

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Part I

**Introduction: developing a regional
approach to global security**

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

Almost nobody disputes that the end of the Cold War had a profound impact on the whole pattern of international security but, more than a decade after the transition, the character of the post-Cold War security order still remains hotly contested. This book explores the idea that, since decolonisation, the regional level of security has become both more autonomous and more prominent in international politics, and that the ending of the Cold War accelerated this process (Katzenstein 2000). This idea follows naturally from the ending of bipolarity. Without superpower rivalry intruding obsessively into all regions, local powers have more room for manoeuvre. For a decade after the ending of the Cold War, both the remaining superpower and the other great powers (China, EU, Japan, Russia) had less incentive, and displayed less will, to intervene in security affairs outside their own regions. The terrorist attack on the United States in 2001 may well trigger some reassertion of great power interventionism, but this is likely to be for quite narrow and specific purposes, and seems unlikely to recreate the general willingness to intervene abroad that was a feature of Cold War superpower rivalry. The relative autonomy of regional security constitutes a pattern of international security relations radically different from the rigid structure of superpower bipolarity that defined the Cold War. In our view, this pattern is not captured adequately by either 'unipolar' or 'multipolar' designations of the international system structure. Nor is it captured by the idea of 'globalisation' or by the dismal conclusion that the best that IR can do in conceptualising the security order of the post-Cold War world is to call it 'the new world disorder' (Carpenter 1991).

The argument in this book is that *regional security complex theory* (RSCT) enables one to understand this new structure and to evaluate the relative balance of power of, and mutual relationship within it between,

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

regionalising and globalising trends. RSCT distinguishes between the system level interplay of the global powers, whose capabilities enable them to transcend distance, and the subsystem level interplay of lesser powers whose main security environment is their local region. The central idea in RSCT is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes. As Friedberg (1993–4: 5) puts it (echoing the Federalist Papers Nos. IV and VI; Hamilton et al. 1911): ‘most states historically have been concerned primarily with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbours’. Processes of securitisation and thus the degree of security interdependence are more intense between the actors inside such complexes than they are between actors inside the complex and those outside it. Security complexes may well be extensively penetrated by the global powers, but their regional dynamics nonetheless have a substantial degree of autonomy from the patterns set by the global powers. To paint a proper portrait of global security, one needs to understand both of these levels independently, as well as the interaction between them.

RSCT uses a blend of materialist and constructivist approaches. On the materialist side it uses ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power that are close to those in neorealism. Its emphasis on the regional level is compatible with, and we think complementary to, neorealism’s structural scheme, but it contradicts the tendency of most neorealist analysis to concentrate heavily on the global level structure. On the constructivist side, RSCT builds on the securitisation theory set out in our previous works (Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1995c), which focus on the political processes by which security issues get constituted. It thus breaks from neorealism by treating the distribution of power and the patterns of amity and enmity as essentially independent variables. Polarity may affect, but it does not determine, the character of security relations. The processes of securitisation are essentially open, and subject to influence by a host of factors. RSCT offers a conceptual framework that classifies security regions into a set of types, and so provides a basis for comparative studies in regional security. It also offers a theory with some powers of prediction, in the sense of being able to narrow the range of possible outcomes for given types of region. More on this in chapter 3.

In what follows, chapter 1 establishes the plausibility of a regional approach by looking at both the main perspectives on the structure of international security, and the history of regional security. Chapter 2

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

tackles the question of levels by investigating how we are to understand the structure of security at the global level, seeing this as a precondition for defining the regional one. Chapter 3 lays out a revised and updated version of RSCT, and relates it to system level polarity. This theory sets the frame for the rest of the book.

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 Theories and histories about the structure of contemporary international security

This chapter starts by sketching out the three main perspectives on the structure of international security. The second section gives a short history of regional security, and the third reflects on the legacies of that past for states and regions.

Three theoretical perspectives on the post-Cold War security order

The three principal theoretical perspectives on post-Cold War international security structure are neorealist, globalist, and regionalist. What do we mean by ‘structure’ in this context? We are using it in broadly Waltzian (1979) terms to mean the principles of arrangement of the parts in a system, and how the parts are differentiated from each other. But our range is wider than the neorealist formulation (though we incorporate it) because we want: (a) to look at structural perspectives other than the neorealist one; and (b) to privilege the regionalist perspective.

The neorealist perspective is widely understood and, since we will have more to say about it in chapter 2, does not need to be explained at length here. It is state-centric, and rests on an argument about power polarity: if not bipolarity, then necessarily either unipolarity or multipolarity (or some hybrid). This debate is about the distribution of material power in the international system, which in neorealism determines the global political (and thereby also security) structure, and the interplay of this with balance-of-power logic. Its interpretation of the post-Cold War structure of international security assumes that there has been a change of power structure at the global level (the end of bipolarity), and its concern is to identify the nature of that change in order to infer the security consequences. Neorealism does not question the primacy of the global level,

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Three theoretical perspectives*

so its search for change is confined to a narrow range of options within that level: unipolarity or multipolarity.

