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Published in:
Security Studies

Publication date:
2008

Citation for published version (APA):
Booth, K., & Wheeler, N. (2008). Rethinking the Security Dilemma. In P. D. Williams (Ed.), *Security Studies: An Introduction* (pp. 131-150). Taylor & Francis. http://hdl.handle.net/2160/1924

Rethinking the Security Dilemma

Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler

CONTENTS

Abstract

The concept of the security dilemma engages with the existential uncertainty that lies in all human relations, and especially those taking place in the arena of international politics. The chapter argues that the security dilemma is a more fundamental concept for security studies than even war and strategy. After defining the meaning of the security dilemma, the chapter proceeds to explore its dynamics, giving illustrations from current and future dangers. It argues that if security studies is to live up to its name in the twenty-first century, the complex phenomenon of the security dilemma must be given a central place in the agenda.

Introduction

The term 'security dilemma' describes a familiar predicament experienced by decision-makers in a world already overflowing with dilemmas. Despite its ubiquity, our claim is that the concept has been invariably misconceived by academic theorists, yet – properly understood – it should be regarded as the most fundamental concept of all in security studies, and as such should be at the centre of a reformed agenda of this field.[1] The security dilemma is a foundational concept because, above all, it engages with the *existential condition of uncertainty* that characterizes all human relations, not least those interactions on the biggest and most violent stage of all – international politics. That its significance has not been properly recognized has been the result of orthodox thinking failing to give due credit to the work and insights of its major early theorists (John H. Herz and Herbert Butterfield, and later Robert Jervis) and at the same time missing the opportunity (as a result of paradigm blinkers) to appreciate the extent of the theoretical and practical horizons it opens up. Our claim is that an understanding of the dynamics and potentialities involved in thinking about the security dilemma gets to the heart of the central questions of security studies more profoundly than do even the traditional canon of concepts such as 'war', 'strategy', 'conflict' and the rest.

The house of uncertainty

By describing uncertainty as the 'existential' condition of human relations we mean that it is not an occasional and passing phenomenon, but rather an everyday part of the existence of individuals and groups. It is uneven in its significance and how it is felt, but it is ultimately inescapable. Insecurity, however, cannot be simply correlated with uncertainty, since uncertainty is a house in which there are many rooms, and in some life is much less insecure than in others. It is preferable to live with the uncertainties of what Kenneth Boulding (1979) called 'stable peace' than with the insecurities of Stanley Hoffmann's (1965) condition of 'state of war'. When states practise cooperation, or societies even embed trust in security communities, significant degrees of security are attained, even within the house of uncertainty.

In the context of International Relations, the existential condition of uncertainty means that governments (their decision-makers, military planners, foreign policy analysts) can never be 100 per

cent certain about the current and future motives and intentions of those able to harm them in a military sense. We call this situation one of *unresolvable uncertainty*, and see it as the core of the predicaments that make up the security dilemma.

The drivers of unresolvable uncertainty are multiple, but they can be reduced to the combination of material and psychological phenomena, and primarily the *ambiguous symbolism* of weapons and the psychological dynamic philosophers call the other minds problem. Together, these create the conditions for the concept first theorized by Herz (1951) and Butterfield (1951). Students of disarmament are familiar with the strategic meaning of the idea of the *ambiguous symbolism* of weapons, if not this actual label. The term refers to the difficulty (many would say the impossibility) of safely distinguishing between 'offensive' and 'defensive' weapons. As the old adage has it, whether you regard a gun as defensive or offensive depends on whether or not you have your finger on the trigger. This subjective interpretation, in principle, is the same in international politics, though in practice it is more complex. If, for example, it is argued

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BOX 10.1 THE SECURITY DILEMMA DEFINED

The security dilemma is a *two-level strategic predicament* in relations between states and other actors, with each level consisting of two related dilemmas (or propositions that can be assumed to be valid) which force decision-makers to choose between them. The first and basic level consists of *a dilemma of interpretation* about the motives, intentions and capabilities of others; the second and derivative level consists of *a dilemma of response* about the most rational way of responding.

First level: a dilemma of interpretation is the predicament facing decision makers when they are confronted, on matters affecting security, with a choice between two significant and usually (but not always) undesirable alternatives about the military policies and political postures of other entities. This dilemma of interpretation is the result of the perceived need to make a decision in the existential condition of *unresolvable uncertainty*, about the motives, intentions and capabilities of others. Those responsible have to decide whether perceived military developments are for defensive or self-protection purposes only (to enhance security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to seek to change the status quo to their advantage).

