

**No. 23**

**The Concept of Security Before and After September 11**

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Some Preliminary Reflections by Amitav Acharya**

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## **ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS**

### **(1) The Contested Concept of Security**

**Steve Smith**

The main theme underlying this paper is the contention that ‘security’ is “an essentially contested concept”. The article attempts an overview of the current debates shaping the sub-field of ‘security studies’. Six main ‘schools of thought’ are examined in turn to demonstrate how each of these ‘schools’ challenge and contest the traditional agenda of ‘security studies’ by attempting to both widen and deepen the concept of ‘security’. The last section concludes by examining the value of engaging in such debates on widening and deepening the term ‘security’ for international politics in our present age.

### **(2) Security and Security Studies After September 11: Some Preliminary Reflections**

**Amitav Acharya**

Debates about the meaning of security and the agenda of security studies have entered a new stage following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US. This paper explores some of the main themes and likely directions in this debate. It identifies five issues: (1) the new threat of, and the new warfare against, terrorism; (2) US strategic primacy and its impact on international stability; (3) implications for “clash of civilizations” thesis; (4) implications for the relationship between democracy and international security, and (5) the shift from “human security” to “homeland security”. The paper argues that the new threat of transnational terrorism and international responses to it have undermined both “clash of civilizations” and “end of history” perspectives, which together formed one of the great debates in international security studies in the post-Cold War era. The new security debate in the post September 11 era should be about the role of the US in a unipolar world (especially whether and how it can be stabilizing), and the rise of the “homeland security” paradigm, which entails a reassertion of state power over societal forces and blurs the distinction between Western and Third World security paradigms.

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# **THE CONTESTED CONCEPT OF SECURITY**

**Steve Smith**

## **Introduction**

In an influential article published nearly fifty years ago, W.B. Gallie introduced the notion that certain terms used in social theory are, as he put it, essentially *contested concepts*.<sup>1</sup> By this phrase Gallie does not simply mean that it is difficult to agree on a definition of a concept, but that there are some concepts whose meaning is *inherently* a matter of dispute because no neutral definition is possible. So, I believe, it is with the concept of security and what I want to do in this paper is to outline and assess the main ‘schools of thought’ concerning the meaning of the term. I have opted to look at six main ‘schools of thought’ in the debates about the meaning of the concept of security. These six schools are those involved in broadening and deepening the concept and therefore I am going to concentrate on these. In the conclusion, I will return to the relationship between broadening and deepening the definition of the concept of security and its utility in explaining world politics, and to discuss whether widening and deepening the term might undermine it and reduce its utility as a key concept for the analysis of international politics.

## **The Copenhagen School and Security**

The work of Barry Buzan has been enormously important in the development of security studies. It has also been at the core of what has been dubbed the “Copenhagen school”. The key element in Buzan’s book was to broaden the security agenda so as to involve five sectors rather than deal only with one of the five, which was the traditional

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Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Paul Williams for his research assistance on this paper.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> W.B. Gallie, ‘Essentially Contested Concepts’, pp 167-198 in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 1955-56.

focus, i.e., military security.<sup>2</sup> To this, Buzan added political, economic, societal and ecological security sectors. These new sectors needed to be discussed because of changes in the policy environment facing states in the 1980s. Importantly, Buzan also discussed the individual as the ‘irreducible base unit’ for discussions about security. But for Buzan, individuals could not be the referent object for the analysis of international security. That had to be the state for three reasons: it was the state that had to cope with the sub-state, state, international security problematic; the state was the primary agent for the alleviation of insecurity; and the state was the dominant actor in the international political system. In this sense, Buzan sought to widen the definition of security to encompass five sectors, and to focus discussions about security on three levels (the sub-state, the state and the international system). But in all of this the state was the referent object, as it is the state that stands at the interface between security dynamics at the sub-state level, and the security dynamics operating at the level of the international system.

By the early 1990s however, the massive changes in European security meant that it was difficult for Buzan to maintain his view that the state was the referent object for security. In a series of publications, he developed the notion of ‘societal security’ as the most effective way of understanding the emerging security agenda in post-Cold War Europe. This shift was a very important one. Whereas state security focuses on sovereignty as the core value, societal security focused instead on identity, as represented in the ability of a society to maintain its traditional patterns of language, culture, religious and national identity and customs. Societal security in this analysis should thus not replace a focus on state security but should be given greater attention. This was because societal security issues were becoming far more relevant to the debates of the 1990s than were the old state security ones. Prominent among these were issues such as migration, which simply could not be fitted into the state security debate.

Crucial in this move towards societal security has been work on the idea of ‘securitization’.<sup>3</sup> In this context, labelling something as a security issue imbues it with a sense of importance and urgency that legitimises the use of special measures outside of the

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Buzan *People, States and Fear* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983); *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, second edition, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> See Ole Waever, ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’ in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp 46-86.

usual political process to deal with it. The concern here is that this results in a militarised and confrontational mind-set, which defines security questions in an “us versus them” manner. Instead this approach proposes “desecuritizing” issues, that is, to remove them from the security agenda. Thus, for the “Copenhagen school” the focus is as follows: ‘securitization’ studies aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful). This securitization approach is then related back to the five sectors outlined by Buzan earlier in the paper.

### **Constructivist Security Studies**

By constructivist security studies I mean those works that have brought the assumptions of social constructivism into security studies. This involves adopting the infamous statement of Alex Wendt, that “anarchy is what states make of it”, to the security realm: thus ‘security is what we make of it’. The focus here will be on two major strands of thought.