The globalist perspective (by which we mean acceptance of the view usually labelled 'globalisation') is generally understood to be the antithesis of realism's (and neorealism's) statist, power-political understanding of international system structure. Globalisation is rooted mainly in cultural, transnational, and international political economy approaches. Perhaps its clearest guiding theme is the deterritorialisation of world politics (Held et al. 1999: 7–9; Woods 2000: 6; Scholte 2000: 2–3). In its stronger versions (whether Marxian or liberal), deterritorialisation sweeps all before it, taking the state, and the state system, off the centre stage of world politics (Held et al. 1999: 3–5). Milder versions leave the state and the state system in, but have lots of nonstate actors and systems operating across and outside state boundaries (Held et al. 1999: 7–9; Scholte 2000; Woods 2000; Clark 1999): 'territoriality and supraterritoriality coexist in complex interrelation' (Scholte 2000: 8); and 'Territorialization remains a check on globalization' (Clark 1999: 169). In terms of structure, the globalist position is clearer as an attack on neorealism's state-centric approach than as a statement of an explicit alternative. The global market or capitalism or various forms of world society probably best capture the underlying ideas of system structure in the globalist perspective, and the key point is rejection of the idea that an adequate sense of system structure can be found by privileging states.

Globalisation's hallmark is acknowledgement of the independent role of both transnational entities – corporations, non-governmental social and political organisations of many kinds – and intergovernmental organisations and regimes. Its focus is on how territorial sovereignty as the ordering principle for human activity has been redefined, and in some ways transcended, by networks of interaction that involve actors of many different kinds and at many different levels, and that feed off the huge technological and social improvements in the capacity for transportation and communication of nearly all types of goods, information, and ideas. The state is often a player in these networks, but it does not necessarily, or even usually, control them, and is increasingly enmeshed in and penetrated by them. Marxian and liberal versions of globalisation differ more in their normative perspectives than in their basic understanding of what globalisation means: here, as elsewhere, they are mirror images of the same phenomenon. Both see the macro-structure of the international system as taking a centre–periphery

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Theories and histories*

(or 'rich world–poor world' or 'developed–developing') form, with a core of societies (or elites) controlling most of the capital, technology, information, and organisational and ideological resources in the system, and shaping the terms on which the periphery participates. In the Marxian view, this structure is fundamentally exploitative, unequal, unstable, and undesirable, whereas in the liberal one it is fundamentally progressive and developmental, and its tendencies towards instability, though serious, are not without institutional solutions.

It is not in our remit here to go into the entirety of the debate about globalisation or to take on its enormous literature. Our perspective is security, and as Cha (2000: 391, 394) notes there has not been much written about the links between globalisation and security, not least because the security effects of globalisation have been hard to distinguish from the more dramatic effects of the ending of the Cold War. Cha (2000: 397), Clark (1999: 107–26), Guehenno (1998–9), Scholte (2000: 207–33), and Zangl and Zürn (1999) all argue that globalisation is responsible for complicating the security agenda, while at the same time reducing the elements of control that underpin the security strategy options of states. Cha and Guehenno both think that globalisation increases the incentives for states to pursue more cooperative security policies, especially at the regional level, a line of thinking much reinforced by the responses to the attack on the United States in September 2001. Barkawi and Laffey (1999) even want to sweep away state-centric security analysis and replace it with a centre–periphery model. We are less interested in the academic debate about globalisation than in the real world responses to it. From our perspective, what matters most is whether and how either globalisation in general or specific aspects of it (e.g., financial flows, terrorism, migration, trade liberalisation) become securitised by the actors in the international system. If globalisation is seen and acted on as a threat by states and other actors in the system, then it plays alongside, and competes with, more traditional securitisations of neighbours or great powers or internal rivals. Then the global level is directly – not only indirectly – present in a constellation of securitisation.

This quite widespread real world security perspective on globalisation has two sides. The first highlights the dark side of the centre–periphery structure. It is the successor to a long line of ideas going back at least as far as Hobson and Lenin, all emphasising the unequal, exploitative, and coercive aspects of relations between centre and periphery: imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, *dependencia*, cultural

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Three theoretical perspectives*

imperialism, anti-hegemonism, and suchlike. At the risk of oversimplifying, one can see these ideas as stemming from the perspective of the periphery, and reflecting its resentments about its relative powerlessness, underdevelopment, and vulnerability in relation to the centre. In one sense, they reflect concerns that the practice of economic liberalism is a major key to understanding what generates the wider international security agenda (Buzan and Wæver 1998; Scholte 2000: 207–33). At their most passionate, these ideas carry the accusation that the centre–periphery structure generated and maintains the weak position of the periphery for the benefit of the core, pointing to cases such as Zaire, Angola, and Iraq as evidence. This dark-side securitisation of globalisation is counterpointed by more upbeat liberal interpretations, more strongly rooted in the centre, which acknowledge the inequalities and disparities, but see the process of globalisation as the fastest and most efficient way to overcome them. In this view, globalisation should be a path to the steady erosion and eventual elimination of the traditional international security agenda (and in more radical liberal views also the state). The darlings of this perspective are South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, all of which have transformed themselves economically, and up to a point politically, within the embrace of globalisation. Its key great power targets are China and Russia, where the hope is that economic liberalisation (i.e., penetration by globalisation) will eventually generate political liberalisation and a lowering of threat perceptions. But even here there is a security dimension, mostly focused on the potential instabilities in the global trading and financial systems (Buzan et al. 1998: 95–117).