Second level: a dilemma of response logically begins when the dilemma of interpretation has been settled. Decision-makers then need to determine how to react. Should they signal, by words and deeds, that they will react in kind, for deterrent purposes? Or should they seek to signal reassurance? If the dilemma of response is based on misplaced suspicion regarding the motives and intentions of other actors, and decision-makers react in a militarily confrontational manner, then they risk creating a significant level of mutual hostility when none was originally intended by either party; if the response is based on misplaced trust, there is a risk they will be exposed to coercion by those with hostile intentions. When leaders resolve their dilemma of response in a manner that creates a spiral of mutual hostility, when neither wanted it, a situation has developed which we call the *security paradox*.

(reprinted from Booth and Wheeler 2008: 4–5).

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that it is possible to distinguish between what is clearly offensive (a sword) from what is clearly defensive (a shield) with respect to individual weapons, strategists are likely to reply, unanimously, that such distinctions are operationally meaningless when interpreted as a whole, because a shield can be a vital part of an offensive move when used in combination with a sword.

Such an understanding has informed Russian, Chinese and other strategic planners in their interpretation of various plans for US ballistic missile 'shields' over the years. In the early twenty-first century, the Administration of George W. Bush attempted to justify deploying missile defence systems with the argument that they would help protect the US homeland against limited missile attack from 'rogue states' in general, and crucially Iran and North Korea in particular. Washington's

critics (in potential target countries and elsewhere)claimed to the contrary that the shield of missile defence can potentially be used in combination with the sword of US offensive nuclear missiles in a disarming strike against their enemies at some point in the future. The domestic critics of such a deployment in the USA for this reason see the move as destabilizing. 'What is not a weapon in the wrong hands?' is the question delegates at the World Disarmament Conference asked themselves in the early 1930s.

The closely related second dimension of unresolvable uncertainty is the other minds problem. This refers to the inability of the decision-makers of one state ever to get fully into the minds of their counterparts in other states, and so fully understand their motives and intentions, hopes and fears, and emotions and feelings. Obviously, some degree of understanding, sympathy, and (even) empathy is usually possible, but when it comes to matters of national security, the degree of confidence required by national security planners has to be very high, since the cost of getting it wrong is never trivial. A serious misjudgement could result in a waste of money and loss of prestige through the pursuit of bad policies; ultimately, defeat in war and foreign occupation might be the outcome.

The challenges posed by the other minds problem are evident from the numerous illustrations of misperception in international history. On many occasions, decision-makers and analysts have made more or less serious mistakes when trying to get into the minds of those with whom they have been dealing (Jervis (1976) is still the key work). These mistakes have ranged from misreading a signal in a diplomatic conference to misinterpreting intelligence information, and so failing to predict hostile military moves. We all know how difficult it can be sometimes to understand what is going on in the minds of those we know best; it is not surprising, therefore, that the decision-makers of one country sometimes (indeed often) fail to get inside the minds of those of others from a different cultural lifeworld, and so misinterpret their motives and intentions. What is more, the levels of difficulty in international politics are compounded by the fact that governments will normally go out of their way to keep secret a great deal of what they say and do, while on important strategic issues they may engage in methods of deliberate deception.

Together, the drivers of ambiguous symbolism and the other minds problem result in politics among nations being characterized by *the certainty of uncertainty*. This is why the security dilemma is the most fundamental of all concepts in security studies; it alone describes the existential condition of the future environment in which political groups frame their thinking.

The quintessential dilemma

The dilemmas caused by ambiguous symbolism and the other minds problem are as new as today's newspaper headlines ('Russia threatening new cold war over missile defence', declared the *Guardian* on 11 April 2007) and as old as international history. On the latter, it is fascinating to recall that in the first significant account of war in the West the security dilemma was thought to be the underlying cause. Writing in the fifth century BCE, the historian (and General) Thucydides argued that what led to war in ancient Greece between Athens and Sparta was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this had caused in Sparta (Thucydides 1972: 49). The leaders of both these major powers of the time faced a *dilemma of interpretation* and a *dilemma of response* regarding the other's military plans and political motives and intentions. This two-level predicament constituting the security dilemma links 26 centuries of politics among states and nations down to the present day, from the era of city-states and spears to today's era of globalization and intercontinental missile systems.

Those responsible for the security of a political community (be it a superpower in the Cold War or ethnic groups in the Balkan wars in the early 1990s) have to decide whether perceived military developments on the part of others are for defensive or self-protection purposes only (to enhance security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to seek to change the status quo to their advantage). Logically, the dilemma of response kicks in when the dilemma of interpretation has been settled (to the extent that it ever can be, because in practice, interpretation must be continuous if it is rational). Decision-makers must decide how they will react to what they perceive to be happening: should they signal by words and deeds that they wish to show reassurance, or should they seek to send deterrent signals because of anxiety about what they fear is developing (Jervis 1976: 58–111)? When those responsible for policy remain divided or unsure in the face of a

dilemma of interpretation, then arriving at a decision on their dilemma of response – and turning it into diplomatic and military moves – becomes all the more difficult. In the mid-1930s, unsure about the motives and intentions of the new Nazi regime in Germany, the British government had to decide whether its response should be to try to confront rising German military power (and perhaps provoke German nationalism, already stoked by the 'humiliation' of the Treaty of Versailles) or to reassure Germany about its place in Europe by accepting its changing military status (and so risk allowing German rearmament to steal a march if an arms race developed).