The first is the work on ‘security communities’.<sup>4</sup> The central theme is that security communities are best understood as path-dependent and socially constructed, with the trigger mechanisms for security communities having both material and normative bases. The important insight that this approach develops is that state actors might see security as achievable through community rather than through power. Security, therefore, is something that can be *constructed*; insecurity is not simply the “given” condition of the international system. Security is what states make of it. The idea here is that a constructivist approach, which recognises the importance of knowledge for transforming international structures and security politics, is best suited to taking seriously how the international community can shape security politics and create the conditions for a stable peace.

The second major strand developing a constructivist account of international security is work on the security culture of different states. The central theme of this

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<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

approach is that national security interests are defined by actors who respond to cultural factors. This does not mean that power, conventionally understood as material capabilities, is unimportant for an analysis of national security, but the meanings that states and other political actors attach to power and security help us explain their behaviour. Note that for all the focus on identity, norms and culture in this approach, the state is still the actor, and military security remains the form of security to be explained.

### **Critical Security Studies**

Critical security studies is the most sustained and coherent critique of traditional security studies. There are two main approaches in the writing in this area.

The first is associated with the work of Keith Krause and Michael Williams.<sup>5</sup> It was they who popularised the distinction between broadening and deepening security.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, they want to question the focus of traditional security studies on the state, and to re-examine prevailing claims about security. This approach harbours a dissatisfaction with orthodox security studies and a disillusionment with the agenda of mainstream security studies after the end of the Cold War. Basically the stress is on the need to move from a focus on the military dimension of state behaviour under anarchy to a focus on individuals, community and identity. Ultimately this approach is most interested in encouraging a variety of approaches to studying and ‘practising’ security.

The second variant within critical security studies has a more defined and focused definition of what critical security studies means. This can be termed the Welsh School.<sup>7</sup> This approach has as its focus the goal of human emancipation. Only a process of emancipation can make the prospect of security more likely. This approach does not however see human emancipation as synonymous with Westernisation. It argues that emancipation should logically be given precedence in our thinking about security over the mainstream themes of power and order. “Human emancipation” here is defined “as the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from the physical and human constraints

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds) *Critical Security Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Keith Krause and Michael Williams, ‘Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods’, *Mershon International Studies Review*, 40, Supplement 2, 1996, pp 229-254.



which stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do". War and the threat of war are thus some of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. The quest for 'emancipation', and not power or order, thus produces genuine 'security'. A critique of critical security studies has been made by Mohammed Ayoob, who focuses on the stress on emancipation. For Ayoob the definition of emancipation tend to impose a model of contemporary Western polities that are far removed from Third World realities.<sup>8</sup> He adds that to posit emancipation as synonymous with security and the panacea for all the ills plaguing Third World states can be the height of naïveté. The problem, for Ayoob, is that this approach is concerned with human emancipation, whereas Ayoob wants to focus on the security of the state; his is an avowedly realist perspective. The main weakness of Ayoob's criticism is his focus on the security of the state when for many societies (Third World or otherwise) the state is the main threat to their security. In the end, it comes down to whether one sees the state or the individual as the referent point of security.

Critical security studies, defined more generally, consists of alternatives for security studies to that offered by the mainstream. It is explicit in its rejection of realism but it does not add up to an alternative theory.

### **Feminist Security Studies**

Feminist work on security is extensive, although much of it deals with security implicitly as a result of a thoroughgoing critique of the gendered assumptions of traditional International Relations. Indeed, feminist International Relations shows how women are ignored yet centrally implicated in international relations. It has been argued that whilst security has always been considered a masculine issue, women have seldom been recognised by the security literature; yet women have been writing about security since at least the beginning of the century. This is largely because there are security issues that more directly affect women than men: 80-90 per cent of casualties of war are

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<sup>7</sup> Ken Booth: 'Security and Emancipation'; 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice' *International Affairs*, 67: 3, 1991, pp 527-545; Wyn Jones, 'Travel Without Maps'; "Message in a Bottle"? Theory and Praxis in Critical Security Studies' *Contemporary Security Policy*, 16:3, 1995, pp 299-319.

<sup>8</sup> <sup>8</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, 'Defining Security: A Subaltern Realist Perspective', in Krause and Williams, *Critical Security Studies*, pp 126-127.

civilians, the majority of these being women and children; the rape of women is commonly used as a tool of war; over 80 per cent of the world's refugees are women and children; domestic violence against women is higher in militarised societies. If the definition of security is broadened from one centred on the military dimension to include economic and environmental dimensions, then women's insecurity is even further highlighted: while women represent half the global population and one-third of the paid labour force and are responsible for two-thirds of all working hours, they receive only a tenth of world income and own less than one percent of world property.

The conclusion is that this evidence shows the fallacy of the view that the state is the guarantor of security for its citizens; crucially, the state is not neutral with regard to security provision for all individuals. Finally, there is the work on the practical relationship between education, peace research and feminism. For example, some writers have shown the linkages between militarism and sexism in society, and argue that both are maintained by a similar worldview, namely that men are inherently aggressive and women inherently non-violent, and that women are inferior.

The contribution of feminist writers to security studies has been to interrogate the notion of the state as a neutral actor. Crucially, looking at security from the perspective of women alters the definition of what security is to such an extent that it is difficult to see how any form of traditional security studies can offer an analysis. It is like looking at the world through completely different coloured spectacles.

### **Post-structuralist Security Studies**

Post-structural work on security represents another significant challenge to traditional security studies. It is both a school of thought as well as a critique of the traditional conception of both security and its referent object.

