DONALD M. SNOW

NATIONAL SECURITY

ENDURING PROBLEMS IN A CHANGING DEFENSE ENVIRONMENT

SECOND EDITION

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ENDURING PROBLEMS IN A CHANGING DEFENSE ENVIRONMENT

Second Edition

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Preface

The world has changed remarkably since the first edition of this book was published in 1987. Spurred by the momentous events that began in 1989 and continue to this day, the environment in which national security policy is fashioned has become very different from the conditions of Cold War that marked the previous four decades. At the same time, we have entered a period of transition to an international system superseding the Cold War, the dimensions and shape of which are only generally knowable at this time.

This edition tries to reflect both this change and fluidity. One change is clearly a diminished Soviet military threat, although the physical threat remains. In the specific light of the Iran-Contra affair, the very process by which defense policy is made has come into question, and as a result, a chapter on that process has been added. Also, a new set of issues has arisen that called for a rewritten chapter featuring the war on drugs, economic competitiveness, and the budget problems as legitimate national security concerns.

This process of change, of course, has as its backdrop the post-1945 period into which the United States was thrust as a major, if not particularly well prepared, principal. Before 1945, there had never been anything resembling a comprehensive American defense policy; the buffers of two broad oceans and friendly, weak neighbors had made development of such a policy unnecessary.

The world was changed in many ways, three of which stand out. First, power in the international system became *bipolar,* with only the United States and the USSR retaining the capacity to significantly influence events. Each was drawn—either willingly or unwillingly—into power vacuums around the globe. In the process Americans began to regard their national interests, including those that might potentially be defended with force, as global in nature.

Second, most nations of the world, including the United States and the USSR, signed the United Nations charter, by which signatories renounced

war as an instrument of policy. The result has been not a positive condition of peace but an era in which force continues to be applied under various guises. This situation of *violent peace,* to borrow the title of a book written in 1968 by Carl and Shelley Mydans, blurs the traditional distinctions between war and peace.

Third, the nuclear age began. By unleashing atomic power, mankind created the means of its self-immolation and thereby altered the basic rules for defense and war. As nuclear arsenals achieved their current deadly levels, the result was to restrain the nations that possessed them. The informal rule that has emerged is that major nuclear powers—notably the United States and the Soviet Union—can no longer afford to confront one another in ways that could lead to violence and thus nuclear war. Fear of an atomic exchange thus governs the behavior of the superpowers toward one another. Something of a paradox has emerged. In regions of vital interest such as Europe, one cannot fight for fear of starting a nuclear war. But in other parts of the world where interests are not vital—and therefore not worth fighting over—confrontation is permissible because it does not raise the same specter.

This dilemma and others will be explored in the following pages. The first part of the book establishes the setting in which national security policy is fashioned. To begin this background section, chapter 1 shows how the maintenance and occasional use of military force is made necessary by an anarchical international system based on the sovereignty of nation-states that achieve their ends through the exercise of power. Chapter 2 looks at the role of force from a uniquely American vantage point. The central theme of this chapter is that history, geography, and natural predilection have shielded Americans from the harsh geopolitical aspects of international relations in which violence plays a part; as a result, development of a comprehensive defense posture has been all the more difficult. Building upon this theme, chapter 3 describes how American defense policy has developed in the face of changing security challenges. Chapter 4 deals with the policy process in which policy is fashioned. Part I concludes with an assessment of the adversaries facing the United States: after examining the "traditional" Soviet adversary, it also looks at challenges to American interests in the Third World.

Parts II and III explore the substantive, enduring national security problems facing the United States. In Part II so-called conventional force threats—situations in which the United States would use nonnuclear means to achieve its ends—are addressed. Chapter 6 opens this section by scrutinizing the problem in central Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact that has obsessed American defense planners since 1945. Chapter 7 goes on to look at other challenges to the United States, notably conflicts in the Third World falling under the current designation of "low intensity

conflict" (LIC). Chapter 8 concludes Part II with an examination of the functional problems of defense spending and military manpower.

Part III, in turn, concentrates on thermonuclear problems. To begin this study, chapter 9 describes the dynamics of nuclear balance, the way in which that balance has evolved, and the competing notions of deterence. Chapter 10 then examines the nature and structure of nuclear arsenals, how they are changing, and what those changes may mean. Because the desire to restrain nuclear arsenals is ever present, chapter 11 looks at the evolving role of arms control in the dynamics of the nuclear system, as well as the current interest in accompanying reductions in conventional arms in Europe. The Conclusion not only summarizes main points of the book but also provides some perspective on the future of the national security problem.

