the lack of specificity concerning some terms used by this approach, among which norms and values, which lead to the absence of a causal theory of identity (Hopf, 1998, 196-8). Olivia Todorean emphasizes other critics towards this approach: the lack of unity and coherence of socio-constructivism due to its wish to become a middle ground between rationalist and reflectivist approaches in international relations, its excessive methodological diversity and the incipient state in the development of this approach (Todorean, 2006, 162).

OTHER THEORIES/APPROACHES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY

Marxism, as theory of international relations comprises a series of approaches, from the imperialism of Lenin to the dependency theory of Raul Prebisch, and the system theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. The common elements of all Marxist theories can be summarized as being: holistic thinking, materialist vision upon history, the conflict between classes, the idea that classes are the main actors in international relations and not the nation states (Ungureanu, 2006, 115-6). Regarding security, Marxists consider that all the international events, either wars, treaties or international aid actions, are determined by the structure of global capitalism (Hobden, Wyn Jones, 2005, 227).

Also in the context of socio-constructivism we have to take into account the vision of the representatives of the Copenhagen School regarding security. The Copenhagen School has its roots in the work of Barry Buzan entitled *People, States and Fear: The Problem of National Security in International Relations*, published for the first time in 1983. The Copenhagen School agrees with the other approaches that extend the concept of security beyond the military classical field so as to include new objects of reference for security, Barry Buzan identifying in 1983 five domains of security: military, political, economic, social and environmental.

As confessed by Buzan himself, the Copenhagen School constructs a more radical vision of security studies by exploring the threats to the reference objects and securitization of these threats, which are non-military as well as military (Buzan, 1997, 13). Any problem can become an issue of security when leaders start talking about it in terms of existential threat to some valuable reference objects.

The Copenhagen School puts a special emphasis on the social aspects of security and on the independent identity and the functional integrity of states. This school of thought considers the difference between state and society as being the starting point for restructuring security studies, so as for the duality of the concept of security to be accepted: a combination of state security, concerned with sovereignty, and of societal security, concerned with identity (Goetschel, 2000, 226). At the same time, in the opinion of the representatives of this theoretical approach the role of state in ensuring security will decrease while the international cooperation is useful because national securities are interdependent, and through cooperation we get to mature anarchy as structure of the international system.

If the Copenhagen School focuses on societal studies, the critical studies emphasize the security of the individual. The critical security studies focus on the way in which the existent relations and institutions emerged and what can be done to change them (Baylis, 2005, 313). According to this approach of international relations, a change from the centre of analysis state to the center of analysis individual should take place, as states are mostly not a solution to the problem but a part of the problem. Moreover, from the perspective of this theory, security can best be ensured through emancipation, understood as liberty of the individuals and of all types of groups.

Although critical studies and socio-constructivism share some assumptions related to the actors of international relations, the changing nature of world politics, the importance of intersubjective understandings, mutually constituency of agents and structures, there are also differences between these approaches, as noticed also by Ted Hopf (Hopf, 1998, 182-5), and these are:

- socio-constructivism is more conventional in methodology and epistemology in comparison with critical studies;
- socio-constructivism wishes to discover reproductive social identities and practices and to offer an explanation for the way in which identities imply some actions, while critical studies wish to bring to surface these identities, not to articulate their effects, but to analyze the way in which people come to believe in a single version of truth;
- socio-constructivists maintain a difference between actors and observers while in critical study this separation does not take place;
- socio-constructivists offer a cognitive version upon identity, while critical theoreticians are more inclined to consider that alienation determines the need for identity;
- finally, critical theoreticians, in comparison with socio-constructivists, are more interested in power relations and try to bring to the surface the power relations, taking into account that power is exercised in each social exchange.

Feminist approaches have entered on the arena of international relations at the end of the last century, and have come to include more approaches. In the opinion of some authors, there are four types of feminist approaches in international relations, namely the standpoint feminist theory, liberal feminism, post-modern feminism and marxist feminism (Smith, 2002, 8), while other authors would add two more types of feminism: critical theory feminism and constructivist feminism (Todorean, 2006, 165-77). The common idea of all these approaches is that international relations are strongly affected by gender in their consequences but also in the forms of identification and subjectivities that they constitute, and still the discipline does not see that it is affected by gender. In other words, security was written and practiced from the male point of view, but a female point of view would only enrich the security studies and make the world more peaceful.