There are two illustrative examples of work in this area. The first is the work of Bradley Klein, specifically his book *Strategic Studies and World Order: The Global Politics of Deterrence*.<sup>9</sup> The main aim of this work is to demonstrate how the language of

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<sup>9</sup> Bradley S. Klein, *Strategic Studies and World Order: The Global Politics of Deterrence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

‘strategic studies’ is not just a neutral appraisal of the condition of international anarchy. Instead, the language of strategic studies, concentrated as it is on “threats”, “fear” and “security” is actually one of the tools used to legitimate the processes of state formation and maintenance. Without external “threats”, “fears” and “dangers”, the state’s legitimacy to exist and continue existing in the shape that it does on the basis of providing “security” will come under increasing scrutiny. “Strategic studies” is thus an implicit endeavour in “finding”, “producing” and “re-producing” the above threats which in the end keeps the state in business.

A second example is David Campbell’s empirical work in post-structuralist security studies, *Writing Security*.<sup>10</sup> He looks at how the practices of US foreign policy construct the identity of the US. The book invites the reader to question the taken-for-granted separations of inside/outside, self/other, and domestic/foreign – these dichotomies based as much on territorial boundaries of states as they are on the moral/ethical boundaries of “citizenship” and “national identity”. The author maintains that these separations/boundaries are, to a large extent, produced and maintained through the act of identifying ‘threats’ by the state. The book basically traces the ways in which US foreign policy has served to demonstrate certain “dangers” and “threats” to construct a specific identity for the US as an international actor.

In all, post-structural security analysis’ contribution to policy analysis is two-fold. Firstly, contradictions in policy options and outcomes are not seen as obstacles but as intrinsically part of the process of arriving at policy decisions – they have to be negotiated and not “escaped” or “transcended”. Secondly, every policy proposal is *preceded* by the qualification of a “perhaps” and *followed* by an insistent and persistent questioning. In other words, poststructuralist thought is never satisfied with claims that a lasting solution to problems can be, or has been, reached.

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<sup>10</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

## **Human Security**

The concept of human security has risen to prominence in the debate following the 1994 United Nations Development Program (UNDP).<sup>11</sup> Starting from the premise that the end of the Cold War gave an impetus to rethinking the concept of security, the UNDP proposed that the focus should shift from nuclear security to human security:

With the dark shadows of the Cold War receding, one can now see that many conflicts are within nations rather than between nations. For most people, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Will they and their families have enough to eat? Will they lose their jobs? Will their streets and neighbourhoods be safe from crime? Will they be tortured by a repressive state? Will they become a victim of violence because of their gender? Will their religion or ethnic origin target them for persecution? In the final analysis, human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity.<sup>12</sup>

The Report notes four main features of the concept: it is a universal concern, relevant to people everywhere because the threats are common to all; its components are interdependent since the threats to human security do not stay within national borders; it is easier to achieve through early rather than later intervention; it is people centred, in that it is concerned with how people ‘live and breathe’ in society. The Report outlines seven areas of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. It also identifies six main threats to human security: unchecked population growth, disparities in economic opportunities, migration pressures, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, and international terrorism.

Since the initial report in 1994, the UNDP has refined the concept of human security, with the 1997 report introducing the distinction between income poverty and human poverty: the former refers to an income of US\$1 a day and less, the latter factors such as life expectancy and illiteracy. The concept has also been taken up by international

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*, (New York: Oxford University Press). (Citations that follow are from a reprint of sections of the report, ‘Redefining Security: The Human Dimension’, in *Current History*, May 1995, pp 229-136.

bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF, as well as by some governments. The most significant of these has been the use of the concept by the Canadian and Japanese governments. The Canadian usage of the concept differs in an important way from the UNDP usage: although the Canadian government pointed to the important role of the UNDP in re-focusing attention on human rather than state security, the very breadth of the UNDP approach made it unwieldy as a policy instrument and largely ignored the continuing human insecurity resulting from violent conflict. By the UNDP's own criteria, human insecurity is greatest during war. Of the 25 countries at the bottom of the 1998 Human Development Index, more than half are suffering the direct or indirect effects of violent conflict'.<sup>13</sup> The Canadian government is mainly concerned with measures to lessen the effects of conflict on people, and thus has concentrated on measures such as the ban on landmines and the creation of an international criminal court to hold people responsible for war crimes.

The Japanese government's concept of human security is much broader than the Canadian government's in that it is very closely related to the UNDP view: specifically noting the work of those who press for banning landmines and creating international criminal courts, the government nonetheless states that "In Japan's view, however, human security is a much broader concept...it is necessary to go beyond thinking of human security solely in terms of protecting human life in conflict situations".<sup>14</sup>

Outside governments, the concept has been important in linking the study of conflict and security with economic development. For some, human security involves not only a shift from a focus on the state to the individual, but also a shift from notions of the security of the individual to a focus on individual needs. Thus material sufficiency is at the core of human security, but it involves more than that as human security describes a condition of existence in which basic human needs are met, and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the life of the community can be realised. Thus,

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<sup>12</sup> UNDP, 'Redefining Security: The Human Dimension', p 229.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Canada, *Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World*, (Ottawa, April 1999). Located at [www.dfa-it-maeci.gc.ca/foreignp/HumanSecurity/menu-e.html](http://www.dfa-it-maeci.gc.ca/foreignp/HumanSecurity/menu-e.html). Quote from section II.

<sup>14</sup> Yukio Takasu (Director General of the Foreign Ministry of Japan), 'Statement by Director General Yukio Takasu at the International Conference on Human Security in a Globalized World', Ulan-Bator, 8 May 2000. (Located at [www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human\\_secu/index.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/index.html).)

human security requires both that basic material needs are met (food, shelter, education, health care, etc.) and the achievement of human dignity which incorporates personal autonomy, control over one's life and unhindered participation in the life of the community.