When a dilemma of interpretation is settled in favour of the view that another state is a definite threat to one's own national security, there is no longer a security dilemma; the relationship is best understood as a *strategic challenge*. It may be, of course, that the interpretation is faulty, and the other state's defensive moves are misread as being aggressive. In such a situation, decision-makers who react in a militarily confrontational way risk creating a significant level of mutual hostility when none was initially intended by either party. The result is a round of security competition which makes everybody more insecure; this is best understood as a *security paradox*, a condition that many erroneously confuse with the security dilemma from which it derived.

It should be clear by now that what underlies the dynamics of the security dilemma is fear. Indeed, as traditionally understood, the international system may be conceived as a fear system. It is a competitive self-help system in which

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BOX 10.2 THE SECURITY PARADOX
A security paradox is a situation in which two or more actors, seeking only to improve their own security, provoke through their words or actions an increase in mutual tension, resulting in less security all round.

(reprinted from Booth and Wheeler 2008: 9)[2]

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states fear being attacked, fear dropping in the prosperity league, fear leaving themselves open to attack, fear losing prestige, fear being oppressed by outsiders – and on and on. For many, fear makes the world go around.

For Herz, who first coined the term 'security dilemma', the issue at the base of social life was 'kill or perish' (Herz 1951: 3). For Butterfield, the other pioneer, the inability of one set of decision-makers to enter into the counter-fear of others was the 'irreducible dilemma' (1951: 20). In other words, for Herz fear created a structure of conflict between groups, while for Butterfield this fear derived from an inescapable inability of people(s) to understand how their own peaceful/benign motives and defensive/reactive intentions could be interpreted as threatening by others. The operating principle for those responsible for national security planning tends to be: 'You have nothing to fear from us, but we must be concerned that your motives, even if peaceful now, might not be in the future, and that your intentions – whether or not reactive now – give you the increased power to further your ambitions.' Clearly, the problems of mistrust are maximized when current predicaments are set against a historical record of a conflictual relationship.

Future uncertainty appears therefore to construct international politics as an inescapable insecurity trap. Even if, today, the government of State A considers the leadership group in State B to be peacefully inclined, can it afford to rely indefinitely on 'best-case' thinking in a situation where bad judgements of interpretation and response can have such negative consequences for one's own state (Copeland 2000, 2003, Mearsheimer 2001)? The conclusion drawn so often through history has been that those charged with responsibility for a state's or people's security must never rely on best-case forecasting when assessing potential threats to their well-being. Instead, the guiding principle must be very conservative. Barry Posen put it very baldly when he advised that states 'must assume the worst because the worst is possible' (Posen 1993: 28). The corollary of all this, in the language of US security dilemma theorists, is that defensively motivated states cannot 'signal type' (Glaser 1992, 1997, Kydd 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2005, Mitzen 2006). That is, however peaceful State A believes

itself to be, it can never transmit such intent with 100 per cent effectiveness to State B (and C, D) because others know that 'the worst is possible' in a world of future uncertainty.

If uncertainty and fear logically exist at the best of times in relations between states – when all the parties hold weapons only for self-protection, but cannot effectively signal this to others – then can there ever be any hope that humans can live together in a more peaceful world? In this understanding, the security dilemma depicts politics among nations as being a potential or actual war system *even* when all the units believe themselves as having peaceful/benign motives and defensive/reactive intentions. This is why it is the quintessential dilemma in international politics.

Butterfield, as a historian, claimed that it was only much later, when the guns had gone silent, that it became possible to reconstruct the past, and so to understand the motives and intentions of the key actors. But we now know that such a view belongs to an older and more confident era of historiography. Today we are more familiar with the idea of an endless debate among historians – adding further layers of uncertainty. If historians, with critical distance and abundant information, cannot make up their minds about the interpretations and responses of policy-makers in the past, students of security studies should show sympathy to the predicaments that had to be faced by those on whose shoulders rested great responsibilities, when operating with always limited information and often very compressed time in the face of terrible risks.

Three logics

The previous section concluded by recognizing the limited time and knowledge often faced by decision-makers in international politics. When this is the case, what tend to fill the gaps in their knowledge are their philosophical and theoretical understandings of how the world works. With this in mind, we identify below three a priori logics that have framed the way theorists and practitioners of international politics have thought about the security dilemma:

- *Fatalist logic* is the idea that security competition can never be escaped in international politics. Human nature and the condition of international anarchy determine that humans will live in an essentially conflictual world.