A number of colleagues and instructors graciously read the manuscript during various stages of its development, and I sincerely appreciate their helpful questions and suggestions. Any inaccuracies or misinterpretations that remain are, of course, my own. I would like to thank the following reviewers who supplied useful information to help guide my revision of the second edition: Edward Davis, The Citadel; Joseph Kruzel, Ohio State University; and Louis Terrell, San Diego State University. I also thank Mrs. Mary Carlson of the University of Alabama and Mrs. Barbara E. Atkins of the U.S. Naval War College for their fine assistance in typing and retyping various versions of the manuscript. Finally, for research material and other invaluable assistance, I thank the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama (where the first draft was completed), the Secretary of the Navy Senior Research Fellows Program at the U.S. Naval War College (where revisions and various phases of the book's first edition were undertaken), and the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College (where revisions for the second edition occurred).

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Part I

The Setting of Security Policy

National security policy does not arise from nor exist in a vacuum; rather, it is conditioned by factors inherent in its context. The "violent peace" that marks the waning years of the twentieth century is partly the result of an anarchic international system that sometimes compels nations to employ physical force in order to accomplish their national purposes. The way nations view their place in the international order is largely the result of their "strategic culture," the unique blend of historical and physical experiences that conditions how different states, including the United States, view the role of military affairs. This country, by the accidents of history and geography, was never forced to come intimately to grips with defense concerns prior to 1945. The events of the post–World War II period have been turbulent and rapid, forcing a continual evolution and adjustment in defense policy that must be understood if the current state of defense problems is to be comprehended. The unique blend of influence on the shape of that policy, in turn, is the result of and reflects the American political process. Finally, defense

policies are fashioned to meet the actual or potential threats posed by foes; therefore assessing adversaries and their intentions and their capabilities is a further element in understanding policy. Collectively, by focusing on these concerns the first five chapters provide the context for analyzing ongoing problems of national security policy.

Chapter 1

Security and Politics

Americans have turned to the problem of national security with renewed interest in the past few years. In our universities, courses on national security, defense policy, arms control, and the like have proliferated at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and some programs now offer degrees in areas such as strategic studies.

This revived attention stands in marked contrast to the mood in the years immediately following the end of American involvement in Vietnam. As the memories of America's worst military experience have faded, both growth and change have taken place in the area of national security studies. Because the field has emerged recently and is evolving rapidly, there is widespread agreement neither on exactly what constitutes national security studies nor on what its basic thrust and orientation are.

Any generalization runs the risk of oversimplification; but two basic orientations, which may be described as the extremes in the discussion, have emerged on what national security is about. At one end of the spectrum are those approaches that describe national security primarily or exclusively in military terms. In this construction, national security and military defense are viewed as more or less the same thing. The emphasis is on how the threat or use of military force can accomplish the security goals of the state. The orientation of those holding this view is geopolitical—looking at the international system, they emphasize the role of force in a system typified by the absence of any supranational authority.

At the other extreme, and more contemporary in its origin, is the position that this traditional approach is too restricted in concept. In this view, security extends both above the nation-state, to something called international security, and below it, to individual security. Pointing to the enormous destructive capability of modern—especially thermonuclear—weaponry, the contemporary thinkers stress the frequent incompatibility of national with international or individual security; the need for a broader concept of security that *also* encompasses the individual and international

dimensions; and the need to harness through arms control, internationalization, and other mechanisms, the enormous destructive capacities man has devised. Moreover, these thinkers extend the notion of security beyond a narrow focus on the military element alone to areas such as economic security.

Any contemporary view of national security must incorporate both views. On the one hand, the continuing organization of the international system as a group of sovereign nation-states means that national concerns, some with military implications, remain of primary importance. On the other hand, the international system is changing radically, and its problems and their solutions can decreasingly be framed in military terms alone. The Third Industrial Revolution, with its emphases on information and knowledge generation and diffusion, is making the world a far different place; at a minimum, the economic aspect of security is becoming vital to national health and well-being.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework of concepts and relationships to assist in understanding defense policy issues. It begins with a brief discussion of what makes up national security, followed by descriptions of the relationship between national security and politics, the nature of the international system that requires nation-states to possess military force, the relative role of the various "instruments of national power" in dealing with national problems, and the role of risk in the policy and strategy context.