Post-modernist security studies underline the role of identity, discourse and narration in the analysis of security. As in the case of critical studies, the main reference object should not be the state, but non-state actors, from individuals to cultural and ethnic groups, regional blocs, nongovernmental organizations, including multinational corporations and the security of individuals is clearly superior to that of the state (Sarcinski, 2005, 11). The aim of the theoreticians included in this category is to replace the realist discourse and thinking, because there cannot be only one reality, the realist reality, and to introduce a new thinking based on cooperation norms, so as for the world to become more peaceful.

CONCLUSION

Despite the evolutions on the international arena and although new international relations approaches have emerged in the last decades, realism continues to dominate the security studies in the contemporary period, in the modern form of neorealism. According to this theory, the end of the Cold War did not lead to a change of the concept of security. On the other side, neoliberalism, the second theory of international relations as importance, is the successor of liberalism. For liberals, international peace and security can be ensured through international law, international organizations, political integration and democratization.

The dominance of systemic theories in the field of international relations did not impede the emergence of approaches that have as an aim not to solve the problems but to understand them, to analyze the way in which they appeared and which put the accent on the role of common knowledge and understanding of security. Moreover, the center of analysis for the new international relations approaches seems to be changing from the state to the individual. The state security is important but even more important is the security of the individual. Although these new approaches have come a long way in the last decades, more time is needed for them to replace realism as a main theory of international relations, that is if they will succeed in this venture ever.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BAYLIS, John, *International and Global Security in the Post-Cold War Era*, in *The Globalization of World Politics* edited by John BAYLIS and Steven SMITH, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 297-324.
2. BAYLIS, John, *The Concept of Security in International Relations*, in *Globalization and Environment Challenges*, edited by H.G. BRAUCH, U. SPRING, C. MESJASZ, J. GRIN, P. DUNAY, N.C. BEHERA, B. CHOUROU, P. KAMERI-MBOTE, P.H. LIOTTA, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, Berlin, 2008, pp. 495-502.
3. BUZAN, Barry, *Rethinking Security after the Cold War*, in *Cooperation and Conflict*, No. 32 (1997), pp. 5–18.
4. DÎRDALĂ, Lucian-Dumitru, *Neoliberalismul*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 139-154.
5. DÎRDALĂ, Lucian-Dumitru, *Neorealismul*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 127-138.

6. FREDERKING, Brian, *Constructing Post-Cold War Collective Security*, in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (2003), pp. 363-378.
7. GOETSCHER, Laurent, *Globalisation and Security: the Challenge of Collective Action in a Political Fragmented World*, in *Global Society*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2000), pp. 259-277.
8. HOBDEN, Stephen; Richard WYN JONES, *Marxist Theories of International Relations*, in *The Globalization of World Politics* edited by John BAYLIS and Steven SMITH, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 225-250.
9. HOPF, Ted, *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, in *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1998), pp. 171-200.
10. JERVIS, Robert, *Realism in the Study of World Politics*, in *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1998), pp. 971-991.
11. KARACASULU, Nilufer; Elif UZGOREN, *Explaining Social Constructivist Contributions to Security Studies*, in *Perception* (Summer-Fall 2007), pp. 27-48.
12. KEOHANE, Robert, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1989.
13. KRAUSE, Keith, *Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods*, in *Mershon International Studies Review*, No. 40 (1996), pp. 229-254.
14. LAMY, Steven L., *Contemporary Mainstream Approaches: Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism*, in *The Globalization of World Politics* edited by John BAYLIS and Steven SMITH, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 205-224.
15. MIROIU, Andrei; Simona SOARE, *Realismul*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 209-221.
16. MORGENTHAU, Hans J., *Politics among nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th edition, Mc-Graw Higher Education, Boston, 2006.
17. NIOU, Emerson M.S., *Realism versus Neoliberalism: A Formulation*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1991), pp. 481-511.
18. SARCINSKI, Alexandra, *Dimensiunile nonmilitare ale securității*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, 2005.
19. SMITH, Steve, *The Concept of Security in a Globalized World*. Paper presented at the conference organized at Otago University, June 2002.
20. TODERAN, Olivia, *Constructivismul în relațiile internaționale*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 155-163.

21. TODEREAN, Olivia, *Feminismul în relațiile internaționale*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 165-177.
22. TODEREAN, Olivia; Ionuț APAHIDEANU, *Școala engleză a relațiilor internaționale*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 155-163.
23. UNGUREANU, Radu-Sebastian, *Teorii marxiste ale relațiilor internaționale*, in *Manual de relații internaționale (Handbook of International Relations)* edited by Andrei MIROIU and Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU, Polirom, București, 2006, pp. 115-126.
24. WALTZ, Kenneth, *Teoria Politicii Internaționale (Theory of International Politics)*, Romanian version. trans. Nicoleta Mihailescu, Polirom, București, 2006.