- *Mitigator logic* is the idea that security competition can be ameliorated or dampened down for a time, but never eliminated. Here, notions of regimes and societies are key, blunting the worst features of anarchy.

- *Transcender logic* is the idea that human society is self-constitutive, not determined. Humans have agency, as individuals and groups, and so human society can seek to become what it chooses to be, though inherited structural constraints will always be powerful. A global community of peace and trust is in principle possible if in practice it currently looks improbable.

From these three logical positions derive characteristic forms of international behaviour.

Fatalist voices say that the search for security is primordial, and because groups cannot trust each other in conditions of anarchy, relations between states are essentially competitive, sometimes violent, and always characterized by a degree of insecurity. The logic of interstate anarchy (there is no supreme authority above states) is to maximize power and especially military power. In such a worldview, rational behaviour consists of mistrusting all around, and taking what advantage one can whenever it is prudent to do so. Cooperation can take place, but only when it is in one's immediate interests to do so. States are conceived as 'rational egoists'. The ideal type of this worldview in contemporary International Relations theorizing is 'offensive realism'.

Mitigator logic accepts that the international system is technically anarchic, but does not believe that this must necessarily mean that anarchy is synonymous with chaos and violent conflict. A major strand of thought within mitigator logic has focused on the concept of 'security regimes'. The latter seek through mutual learning and institutionalization to bring a degree of predictable order into security relationships. An alternative strand of mitigator logic is that of the English School, though its exponents have strangely neglected comprehensive and constructive engagement with the theory and

practice of security. English School thinking about 'society' has focused on the building of the institutions of international law, developing processes of moderate diplomacy, and experimenting with norms such as mutual military transparency. As a result, a society of states can exist with predictable order, and hence the amelioration of the security dilemma.

The view identified earlier with Butterfield that it is impossible to enter into another's counter-fear has been challenged by certain ideas within mitigator logic. In the 1980s 'common security' thinking in particular attempted to reduce the most dangerous features of the superpower confrontation. The key here was the idea of security not *against* others (the fatalist logic) but security *with* others (with the implication that the parties are able to understand to a reasonable degree the counter-fear of the other parties). In practice, this was most notably demonstrated by Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the USSR after

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BOX 10.3 JOHN MEARSHEIMER'S CONCEPTION OF OFFENSIVE REALISM

The sad fact is that international politics has always been a ruthless and dangerous business, and it is likely to remain that way. Although the intensity of their competition waxes and wanes, great powers fear each other and always compete with each other for power. . . . But great powers do not merely strive to be the strongest of all the great powers. . . . Their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon – that is, the only great power in the system. . . . Why do great powers behave this way? My answer is that the structure of the international system forces states which seek only to be secure nonetheless to act aggressively toward each other. . . . This situation, which no one consciously designed or intended, is genuinely tragic.

(Mearsheimer 2001: 2–3)

BOX 10.4 ROBERT JERVIS' DEFINITION OF A SECURITY REGIME

By a security regime I mean . . . those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behaviour in the belief that others will reciprocate. This concept implies not only norms and expectations that facilitate cooperation, but a form of cooperation that is more than the following of short-run self-interest.

(Jervis 1982: 357)

1985, who was able to begin to wind down the Cold War because he began to understand how the West felt threatened by Soviet forces and postures. As a result he sought to address the causes of such fears by offering to eliminate the most threatening parts of Soviet military deployments and foreign policy positions (Wiseman 2002: ch.5 5). Here, Gorbachev showed his appreciation of how mutual mistrust and suspicion could result from security dilemma dynamics, and in seeking to dampen down these dynamics through his trust-building initiatives, he exercised what we call *security dilemma sensibility*.

What has characterized transcender logic has been the variety of viewpoints and theories it has sponsored, from the centralization of power globally necessitated in world government to the decentralization of traditional anarchist theory. Some strands have been reformist, others very revolutionary. What they all share is the belief that history rather than necessity has got us where we are, and that it is possible (if extremely difficult) to construct a radically different world order – including one in which dilemmas of interpretation and response are replaced by a successful politics of trust-building. One of the difficulties facing transcender logic as a whole is that the separate strands tend to reduce the problem of insecurity in world politics to one cause (capitalism, patriarchy,

anarchy) and one related solution. One of the problems of the transcender logic, therefore, is that its various strands are themselves a major cause of disagreement.

BOX 10.5 SECURITY DILEMMA SENSIBILITY DEFINED

Security dilemma sensibility is an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear.