NATIONAL SECURITY AS A CONCEPT

To begin to understand what constitutes national security, it is useful to look individually at the two words that compose the concept. This is particularly helpful in the case of the first term, *national,* because it is on this point that the traditional and contemporary schools of thought on the subject disagree most.

National security has traditionally emphasized the security of the nation-state as its primary concern, hence the adjectival use of the term national. This emphasis reflects the political organization of the world into a system of nation-states. Legally and politically, the world is divided into jurisdictions defined by state boundaries, and the highest form of authority is that of the nation-state. Moreover, the primary political loyalty that most people (certainly Americans and most inhabitants of the "developed" nations or First World) have is to the nation-state, and the nation-state is the basic unit or building block of the global system. Thus, if there is a political unit whose security needs to be guaranteed, it is the nation-state.

From this perspective, anything that enhances the security of the

nation-state is beneficial, and anything that detracts from the security is harmful. The emphasis tends to be particularistic, focusing on individual problems and threats that face the state, and thus particularly on short-range problems that nations experience. Moreover, this viewpoint suggests that if the good of the individual nation-state and the benefit of the international system as a whole or of other members of that system are incompatible, it is the interest of the nation-state that must be served.

The particularistic emphasis draws the fire of the contemporary school of thought, both because of its exclusive attention to national problems and because of the tendency to look at the shorter- rather than longer-range consequences of actions. Since what could promote national security (for instance, a global monopoly on access to petroleum) would come at the expense of other members of the international system and of the system itself, the national emphasis is viewed as short-sighted and ultimately self-defeating.

According to these critics, problems of security are increasingly akin to other global issues in that they transcend national boundaries; national solutions may thus be counterproductive. In light of the possibility of global ecological disaster (the "nuclear winter") caused by nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, for instance, the problem of nuclear deterrence is not a national but a global security problem, which must be dealt with at the global level. To treat the problem as national in nature courts disaster. Moreover, one country's security, for example, the maintenance of a large military force, may well be its neighbor's insecurity, and thus in the long run destabilizing.

The second part of the concept is *security.* What contributes to a sense of security, and, conversely, what makes one insecure?

The primary dictionary definition of the term captures both the meaning and dimensions of security: "the state or feeling of being free from fear, care, danger, etc.; safety or a sense of safety." Here two aspects of security arise: security as a physical condition, and security as a psychological state. Each sense is present in the debate about what constitutes security.

The traditional view of national security emphasizes the physical aspect. From the traditional perspective, the most obvious component of national security is protection of national boundaries from encroachment by other nations; this is a physical value so basic that no other goals can be pursued in its absence. Other physical forms of security, such as guaranteed access to natural resources, can be pursued only after hearth and home have been secured. Such concrete symbols represent the bedrock of the physical sense of security.

But security is more than the objective physical state of being free from physical threat. It is also psychological: we are free from fear to the extent that we lack a feeling of fear. Different people have contrasting

notions about what makes them feel safe or secure; security will thus always, to some extent, be subjective. We may all agree on certain core conditions, primarily physical in nature, that define security, but there will also be areas where we disagree on what enhances or diminishes security. It is largely these disagreements that divide the traditionalists from the contemporary school.

This problem is often referred to as the *security dilemma,* and it is best described by example. In the 1950s, when the perception of the menace posed by the Soviet Union was at its zenith in the United States, there was widespread disagreement on what the United States should do in the face of a gigantic and aggressive Soviet military machine. The debate was framed mainly in terms of the growing thermonuclear threat and the terrible consequences of a nuclear war. Nuclear weapons were thought to provide the primary means of coping with the Soviet threat, yet their existence and potential usage threatened the most basic security value, physical survival.

The security debate can be reduced to those two dimensions. Those who argued for security based on nuclear weapons were saying that the most basic requisites of security are protection of the integrity of national boundaries and of the national political form. Those who opposed this formulation, on the other hand, maintained that individual survival is a more important concern than the nation's political identity, and that if one or the other must be sacrificed, it should be the national rather than the individual aspect of security. Moreover, the possibility existed that war could now devastate the globe (this was the period when the doomsday motion picture *On the Beach* was popular). As a result, national and international security were incompatible, because defending the nation-state could result in international devastation.