As Amitav Acharya notes, “we have three different conceptions of human security today: one focusing on the *human costs* of violent conflict, another stressing *human needs* in the path to sustainable development. A third conception, approximating the first more than the second, emphasises the *rights* (meaning human rights) dimensions of human security without necessarily linking to the costs of violent conflict”.<sup>15</sup> As this implies, there is no agreement on the meaning of the concept of human security, and it is not clear exactly how it can be operationalised.

### **Conclusion**

My main conclusion is that the concept of security is now genuinely contested. The debate over security can be classified into four strands. The first involves the extension of security “from the security of nations to the security of groups and individuals: it is extended downwards from nations to individuals. In the second, it is extended...upwards, from the nation to the biosphere...In the third operation, it is extended horizontally, or to the sorts of security that are in question...the concept of security is extended, therefore, from military to political, economic, social, environmental, or “human security”. In a fourth operation, the political responsibility for ensuring security is diffused in all directions from national states, including upwards to international institutions, downwards to regional or local government, and sideways to non-governmental organisations, to public opinion and the press, and to the abstract forces of nature or of the market.

The massive expansion in the extension of the concept of “security” in the last decade has caused some to question whether this undermines the utility of the concept. Some have argued that the term may now have little analytical usage since it is used so widely that it no longer has a core meaning. This group argues that there is a danger that

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<sup>15</sup> Amitav Acharya, ‘Human Security in the Asia Pacific: Puzzle, Panacea, or Peril?’, unpublished paper. I would like to thank Amitav for his help in thinking about human security, and for his generosity in providing references and sources.

the coherence of security studies is being eroded. Therefore this line of opinion feels that security has long been about the survival and physical safety of the actors and their people; by extension it concerns the *deliberate* use of force by states. Broadening security studies to cover other ‘harms’ – economic, environmental and so forth – is unfortunate for it lumps together deliberate, organised physical harm (or threats thereof) with other threats and pains. By way of contrast, an alternative argument often made is that in stark contrast to the treatment of security during the Cold War, any conception capable of dealing with the current world order needs to be linked to a much wider notion of governance than that which characterised the Cold War. For security here thus refers to such a vast range of problems related to order and governance that there can be no one universal solution to the resulting security dilemmas, and no treatment of security is isolated from its political and social underpinnings.

The concept of security is therefore a battleground in and of itself. On the one hand, there are those who wish to broaden and deepen it (indeed, broadening the term may well be the necessary consequence of deepening it); on the other, there is now a reinvigorated section of opinion focusing on the traditional meaning of the term, i.e., the military security of nation states. To those working within the traditional area of the subject, broadening and deepening only threaten to undermine the utility of the concept and render it useless for analysis. If the concept of security refers to any threat then it becomes meaningless. Broadening and deepening also carry the risk of undermining the important practices of state security; it is claimed, by undermining the core activity of state security.

The primary aim of his paper has been to outline the basic components of the main non-traditional debates about the concept of security. There is no doubt that the concept of security needs to be challenged and contested, and that the traditional definition has helped create that very ‘natural’, ‘commonsensical’ world of international politics that we all know of. This does not mean that merely contesting the meaning of the concept is sufficient to reconstruct security in world politics, but it is an undertaking that is necessary if such a reconstruction is to take place. For far too long security was not considered to be a contestable concept; for even longer it was never contested. Now the situation is one where not only the concept of security can and must be contested, but so can the intimately related concepts of community and human dignity.

# SECURITY AND SECURITY STUDIES AFTER SEPTEMBER 11: SOME PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS<sup>16</sup>

Amitav Acharya

## Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. on 11 September 2001 and the US counterstrike against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, are clearly among the most important geopolitical events of our times. Like past such momentous events in history, September 11 will have considerable impact on the concept and practice of security. In this brief paper, I will deal with the implications of September 11 with a view to offering some preliminary suggestions as to how it might affect debates about what security means and how best to achieve it. The discussion falls into five broad areas:

- The new threat of, and the new warfare against, terrorism
- US strategic primacy and its impact on international stability
- Implications for the “clash of civilizations” thesis
- The relationship between domestic political systems and international security
- The shift from “human security” to “homeland security”

## I. The New Threat and the New Warfare

Security in its barest essence involves reducing vulnerability to threats. More than any previous episode, the September 11 attacks have demonstrated the vulnerability of nations to the new danger of *transnational* and *post-modern* terrorism. While terrorism is not a stranger to security studies discourse, a good number of security studies scholars are now going to focus on defining the nature and dimensions of this “threat”.

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<sup>16</sup> This paper incorporates sections of two previous papers by the author: Amitav Acharya, “State-Society Relations: Reordering Asia and the World After September 11”, in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, eds., *World in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (London: Palgrave/ New York: St Martins, 2002); and “Diplomacy in Hard Times: Singapore Confronts Global Terrorism and Regional Regression”, Paper Presented to the Perspectives 2002 Conference, Organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2002.



One of the most succinct descriptions of the shape and magnitude of this danger came from Singapore Minister for Trade and Industry, George Yeo, in the following words:

The new terrorism is of a different genre. Like in a civil war, the threat is harder to pinpoint because it is within. Families may be split with the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ mixed together. It is globalised by the same technologies which created the global economy. It does not consist of guerrillas sheltering in the countryside making occasional incursions into the cities, but operates and draws strengths in multi-ethnic and multi-religious urban environments. It makes use of air travel and the internet. It uses similar encryption algorithms to hide its internal communications. Worst of all, its members are prepared to die for their cause.<sup>17</sup>

By striking at the heart of US economic and military power, the September 11 attacks became a defining moment of international relations. They ended forever America’s sense of relative invulnerability to foreign non-nuclear attacks. While terrorists had targeted American lives and assets before, few had expected attacks of such magnitude to succeed on American soil.