(reprinted from Booth and Wheeler 2008: 7)

Despite the generally limited success of much transcender thinking, all is not lost for those who hope for a more peaceful world. The most significant theory and practice within transcender logic – the one with most purchase in the real world – is the idea of 'security community'. Its political manifestation has been the project that developed in Western Europe from the late 1940s onwards, to bring peace, prosperity and security to the traditional cockpit of realist thinking and war. In this laboratory – now extending far across the continent – militarized security competition appears to have been *transcended* indefinitely, though some uncertainty can never be escaped – as in all human relations. In the security community of Europe there are interactions between states and societies at multiple levels; states have stopped targeting each other in a military sense; and war has become unthinkable (Deutsch 1957).

It is for each student of security studies to decide which of the three logics, and which strand within each, gives the best account of international politics, and which represents the most desirable and feasible guide for future policymaking. In our view, offensive realism may offer some short-term security (especially for the most powerful) but that ultimately its effect is to replicate the 'war system' (Falk and Kim 1980), and to do so with ever more dangerous weaponry. Security regimes, conceived and practised according to rational egoism,[3] will always contain 'the seeds of their own destruction' (Jervis 1982: 368), as they have in the past. A more sophisticated approach within mitigator thinking has been that of the English School, which for all its conceptual and practical lacunae has crucially focused on the potentialities for diplomats to construct lasting order in international society through developing shared interests and values that promote practices of common security. Within transcender logic we identify the idea of security communities as the most hopeful project for those who do not think believe that society must live fatalistically in a condition of war and the preparation for war.

The concept of the security dilemma has been much contested, and its empirical manifestations have been interpreted in a variety of not always positive ways; nonetheless, the practices of security communities have challenged in a fundamental manner some of the basic patterns of thought ('the

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BOX 10.6 KARL DEUTSCH'S DEFINITION OF A SECURITY COMMUNITY

[A] group of people which has become 'integrated'. By *integration* we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure . . . dependable expectations of 'peaceful change' among its population. By *sense of community* we mean a belief . . . that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of 'peaceful change'.

(Deutsch 1957: 5)

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logic of anarchy') associated with the Westphalian era. In drawing special attention to the promise of security communities, we are not saying that their members have 'escaped' the security dilemma

finally, since uncertainty is the existential condition as was argued above. What we do claim, however, is that the workings of such a security community have so shifted the conditions for politics that we can claim that the security dilemma has effectively been *transcended* because war has become practically unthinkable. In the case of the EU, the ambiguous symbolism of weapons has become irrelevant, because the members do not target each other, and the other minds problem has shifted from the life-and-death agenda of military competition to the normal politics of life under capitalism and liberal democracy. In the house of uncertainty, rooms marked 'security community' are promising places to live.

The security dilemma in the twenty-first century

We believe that the security dilemma should be at the heart of security studies not only because its significance pervades the 'very geometry' of human conflict, as Butterfield put it, but also because it speaks directly and urgently to some of the main challenges of our time. There are strong grounds for thinking that world politics has entered a period of unprecedented insecurity – a 'Great Reckoning', when human society locally and globally will increasingly come face-to-face with its most fundamental self-created difficulties (Booth 2007: ch. 9). The coming decades will see a potentially disastrous convergence of dangers unless sensible collective action is quickly taken to head them off. In a new era of uncertainty human society will be challenged by a novel combination of old and new security predicaments in relation to such issue areas as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, 'climate chaos', competition for non-renewable (especially traditional energy) resources, mass migration, great power rivalry, cultural/religious/civilizational clashes, and the growing gap between haves and have-nots. All these risks threaten to be exacerbated by the huge but uneven growth in the global population – a topic with which security studies and indeed International Relations in general has not yet begun to seriously engage. In most of these key risk areas,[4] as we discuss in the four major illustrations below, security dilemma dynamics threaten to heighten fear, provoke mistrust, and close down possibilities for building cooperation and trust.