Questions about what contributes to or detracts from national security are often phrased in terms of national interests (an issue to be discussed later in this chapter) and often reflect policy preferences. Thus, for instance, the question of what, if anything, the United States should do about political turmoil in Central America is placed in these kinds of terms. Are U.S. interests, whatever they may be, best served by military intervention, a political and economic approach, or a hands-off policy? For that matter, are the interests primarily military, political, or economic, and what sense of security (if any) is affected? Which outcomes are likely to occur as a result of following each approach? At the bottom line, which outcomes will affect American national security, and how? Since it is difficult to argue that the physical boundaries of the United States will be threatened by any particular outcome, the matter falls within the psychological realm of security and is thus highly debatable. Where there is debate, there is inevitably politics, which is the next element in the puzzle.

POLITICS, THE NATURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM, AND POWER

Deciding what is and is not a matter of national security is a political matter. There are various ways in which *politics* is defined, but they all tend to focus on how authoritative decisions are reached. Thus, for our purposes, *politics* will be defined as "the ways in which conflicts of interest over scarce resources are resolved."

The definition suggests two distinct attributes of a political situation, one substantive and the other procedural. Substantively, the phrase "conflicts of interest over scarce resources" suggests the kinds of situations where a political solution is necessary. A potential political situation exists whenever scarcity (the circumstance in which all claimants to a resource cannot simultaneously have all the resource they desire) is present. Scarcity becomes a political problem in need of resolution when those who have claims seek to exercise them and hence demand more of the resource than can be provided.

This sounds like an economic definition, but need not be. Almost anything can, after all, be scarce. Economic riches are an obvious example: not everyone can be rich simultaneously, for instance. Access to natural resources (such as Persian Gulf oil), social status (being part of the "upper class"), or political power (holding office) are also scarce in this definition. Only one person at a time can possess the U.S. presidency, after all, and there is always more than one aspirant to the office, especially in an election year.

When a condition of scarcity exists, ways to resolve the differences among claimants are needed; this is the procedural aspect of politics. There are many ways to resolve differences, ranging from the highly orderly and cooperative to the disorderly and conflictual. This variety of means of conflict resolution, in turn, points to basic differences between domestic (national) society and the international system.

In domestic society, there are orderly, predictable ways to go about resolving differences between individuals and between individuals and the state. In the United States, the formal and legal bases of order are stated most fundamentally in the Constitution and federal law, in the state constitutions and laws, and in local criminal and civil codes, and the like. The cumulative effect of these statements and more informal social conventions and rules is to produce a set of ways to resolve conflicts over scarce resources.

The system works because it has *legitimacy* and *authority*. Legitimacy means that the majority of people living in the system believe it produces justice for its members; this is a particularly important concern in Western

democracies. Were that not the case, it would be silly in some cases to remain loyal to the system (assuming one had a choice). Whenever one puts a dispute over scarcity before the system, after all, there is always the possibility of losing. If one is going to take that chance, it is probably because one trusts that the system will produce an equitable outcome.

The domestic system also works because it has authority to enforce its rules. If you or I break a rule of society regulating our mutual interaction or our interaction with the state, there is a regulatory body to enforce our compliance. There is, in other words, a police force that makes certain the law is obeyed, at least most of the time. Authority is thus the ability to enforce society's rules of conflict resolution. A society whose members have endowed it with both legitimacy and authority will normally be a stable entity capable of solving most of its problems.

Contrast this situation to the international arena, in which the interactions between nations take place. International politics, as distinct from domestic politics, is characterized by a lower degree of regularity and predictability. The rules and regulations for resolving conflicts among nations are neither as extensive nor as explicit as the rules in domestic society, although most states conform to basic international rules most of the time. Those rules, however, lack both legitimacy and authority, partly because there are fewer legal norms and partly because of the absence of mutual values on which social conventions are based.

Role of Sovereignty

The reason for this difference is both straightforward and absolutely fundamental. International politics operates from the first premise of *sovereignty,* from which all else flows. Sovereignty is defined as supreme and independent authority. In domestic politics, the state possesses sovereignty, which allows the government of the state to enforce its policies on its individual members. In international politics, each state maintains sovereignty; the consequences are very different.

In domestic society, sovereignty normally is the source of order, because the supreme value it enforces is the maintenance of the society itself. In international politics, the consequence is the opposite; because each member of the system retains that same control, no superior mechanism has the authority to resolve differences between the sovereign members.

Sovereignty, that ultimate and independent authority, makes politics in the international and domestic arenas fundamentally different. Because each member of the international system (each nation-state) has sovereign control over its own national territory, there is no authority superior to the state in territorial matters. Should more than one state have claims on, for instance, a piece of territory over which one presently exercises sover-