

The Future Scope and Content of International Security Studies
by Hans Binnendijk

Since the end of the Cold War, external threats to U.S. vital security interests have declined markedly. At the turn of the decade, U.S. national security analysts began to rethink the theological scope and content of the field. I see that CSIS has a project underway to define U.S. national security. Most important, perhaps, foundations began to ask if they should continue to fund our projects. Soul searching was interrupted by the Gulf War, which reminded us that regional conflicts remained prevalent; and possibly even more so than before as former clients of the superpowers felt less constrained by the threat of escalation or intervention. But the Gulf War also reminded us that important U.S. interests are at stake in regional conflicts. Then the Soviet and Yugoslav multi-ethnic states fell apart, bringing widespread conflict to Europe for the first time in 45 years.

At the same time, U.S. economic indicators took a nose dive. A double dip recession combined with twin deficits focuses attention inward. The Soviet collapse demonstrated that the principal threat to a great power is often internal not external. Los Angeles reminded us that our economic problems are fundamental, not transitory. Many began to call for a fundamental redirection of U.S. national priorities and to place America first. Francis Fukuyama provided the intellectual basis for conservative isolationism while Paul Kennedy provided an alternative basis for liberal isolationism. Candidates Pat Buchanan and Jerry Brown used the same talking points on national security issues.

External adversaries also changed. For some, Japan became the new enemy in

the geoeconomic competition. The European Community might also emerge to challenge the predominance of the last superpower. For others, the new adversary was transnational pollution, the hole in the ozone layer, or global warming.

Though not state sponsored, ecological degradation threatened state security as much as an invasion, and tough means were needed to deal with the problem.

In this environment, theologians have tended to broaden dramatically the definition of security studies to include things like economics, ecology, and immigration. Pete Peterson has defined national security as "the preservation of the United States as a free society with its fundamental institutions and values intact." In the Washington Quarterly, Ian Rowlands writes that global environmental changes compel world leaders "to supplement their traditional understanding of security with a broader interpretation." Indeed, Europeans fear economic disruption, environmental disasters and the influx of refugees much more than they fear Iraqi Scuds or escalation of the Yugoslav war.

The field has indeed expanded, but if we are not careful we will define ourselves out of business. While national leaders may develop this broader view of state security, security analysts should maintain a narrower definition tied to the concept of armed conflict. U.S. security analysts should concentrate on 1) potential armed conflict that might affect important U.S. interests, and 2) the range of means available to the United States to resolve those conflicts on terms beneficial to the national interest. This is indeed a narrower definition than the one CSIS used.

I favor this narrower definition for two reasons. First, security analysts are in general not trained as economists or ecologists. That does not mean that we

should not factor social, ethnic, economic or ecological problems into our calculations about the cause and nature of conflict. Of course we must, and increasingly so. We must draw on the expertise of those in adjacent disciplines; security studies is becoming an interdisciplinary field. But we must focus on conflict as the core issue, not on the environment or the economy. We must avoid our own imperial overstretch. If we switch our focus too far, then we have switched fields.

And second, we should use the narrower definition because events of the past three years have deposited a rich body of new and important issues for security analysts to study. The end of the Cold War has changed most of the fundamental assumptions in our field. There is more to do now in our own field than at any time since 1945.

So we must expand the definition of security studies beyond military balance issues without diluting it to the point that the field disappears.

The first part of this narrower definition requires a clearer understanding of the causes and nature of conflict. For that we need what physicists are also searching for in their discipline: a unified field. During the Cold War, security studies tended to focus on military balances. Regional studies were generally considered a separate field, with greater emphasis placed on understanding local motivations based on a broad array of economic, social, political, and cultural factors. The clear threat of the East-West conflict allowed security analysts to focus on military asymmetries as a cause of war, since political motivations of the superpowers were generally understood. With the disappearance of the ideological conflict, motivations have become more complex. The techniques of regional studies must now also be applied from the Vancouver to Vladivostok. Regional analysts

similarly often eschewed military affairs, a practice which led many of them to misjudge the impact of the Gulf War. The lines of demarcations between security studies and regional studies should blur when it comes to the study of conflict. Security analysts need to understand both political motivations that might lead to conflict as well as the nature of conflict and its resolution. They need the tools used by the area specialists.

It is important to provide a broad conceptual structure into which individual research projects can fit. To attempt this, I have indentified ten areas which together should constitute the scope and content of U.S. security studies. In each of these areas, the change over the past three years has been dramatic. The resulting list of areas for further research was prepared before I reviewed the CSIS current and prepared research plan. In general, the CSIS research plan stacks up well against my wish list.