    First: the danger of a new cold war with China. An immanent threat exists of Sino–US competition developing in dangerous ways. The crisis area of the Taiwan Straits continues to represent the functional equivalent of the Central Front in US–Soviet cold war rivalry; that is, the symbolic and actual face-to-face line of confrontation. The Straits are an active theatre of security dilemma dynamics, being highly weaponized and the site of potentially uncontrollable military escalation. In the background, two related issues that have been fuelling mistrust between Beijing and Washington are missile defences and the weaponization of space. What worries strategic planners in Beijing is that Washington might view Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) as part of an offensive strategy of nuclear pre-emption designed to give the USA dominance over the process of escalation in any future crisis (Lieber and Press 2006: 52). Even if Chinese leaders are persuaded that a particular US administration does not harbour aggressive intent (a predicament recognized all too well by US offensive realists) what guarantees can they have that future US leaders will not seek to employ missile defences as part of an offensive strategy? At the same time, the White House has not been persuaded that China's motives and intentions are peaceful when it comes to outer space, a perception which Beijing did nothing to allay by its successful launch of an anti-satellite weapon in early 2007 (though the Chinese could easily justify this as a countervailing move in the light of US plans). Beijing has claimed that it wants to limit not accelerate the competition in space weapons, but the problem with such professions of peaceful intent is that the boundary between 'peaceful' and 'military' uses of technology is invariably blurred when it comes to outer space. Fatalist logic would argue that given the inability of the USA and China to 'signal type' in space, there is no alternative but for planners to assume the worst and treat all deployments as potentially offensive. While cautioning against the trap of applying offensive realist prescriptions to outer space, Bruce Blair and Chen Yali recognized that 'there is nothing China can do to convince American worst-case analysts that China could not possibly adapt its dual-use space capabilities for "possibly" posing military threats to the United States' (2006: 5). Consequently, under fatalist logic, there is no prospect of Sino–US cooperation in preventing space from becoming weaponized. Each set of decision-makers will feel compelled to seek security in space at the expense of the other, replicating key aspects of the dynamics that have historically driven security competition on Earth.

Second: the danger of new arms races. The post-Cold War peace dividend never materialized, and in a period of intensifying international tension it would not be a surprise to see the revival of competitive arms building. New arms races might be global (Russia versus United States) or regional (South versus North Korea), and they might be conventional (Pakistan versus India) or nuclear (Turkey versus Iran). In these cases, security dilemma dynamics work in well-understood ways, with future uncertainty about motives and intentions feeding existing mistrust, and resulting in a contagion of security paradoxes. Ostensible US worries about 'rogue states' (whatever their label) are used to justify missile defence deployment, which in turn provokes counters from Moscow, believing the moves really to be about placing the USA in a position of global dominance. The DPRK's fears about US intentions have led to a nuclear weapons programme that may have been intended for deterrent purposes but which intensifies existing anxieties in South Korea and Japan about the future motives of the regime in Pyongyang. Future Pakistani defensive moves in conventional forces in relation to its role in the so-called 'War on Terror' and in face of India's growing superpower potential might provoke Indian fears that such capabilities may be used to try to settle the Kashmir conflict, and so lead to a demand by Indian planners for more deterrent power at all levels. Finally, Iranian ambitions to develop a civilian nuclear capability have provoked regional as well as wider international fears about the possibility of weaponization, and if the latter fears grow – and certainly if Iran became a declared nuclear weapons state – then it would lead inexorably to similar developments on the part of Turkey and other neighbours.

Three: the danger of a world of many nuclear powers. The threat here is of the breakdown of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, and with it the spread of nuclear weapons technology to an increasing number of states (see Chapter 24, this volume). Few believe that a world of many nuclear powers will be a safer world (Waltz (1981) is an important counter-thesis – see also the Sagan and Waltz (2003) debate), and the diffusion of civilian nuclear facilities (accelerated by concerns about the growing depletion of fossil fuels and the search for clean energy) to an increasing number of states will make it easier than hitherto to make the move from being a state using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (energy) to one using it for weapons. If, as a consequence of the resulting dilemmas of interpretation, states begin to hedge against the collapse of the NPT, the outcome will be a self-fulfilling prophecy of regime breakdown. This will multiply the range of nuclear risks including accidental war, 'loose nukes', nuclear entrepreneurship, acquisition by terrorists, inadvertent nuclear war, crises resulting from non-nuclear weapon states rapidly moving towards nuclear status (especially in tense regional situations), and the problems of stability between nascent nuclear powers without sophisticated command-and-control arrangements.

Four: the danger of terrorism. The Bush Administration's declaration of a worldwide 'War on Terror' in the aftermath of 9/11 contributed to the globalization of the phenomenon of 'international terrorism', which had been perceived to be on the rise for some time. In many parts of the world, the use of terror tactics are ever more feared, though their actual occurrence (as yet) falls short of public perceptions of the danger. International terrorism feeds off local problems but has increasingly been synergistic with regional- and global level confrontations between identity groups associated with cultural or religious markers. In this way, the terror threat has been globalized (see Chapter 12, this volume). It is also multi-level, with potential dangers ranging from individual attacks in cafés or public transport to 'dirty' bombs (see Barnaby 2004: 13, 37–39, 153, Martin 2006: 229, 279–282) and biological attacks (see Rees 2003: 47–57, Martin 2006: 282–285) aimed at mass casualties disrupting life on a huge scale. The apogee of the globalization of the security dilemma in this new age of uncertainty are those situations in which fellow citizens from different 'identity groups' may no longer be trusted to share the same values, and whom one may fear may be ready to use violence – including suicidal tactics – to further extremist causes. Moreover, in a world where nuclear materials are predicted to be more plentiful than previously, with significant proportions of it being unaccountable, the prospects for a nuclear-armed terrorist will grow (Barnaby 2004: 108–150). Looking beyond the early decades of the twenty-first century, some scientists and futurologists have warned of the dangers of genetic manipulation leading to terrifying diseases which could be used for political purposes by states or other entities.