While underscoring the vulnerability of the US to the terrorist threat, September 11 also paved the way for the US to demonstrate its overwhelming dominance of the global military balance. The lessons of the Afghanistan war is likely to take up a good deal of the attention of strategic analysts.

Before it started, many experts had opined that the war against the Taliban could not be won and should not be fought. How could the US win a war in which the target was so elusive and unidentifiable? Didn’t Afghanistan have a history of humiliating foreign powers?

Yet Afghanistan offered a resounding demonstration of the “new American way of war”. This way of war relies on three key instruments. The first is weapon systems that can be deployed at extremely long ranges. The second is the capacity of such weapons to hit targets with extreme precision. Third and most important, is the ability of US forces to

process and use an immense amount of targeting information collected on the ground, in the air and from space.<sup>18</sup>

In this type of warfighting, airpower, backed by target-spotting special forces, surveillance aircraft and imaging satellites with electronic systems and sensors able to peer through darkness and clouds, play a decisive role.<sup>19</sup> This new American Way of War is also thoroughly “smart”. In the 1991 Gulf War only 10 percent of the bombs were precision-guided, meaning they could sense and hit targets from a laser beam or pick up signals from a Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite. In the Afghan War, 90 percent of the bombs were thus capable. The main precision-guided weapon in the Gulf War was a cruise missile costing US\$1 million apiece. In Afghanistan, the main weapon of the air war was a kit, called Joint Direct Attack Munition, which could make dumb bombs smart by attaching a GPS and tail fins to guide a bomb 16 kilometres from the aircraft to the target. It came at a cost of US\$18,000.<sup>20</sup>

Caution is warranted in drawing lessons about the US military prowess from the Afghan experience. Afghanistan had no forest cover, and the Taliban had no air defence. Its demise would have been less swift but for the ruthless ground campaign of the Northern Alliance. The US might not enjoy these advantages in other theatres of conflict, such as in East Asia, where Singapore’s security interests are more directly engaged.

The American military reach is accompanied by its expanding sphere of strategic interest. September 11 prompts a rethink of the relative strategic importance of regional

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<sup>17</sup> George Yeo, “S’pore a Free Port But Will Give No Quarter to Terrorism”, *The Straits Times*, 12 October 2001, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, “High-Tech Successes Point to a Sea Change in U.S. Military Thinking”, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 December 2001, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> The Afghanistan campaign involved the first effective use of remotely piloted surveillance aircraft (“Predators”) which could beam back video pictures in real time showing enemy movements and pinpoint targets. This enabled the US to hit even small elusive targets with smart bombs and guided weapons.

<sup>20</sup> Ricks, “High-Tech Successes”, op.cit. Equipped with precision-guided heavy bombs that rely on all-weather targeting by satellites, US B-52s were able to destroy targets with a single payload, which would have normally required several runs. With these and other assets (including laser designators to guide smart bombs), a few hundred US troops on the ground could pinpoint targets accurately enough with a small number of bombers flying from aircraft carriers 1000 miles away or from Diego Garcia located even further away. The use of “daisy-cutters”, huge 680-kg bombs that set off fuel explosions to ignite all the oxygen in an area of the size of several football fields, symbolized the massive firepower of the US, boosted the morale of the local allies and destroyed Taliban hiding areas in remote mountain caves. Joseph Fitchett, “Campaign Proves the Length of U.S. Military Arm”, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 November 2001.

theatres for US grand strategy. While the importance of the Middle East as part of America's sphere of vital interests is expectedly confirmed, South Asia now would have a higher profile in US grand strategy than was the case for some time. Moreover, American strategic engagement in Southeast Asia has been strengthened.

## **II. Unipolarity with Unilateralism**

Security studies scholars have long debated how the distribution of power in the international system affects the prospects for peace and stability. During the Cold War, many scholars challenged Kenneth Waltz's neo-realist doctrine that bipolar systems (as during the Cold War) are likely to be more stable than multipolar systems (as during the 19<sup>th</sup> century). This proposition could not, however, be put to test when the Cold War was ended, since the post-Cold War era actually turned out to be a "unipolar moment", which has now consolidated into a unipolar era. The more recent debates about balance of power have thus been about the consequences of American strategic primacy for global order.

September 11 may provide some ammunition to those who believe that a unipolar world order is conducive to international peace and stability. For example, renewed American strategic engagement in Southeast Asia to counter terrorism would be viewed by many regional governments, if not their peoples generally, as a positive force for regional stability. American hegemony has been strengthened so much so that it now acts as a significant check on regional conflicts. For example, by consolidating its influence over both India and Pakistan, America has acquired an unprecedented ability to restrain their rivalry, one of the most dangerous flashpoints in Asia and the world.

In the past, hegemony did not prevent the US from acting multilaterally. It was a victorious United States after World War II which presided over a prolific era of multilateral institution-building (including the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions). This became the basis of the theory of "hegemonic stability" which conceptualised how a hegemon could promote global order by accepting sacrifices and offering public good in vital areas (such as free trade and security). But the positive linkage between hegemony and multilateral cooperation may be challenged in the post-September 11 world. This is evident from the US attitude towards coalition-building during the Afghanistan war.

Dashing initial hopes and calls for a renewed commitment to multilateralism, George W. Bush did not replicate the “New World Order” approach that his father had employed against Saddam Hussein in 1990. Instead of collective security, the US invoked the right of national self-defence under the UN charter to bypass direct Security Council authorization for the conduct of the military campaign. Learning from Kosovo where alliance warfare had proven cumbersome, the US also shunned NATO’s direct involvement, although the alliance had invoked its collective defence provision for the first time in history in support of the US.

