

Globalization and Environmental Challenges

Reconceptualizing Security in the 21st Century

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This is a monumental work to accompany and revise our evolving conception of security in the post-Cold War era. The book resembles a hall of mirrors where the reflection of the image multitude of authors, texts, references to texts within and without is part of a series of efforts – this huge work of 1147 pages edited by nine experts and written by 91 authors is just the third volume of a continuous process, since two more volumes are foreseen in this series.¹

The job of the reviewer is extremely simple facing a work of encyclopaedic dimension: You can find both what satisfies your curiosity, and sharpens your sense of criticism.

Two major paradigmatic shifts condition this vast revision, or reconceptualizing security in our century. The first is the end of the Cold War, and with it the collapse of two premises of International Relations: that the primary guarantor of security was military strength, and security was the domain of nation-states and regional alliances. The collapse of the second global military might revealed that military strength was not enough for the survival of the nation-state. New concepts looking at economic might as the guarantor of security emerged. Globalization was trans-pursing the existing state institutions. These changes led to the introduction of new debates into security studies: that of the state of the environment, depletion of resources, pollution, desertification, demographic explosion and growth in consumption patterns, and most recently climate change as the most pressing underlying source of risk. Therefore, the underlying concept of this series is that there is a shift to see the environmental challenges as at the centre of security risks in our times.

Or, is it? Hesitation transpires from many articles. Hesitation reflecting the evolution of the international relations after September 2001 attacks on the American soil, and after the 2003

¹ The first volume is entitled *Security and the Environment in the Mediterranean – Conceptualising Security and Environmental Conflicts*, published in 2003. And the second volume is entitled *Water Resources in the Middle East, Israel-Palestinian Water Issues – From Conflict to Cooperation*, published in 2007.

US-led invasion of Iraq. Again we return to traditional instruments to guarantee security – armed forces. Did 9-11 “slightly modify” global trends to re-evaluate security? Or was the 90’s the exception where after the collapse of one system and before the setting up a new order we had a short era of utopia disturbed by the little wars of the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Great Lake region?

The book is caught between this historic moment of hesitation, and is open to contradiction. And it tries to address these issues from a multitude of perspectives: that of security studies experts, military, environmental expert, militant from the southern continent, among others.

Probably one thing this work did not intend to be is to be an easy read. And it is not. It is complex and complicated. You have repetitions – the same conceptual evolution treated by a number of authors, and contradictions. You have concepts addressed in various manners. For example try to follow how the concept of globalization is used, and you find a variety of meanings to it. Is globalization the appropriation of resources by the multinationals, as Vandana Shiva suggests (pp 15-20), or a new era of revising security concept and introducing human security as found in a number of other articles? Some articles reflect the tradition of development studies, others security studies or IR. These are distinct traditions and the dialogue between the texts is not always easy to follow. For example, we learn that in its painful identity revision, NATO did neither introduce neither globalization nor environment and security in its new doctrine (pp713-723).

The contradictions of this immense endeavour reflects the state of our global hesitation: how to reorganize our International Relations and our understanding of security challenges, following the end of the Cold War? We still do not have a definitive answer. We still mix between our reliance on old instruments, the military, the old political institutions that were shaped during the Cold War to use them fight new wars. In spite of our growing consciousness about the environmental challenges we have a decade or two down the road, we still cling to our old hierarchies, privileges, and modes of consumption. We need more time to bring our new consciousness into reforming our old institutions. But do we have the time?