It should be evident from these illustrations that the security dilemma – its vocabulary, dynamics and insights – speak directly to some of the major issues of our time. Back in the 1950s,

Herz had claimed that the security dilemma had reached its 'utmost poignancy' (1959: 241). There could be no doubt at that time about the relevance of the concept to the potential catastrophe of the Cold War spiralling out of control through failures to appreciate security dilemma dynamics. Nonetheless, we would claim that the global predicament has moved even beyond Herz's judgement in the late 1950s that bipolarity and the threat of nuclear annihilation had created conditions for the security dilemma's 'utmost' relevance (1959).We believe world politics have entered a new age of uncertainty. Its terrain is being shaped by manifold risk and danger, by mistrust and long-term fear, by the fragility of cooperation and unwillingness to trust, and by the expectation of a prolonged season of uncertainty. When Tony Blair introduced the British government's White Paper on the renewal of its Trident nuclear weapons system in December 2006 – in the view of many people well ahead of when he needed do it – he argued that the United Kingdom should continue as a nuclear weapons state for at least the next 50 years. He spoke for many governments around the world when he said, 'the one certain thing about our world today is uncertainty' (Blair 2006). This view, given authoritatively on the part of one of the most territorially secure states in the world, is a token of the power of the unresolvable uncertainty that characterizes the security dilemma.

Our general claim is that uncertainty in the twenty-first century is set to be intense and globalized, and multi-level and multi-directional, and that many of the key issue areas are likely to be subject to security dilemma dynamics, and hence amenable to analysis in terms of relevant frameworks of analysis (including the injunction to explore mitigator and transcender themes, such as security dilemma sensibility and security communities). Without doubt, the dynamics described by the concept continue to have impact in real sites of power and violence across the globe, and so the prospects for building world security would suffer if policy-makers and scholars conspire to marginalize the insights and prescriptions offered by security dilemma theorizing – as they did in the Cold War (Buzan 1991: 4). In the fast changing terrain of contemporary security and insecurity, the security dilemma deserves a special place for those wanting to understand our times and engage with them if human society in whole and in part is to have hope of emerging in decent shape.

Towards a new agenda for security studies

Space allows only the briefest discussion of what a reformed agenda might look like, so we will confine ourselves to indicating some ways in which the concept of the security dilemma is central to answering some of the most basic questions of philosophy and social science: What is real? What can we know? How might we act? (Booth 2007).

What is real? In today's world, students of security studies are charged with analysing a wider set of referents and issue areas than was the case on the traditional agenda – namely states and military power/force. This certainly does not mean in our view that states and military force are irrelevant: far from it. We would oppose any approach to security studies that eschewed the military dimension of world politics, or the referent of sovereign states. However, we do believe that the traditional agenda should be approached through the perspective of what Robert Cox called 'critical' rather than orthodox or 'problem-solving' theorizing (Cox 1981). This means shifting the weight of the agenda from focusing on the problems *in* the status quo to the problems *of* the status quo (Booth 2005c). This means that insecurity should be understood first as the consequence of a wider range of threats (e.g. poverty, the environment, the global economy) than that of military violence, and second, contemplating a wider range of referents (e.g. individuals, regions, common humanity) than sovereign states. It took a decade or so before academic theorizing began to grasp the changes brought about by the advent of the atomic bombs and then hydrogen weapons and intercontinental delivery systems, and so began what has been called the 'golden age' of strategic studies. If security studies for the era of globalization is to produce its own golden age, then it is necessary to reorient its research into a deeper understanding of the role of uncertainty in world politics, and its potentialities. The security dilemma is fundamental to this, recognizing the existential reality of uncertainty in human affairs, but at the same time looking towards a realization that uncertainty is a house with many rooms.

What can we know? In the light of the changing context of world politics, security studies needs a much wider group of experts than those who dominated the mainstream during the Cold War and who still now set the agenda in a broadly business-as-usual direction. Security studies in the twenty-first century needs not only deterrence theorists but also those who understand economic

development; not just conflict managers but confidence builders; and not just tinkerers with the status quo but global trust-builders. This is an argument for pluralism, to keep everybody honest, and for challenging the ethnocentrism in the Anglo-American orthodoxy. We believe that by focusing research on uncertainty, and its acute manifestation in the security dilemmas between political entities, there is an opportunity for issues to be addressed by a fruitful collaboration across a spectrum of theoretical perspectives – allowing each to bring its own special insights, as opposed to the dialogues of the deaf that currently take place. In other words, as the agenda of security studies is broadening and deepening under the pressure of real events, it is necessary to broaden the bases of knowledge accordingly, which in turn means inviting a wider range of areas of expertise to the academic conversation on security.