While the international community was generally supportive of the US position, each of America’s key regional allies have demanded and secured something in return for their backing for the US. (This was in contrast to the situation during the Gulf War of 1991, when the US got its allies, Japan and Germany in particular, to pay for most of the war costs.) China and Russia were quick to press for an American understanding that domestic insurgencies should be viewed as a terrorist, rather than human rights issue. India secured American backing for its own war against terrorism involving Pakistani-supported Kashmir militants.

Those who argue that a unipolar global power structure is not necessarily conducive to stable great power relations will find it particularly interesting to examine trends in great power relations since September 11. The war produced a nominal improvement in great power relations. But here too seeds of discord were already evident. The warmth in US-Russian relations sparked by Putin’s sympathy and support for the US did not prevent a mad dash to Afghanistan by Russian troops soon after its liberation from the Taliban. The terrorist attacks diverted attention from Sino-US tensions, eased by China’s support, albeit qualified, for the US anti-terrorist campaign. But China’s sense of military vulnerability in the Taiwan Straits could only be aggravated by the awesome display of US power projection in Afghanistan. Beijing could not have been happy with the haste with which the Japanese government pushed through legislation to enable its navy (in a supporting role) to enter the waters of the Indian Ocean for the first time since the Second World War. In Europe, while British and West European support for the US was predictably forthcoming, the Blair government probably surprised itself with its exceptionally strong backing of the Bush Administration.

The war in Afghanistan has several implications for the theory of alliances. First, a new catalyst of alliance-formation has clearly emerged. Alliances are usually formed against common threats. Throughout the world, transnational terrorist networks are filling in as *the* common threat against which states can build new networks of security cooperation. While no new formal alliance is forthcoming in Southeast Asia, the terrorist threat in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines has already produced the first multilateral gathering of their defence intelligence chiefs.

At the same time, September 11 might have a dampening impact on alliances. It served to highlight the growing gulf in military technology between the US and its European allies, which could be matched by a political gulf over the Palestinian problem and the proposed US attack on Iraq. The US technological superiority makes for unequal alliances, making strategic interoperability in Europe and East Asia between US and allied forces especially difficult. This might be a worthy subject for scholars of alliances investigating why alliances decline and transform.

### **III. Culture Clash: Between or Within?**

In the 1990s, Samuel Huntington's thesis regarding an impending clash of civilizations had a major impact on the agenda of security studies by generating much new attention on cultural and identity as sources of conflict. It also became a major point of contention. The September 11 attacks and the international reaction offer a good test of the thesis, and how it fared will be long debated by security studies specialists and policy-makers around the world.

Writing in *Newsweek* magazine, Samuel Huntington argues that “[R]eactions to September 11 and the American response were strictly along civilization lines.” But the evidence coming from Asia suggests otherwise, at least where government responses were concerned. While, as Huntington observes, the governments and peoples of Western countries were “overwhelmingly supportive” of the US, and made commitments to join its war on terrorism,<sup>21</sup> it was the governments of India and Pakistan, which were among the

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Age of Muslim Wars” *Newsweek*, Special Davos Edition, December 2001-February 2002, p.13.

first to offer military facilities to the US. Pakistan, a Muslim nation, proved to be the most critical link in the logistics chain that ensured victory for the US against the Taliban.

Governments, including those presiding over Islamic nations, not only condemned the terrorist attacks on the US, many also recognized its right to retaliate against Taliban. Governments in Muslim Central Asia braved popular backlash by offering material and logistical assistance to the US. From Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, from Iran to Indonesia, Islamic nations distanced themselves from the theology of Osama-bin-Laden. Musharaf denounced his home-grown extremists for giving Islam a bad name and for threatening the modernist vision of Pakistan's founder, Ali Jinnah. Iran, having for decades spearheaded the Islamic revolutionaries' jihad against the "great Satan", made no secret of its disdain of Taliban's Islamic credentials.

In responding to September 11, states acted more as states than as civilizations.<sup>22</sup> From Hindu India to Muslim Indonesia, from Buddhist Thailand to Catholic Philippines, the response of governments was the same. Asked to choose between the US and the terrorists, they overwhelmingly sided with Washington. They did so despite reservations about the US support for Israel, concerns about civilian casualties in the Afghanistan war, and misgivings about US military and economic dominance of the world. And they chose this course despite the Bush administration's decision to give short shrift to multilateralism and coalition-building.

Why governments acted this way speaks more to pragmatism and principle than to their cultural predisposition and civilizational affinity. National interest, regime security, and modern principles of international conduct were placed ahead of primordial sentiment and religious identity. Pakistan, for example, got badly needed American aid and de facto recognition of its military regime. Indonesia, whose support as the world's most populous Islamic nation was crucial to the legitimacy of the US anti-terrorist campaign, received both economic and political support for its fledgling democracy. The Saudi regime, which along with Pakistan had created the Taliban, simply followed the dictates of its security

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<sup>22</sup> Amitav Acharya, "Clash of Civilizations? No, of National Interests and Principles", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 January 2002, p.6.

dependence on the US. Iran saw an opportunity to rid itself of an unfriendly regime in its neighbourhood and extend its influence beyond its eastern frontiers.