Typical securitisations from the non-liberal perspective on globalisation have been in the ‘new’ non-military areas of security. They have focused, *inter alia*, on the (in)stability and (in)equity of the liberal economic order, on the contradictions between the pursuit of capitalism and the sustainability of the planetary environment, and on the homogenising pressures of global (read ‘Western’, or ‘American’) culture and the threat this poses to other cultures, languages, and identities (Buzan et al. 1998: 71–140; Cable 1995; B. Crawford 1994; Arfi 1998; Stern 1995). During the 1990s, the globalisation perspective generated a more explicitly military-political securitisation, in the process creating an interesting conjuncture between itself and some strands of neorealist thinking. In this view, the periphery is threatened by two linked developments consequent on the collapse of bipolarity:

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Theories and histories

- The overwhelming military superiority of the West in general and the USA in particular, no longer balanced by a rival superpower.
- The collapse of the political space generated for the third world by superpower rivalry during the Cold War, and its replacement by a much more monolithic domination by the West. Without an ideological challenger within or adjacent to the core, the Western powers can impose much more demanding legal, social, financial, and political conditions on the periphery as the price of access to aid, trade, credit, recognition, and membership in various clubs ranging from NATO and the EU to the WTO. They can also wield increased pressure on states to conform to contested regimes (non-proliferation) or norms (democracy, human rights, anti-terrorism).

Seen in centre–periphery perspective, these developments mean that the centre has become much more cohesive and the international system much more hierarchical. It is hard not to notice how closely parallel this analysis runs to much of the unipolarist thinking within neorealism. In this perspective, globalisation is less an autonomous process and more an expression of US hegemony. The response to this development from those who feel threatened by it has been to take a position against hegemonism and in favour of developing a multipolar global power structure. Such views are prominent in the foreign policy rhetoric of China, India, Russia, Iran, Indonesia, Brazil, and up to a point France to name only the most outspoken exponents. Both the analysis and the cure link globalist and neorealist understandings of the post-Cold War security order.

The regionalist perspective is our chosen approach. We agree with Lake and Morgan (1997b: 6–7) that in the post-Cold War world ‘the regional level stands more clearly on its own as the locus of conflict and cooperation for states and as the level of analysis for scholars seeking to explore contemporary security affairs’, and we believe this to be true even though we use an understanding of security more open than their rather traditional, military one. This approach can be superficially seen as a post-Cold War focus rooted in two assumptions:

1. that the decline of superpower rivalry reduces the penetrative quality of global power interest in the rest of the world (Stein and Lobell 1997: 119–20; Lake 1997: 61); and

Cambridge University Press

052181412X - Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Three theoretical perspectives*

2. that most of the great powers in the post-Cold War international system are now 'lite powers' (Buzan and Segal 1996), meaning that their domestic dynamics pull them away from military engagement and strategic competition in the trouble spots of the world, leaving local states and societies to sort out their military-political relationships with less interference from great powers than before.

Our argument is that the regional level of security was also significant during the Cold War, and that except when global powers are extremely dominant, as they were during the imperial era, regional security dynamics will normally be a significant part of the overall constellation of security in the international system. We accept Lake and Morgan's (1997b: 11) call for security analysis 'to start with regions and employ a comparative approach', and think that this idea should be applied well beyond the immediate circumstances of the post-Cold War period.

The regionalist perspective contains elements of both neorealism and globalism, but gives priority to a lower level of analysis. Because both the neorealist and the regionalist approaches are rooted in territoriality and security, we see RSCT as complementary to the neorealist perspective on system structure, in a sense providing a fourth (regional) tier of structure. But our regional focus and even more our use of a constructivist understanding of security place us outside the neorealist project. Our relationship with the globalist perspective is, on the face of it, necessarily less close. To the extent that globalists start from an assumption of deterritorialisation, their approach is at the opposite end of the spectrum from ours. But this opposition is often more apparent than real. For one thing, globalists have not so far had much concern with security, and therefore are largely addressing a different agenda. For another, the moderate wing of globalists are keen, as are we, to emphasise the interplay between territoriality and deterritorialisation. It is, for example, already widely understood that many aspects of regionalisation, especially the more cooperative ones of regional economic groupings, are responses to globalisation (Buzan et al. 1998: 113–15; Katzenstein 1996b: 126–7; Hurrell 1995b: 53–8). Globalisation constructed as a threat will play a part in our analysis.

So, while we are not dismissive of the force of some of the globalist arguments, we do not see them as yet overriding the continued prominence of territoriality in the domain of security, whether in the form of states, nations, insurgency movements, or regions. Security is a