What might be done? It is evident that human societies will continue to want problem solvers in the status quo, though two warnings must be given. First, on matters of immediate policy relevance, academics can have only a limited impact, because bureaucracies have relative advantages in terms of information and access. And second, the status quo in the security field is overwhelmingly dominated by the agendas and perspectives of nations and states, and the tribal analyses and perspectives that tend to emerge are rarely best calculated to advance the interests of world security in an age threatened by global dangers. As the twenty-first century unfolds, the special role for academics lies in the opportunities they have for understanding the manifold dimensions of uncertainty in human relations and opening up pathways of thought and action regarding the global challenges that are moving from the horizon to centre-stage. These, overwhelmingly, derive from the problems *of* the status quo. If we are right, and the most important and interesting work relating to international and world security lies on the borderlands between, on the one hand certain strands of mitigator thinking (largely common security advocates and English school solidarists concerned with military confidence-building and post-national identity formation) and on the other, the reformist strand of transcender thinking (concerned with security community building and maintenance) then the implications for security studies are enormous.[5] Unless one espouses the fatalist outlook of offensive realism or the rational egoism of security regime theorists, a reformed agenda must seek to open up the potential for human agency to build cooperation and trust at all levels of political community. At the heart of this is the notion of security dilemma sensibility, which seeks to do what Butterfield thought impossible; namely to overcome the challenge of successfully signalling peaceful intent, and so transcend the dilemmas of interpretation and trust – and thus the likelihood of relations spiralling into armed competition, and the trap of the security paradox.

Security dilemma sensibility offers human society globally some hope of coming through the dangerous decades ahead in more positive shape than currently seems conceivable if governments and societies remain wedded to the global politics of business as usual. If security studies is to be other than an activity in which its exponents focus entirely on their own nation, then its students must accept that future uncertainty cannot be escaped through a mix of technology and rational egoism. Fatalism about global insecurity will be self-fulfilling. In contrast, a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the security dilemma and the requirements of the political conditions of trust offer at least a glimpse into the theory and practice of a radically different but still realistic world – a world characterized by the political, economic, social and philosophical uncertainties of human existence, but a world in which people are progressively emancipated from direct and structural violence. Relations characterized by mutual trust-building represent the mirror-image of those in which fatalist assumptions about world politics generate and exacerbate security dilemma dynamics. The theory and practice of trust-building must be a priority on the future agenda of academics if we are finally to see the emergence in the twenty-first century of a true security studies, as opposed to the 'in security studies' that has dominated International Relations since the Second World War.

Notes

1. The ideas in this chapter derive from Booth and Wheeler 2008.
2. For the phrase but not the definition we acknowledge Justin Morris.
3. Our use of the term 'rational egoism' follows that of Robert Jervis who defined it as a situation where actors place 'primary value on [their] own security . . . and [do] not care much about others' well-being as an end in itself ' (1982: 364; see also Glaser 1997: 197).

4. The security dilemma is only relevant in situations where intentionality (and hence the other minds problem) comes into play. This reduces its relevance in some of the key areas of insecurity now and in the future, such as the fear of pandemics or the consequences of climate change.
5. For 'solidarism' see Wheeler (2000) and for 'common security' see Wiseman (2002).

Further reading

Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008). The most up-to-date and comprehensive exegesis of the concept, together with an extensive discussion of historical illustrations and its contemporary relevance.

Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951).
Chapter 1 of this book, 'The Tragic Element of International Conflict', provides the first elucidation of the psychological dynamics driving the security dilemma, particularly the inability of decision-makers to realize that others do not necessarily see them as they see themselves.

John Herz, 'Idealist internationalism and the security dilemma', *World Politics*, 2(2) (1950): 157–180. The first article on the security dilemma.

John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1951). This book locates the concept of the security dilemma in the context of realist and idealist theories of International Relations. The book is frequently interpreted as a classic realist text, but Herz opens up in the second half of the book the possibilities for 'mitigating' the security dilemma.

John Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1959). This book develops Herz's position on the security dilemma, particularly his disagreements with Butterfield on the ubiquity of the security dilemma. However, the book is also important because it sets out his view that world conditions (the threat of nuclear annihilation) were creating the basis for a new universal politics of global survival.

Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). This book remains the most sophisticated and influential analysis of the psychological factors influencing security dilemma dynamics.

Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the security dilemma', *World Politics*, 40(1) (1978): 167–214. This article remains the seminal discussion of the role that offence–defence dynamics play in exacerbating or ameliorating security dilemma dynamics in international politics. It focuses on the interrelationship between the material and psychological dimensions of the security dilemma.