For some governments, concerns for domestic stability and regime security proved decisive. In rejecting the open call to Jihad issued by the Taliban and its supporters, some Islamic nations acted out of interest, others out of principle, but most out of a combination of both. Many nations recognized the US counter-strike as an exercise in a nation's right of self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. They would not grant the same right to the Taliban, whose apologists had portrayed terrorism as a legitimate weapon of the weak against an unjust, anti-Islamic, and overwhelmingly powerful imperialist. A combination of national interest and common interest remains the basis of international relations. Religion and civilization do not replace pragmatism, interest and principle as the guiding motives of international relations.

Finally, the clash of civilizations thesis has been challenged in the wake of September 11 by those who view the terrorist attacks and the response of the international community as signifying a clash *within* a civilization (Islam). This view perhaps has greater merit. Not only did governments of the world close ranks against the threat of transnational terrorism. Domestic cohesion in multi-ethnic countries (such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) has also stood up to the challenge. All this might not be sufficient to drown out traditional geopolitical rivalry between, or cultural conflict within, nations. But the international response to September 11 should go some way in discrediting the clash of civilizations thesis.<sup>23</sup>

Adherents to the clash within a civilization thesis could draw support from the divergent perception of, and reactions to, September 11, on the part of governments and peoples. Throughout the Islamic world, including Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Indonesia, societies showed less sympathy and support for the US than did their own governments. And a lot of this popular anger is directed against their own governments, especially those who had sided with the US or had not been sufficiently forthcoming in condemning the US military action in Afghanistan. Popular resentment of American

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<sup>23</sup> Amitav Acharya, "Clash of Civilizations? No, Of National Interests and Principles", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 January 2001, p.8.

support for Israel made it difficult, though not impossible, for their governments to show understanding and support for the US. President Megawati of Indonesia made a much publicised visit to the White House to show solidarity with the US. But domestic disapproval of this stance soon forced her to criticise the US attack on Afghanistan. Domestic pressures also explain why Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, after making it difficult for his own citizens to travel to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban, also attacked the US military campaign in Afghanistan. The war against terror is thus more divisive when it comes to the relationship between governments and their subjects than that between governments.

#### **IV. Retreat From History? Democratisation and International Security**

Before September 11, the literature on international relations and security studies had seen an acrimonious debate over the relationship between domestic political systems and international peace and stability. The proponents of the liberal “democratic peace” theory argued that democracies seldom go to war with one another and are generally more pacific than autocracies. Critics held that democratisation could actually engender greater conflict and regional disorder. Both the “democratic peace” proponents and their “voting to violence” detractors are being tested by the fallout of September 11.

The new debate over the relationship between democracy and democratisation on the one hand, and conflict and security on the other, is actually about two questions; whether lack of democracy is a “root cause” of terrorism, and whether democracy limits the ability of states to effectively respond to it.

On the first question, Anwar Ibrahim, the deposed and jailed Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, was quick to observe: “Osama bin-Laden and his protégés are the children of desperation; they come from countries where political struggle through peaceful means is futile. In many Muslim countries, political dissent is simply illegal.”<sup>24</sup> Anwar’s thesis is supported by an important fact about the perpetrators of September 11: they were inspired as much by a hatred of their own governments as of American

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<sup>24</sup> Anwar Ibrahim, “Growth of Democracy Is the Answer to Terrorism”, *International Herald Tribune*, 11 October 2001.



hegemony. Osama bin Laden's turn to full-blown mass terrorism was sparked by his well-known dislike of America but also of the autocratic ways of the Saudi royal family. Mohammed Atta, the apparent ring-leader of the September 11 terrorists, has been described by his German friends as having spoken with "increasing bitterness about what he saw as the autocratic government of President Hosni Mubarak and the small coterie of former army officers and rich Egyptians gathered around Mr Mubarak."<sup>25</sup> Anti-Americanism of the kind that breeds the bin-Ladens of the world goes hand in hand with authoritarianism in the Middle East, where governments routinely permit their media to fuel anti-American sentiments so as to deflect attention from their own repressive rule. In this sense, America's war on terrorism, as Ellen Amster reminds us, is in reality one in which Washington is interposing in a fight between Islamic radicals and Arab governments.<sup>26</sup>

If the absence of democracy breeds terrorism, does democracy pre-empt and defeat the terrorist challenge? Some advocates of democracy in the Muslim world hope that "With more democracy...and a stronger voice for advocates of democracy, popular frustrations are less likely to be misdirected, and the resort to violence and terror reduced, particularly among an increasingly disaffected and vulnerable young population."<sup>27</sup> In Southeast Asia, Surin Pitsuwan, a former Foreign Minister of Thailand who is a Muslim and who has been a leading voice for democracy in Southeast Asia, argues that democracy reduces the danger of terrorism by enhancing the conditions for inter-ethnic harmony in plural societies. "As we pursue our aspirations of democracy", he contends, "we know that we shall be free to practise our faith fully and on an equal basis with others who also have their own religious faith and rituals sacred to them."<sup>28</sup>

As the cases of US, Israel and India demonstrate, democratic governance does not make a country immune to transnational terrorism. Thomas Homer-Dixon argues that the advanced industrial nations of the West are uniquely vulnerable to terrorism because of

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<sup>25</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "In Cairo, Father Defends Son as Too 'Decent' to be Hijacker", *International Herald Tribune*, 20 September 2001, p.3

<sup>26</sup> Ellen Amster, "The Attacks Were a Bid for Power in the Arab World", *International Herald Tribune*, 18 September 2001, p.10.

<sup>27</sup> Shaha Aliriza and Laila Hamad, "A Time to Help Mideast Democrats", *International Herald Tribune*, 20-21 October 2001, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> Surin Pitsuwan, "Islam in Southeast Asia: A Personal Viewpoint", *The Nation*, 22 September 2001.

their growing complexity and interconnectedness, and their tendency to concentrate vital infrastructure in small geographic clusters.<sup>29</sup> The fact that these nations also tend to be democracies is not inconsequential, since democracies are also theoretically restricted in their ability to conduct the kind of arbitrary detention and coercive investigation needed to prevent acts of terrorism.

But in supposedly “mature” democracies, such restrictions may be withering, as governments wake up to the dangers caused by traditional pitfalls of civil liberties in combating terror. This was demonstrated for example by the case of Zacarias Moussaoui, a French national, whose laptop computer presumably with information about the impending September 11 attacks could not be legally seized by the US authorities in time to save the World Trade Center. Ironically, it is the immature new democracies, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, which may now be more vulnerable to terrorism because of their inability to imitate Ashcroft’s America.

Moreover, September 11 has shown that democratisation might undermine the ability of newly democratic governments to counter the menace. Indonesia’s inability to replicate the efforts of its neighbours, Malaysia and Singapore, in suppressing suspected terrorists has been blamed on democratisation. After repealing the notorious Anti-Subversion Law of the Suharto era, Indonesia under its new democratic constitution does not provide for an Internal Security Act similar to those of its two neighbours.

These questions and challenges to democracy after September 11 calls for a reassessment of the “End of History” thesis proposed by Francis Fukuyama after the end of the Cold War. Fukuyama had argued that the end of the Cold War has settled once and for all the great clashes of ideas which historically served as powerful drivers of human history. Democracy and free markets have triumphed over all other alternatives, including centrally-planned economies and Marxist-Leninist political systems. September 11 is a setback not just for Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis, but also for the Fukuyama perspective of democracy and free market as the endpoints of history. The war against terror now takes precedence over civil liberties in the West (with the American Attorney

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Homer-Dixon, “The Rise of Complex Terrorism”, *Foreign Policy*, (January 2002).

General praising Malaysia's Internal Security Act<sup>30</sup>), the principle of self-determination in the developing world (where governments are now able to present demands for autonomy as another manifestation of the terror network), and the championing of human rights and democracy by the West (witness Pakistan, where the West's great hero of the war against terror has also turned out to be the great anti-hero of the pro-democracy cause). The retreat of freedom is paralleled by the reassertion of state power over the forces of free market. With a vengeance, states everywhere are striking back and re-powering themselves against the forces of globalisation. They are doing so in a variety of ways, by regulating financial flows with a view to curb the economic lifeline of terrorist networks, tightening immigration controls, and remilitarising borders. What we are witnessing therefore is not the "end of history", but a "retreat from history".

#### **V. From "Human Security" to "Homeland Security"**

As discussed by Professor Smith in his overview of security studies, before September 11, the security agenda of nations was reorienting towards "non-conventional" issues: e.g. environment, refugees, migration and abuse of human rights, etc. The paradigm of human security, or security for the people, had emerged as an alternative to national security, or security for states (and in real terms, regimes). But the distinction between national security and regime security, always tenuous, will now be further blurred. Transnational terrorism may well be classified as a non-conventional threat, but responding to this menace is very much spearheaded by conventional configurations of states. And states are now reasserting themselves against societal forces.

The human security agenda is undermined by the renewed conflation between state security and regime security in the developing world. By creating a sense of national unity and purpose, however brief and superficial, the war against terrorism, like any wars, presents governments with an opportunity to out-manoeuvre their political opponents. Furthermore, terrorism has become a convenient and overarching label under which governments and academic analysts, in the West as much as in the developing world, could lump any and all kinds of challenges to state authority and regime security. Self-

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<sup>30</sup> "Ashcroft Endorses KL's Internal Security Act", *The Straits Times*, 13 May 2002, p.A7.

determination, the much vaunted norm of the post-Cold War global political order, is sidelined in this altered political and intellectual climate.

Thus, while showing empathy for the US after September 11, Chinese official commentators have expected American understanding of China's own brush with "terrorism and separatism" in Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan. Months before September 11, the Shanghai Forum, a regional grouping of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, had issued a joint declaration of its defence ministers pledging "real interaction of the armed forces and other power structures of their countries in the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism."<sup>31</sup> To be sure, terrorism and self-determination are not always separable. But in the absence of a common understanding of what terrorism means, governments can be expected to conflate terrorism and separatism to crush legitimate demands for self-determination, even of the terror-free variety. Where terrorist acts are carried out in the name of self-determination, governments now have less reason to separate the tactics from the cause.

The post-September 11 world order has implications for the campaign to promote human rights, one of the key ingredients of the human security paradigm. An America which carries out secret detentions of legal and illegal aliens suspected of terrorism and imposes a blanket denial of Geneva convention rights on its Afghan prisoners in Cuba, loses its moral high ground as an advocate for human rights and democracy in the world.<sup>32</sup> This message is unlikely to be lost on governments elsewhere, especially those who have accused the US of double standards when it comes to promoting human rights and democracy. They would feel even less constrained (if they ever were) in challenging the universality of human rights norms, especially when their domestic stability is at stake. This compounds another possible consequence of September 11, the decreased space for civil society, as discoveries are made of how some terrorist organisations thrived by claiming NGO status and adopting their modus operandi.

Security is changing in another, and more fundamentally ironic, manner. The "traditional division of security threats into external and internal threats," declared Deputy

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<sup>31</sup> "Shanghai Forum Ready to Fight Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism", *Pravda* (On-line English edition), 15 May 2001. [Http://english.pravda.ru/world/2001/06/15/7789.html](http://english.pravda.ru/world/2001/06/15/7789.html)

Prime Minister and Defence Minister Tony Tan of Singapore in the aftermath of September 11, “no longer held”.<sup>33</sup> The American model of “homeland security” is finding roots in Singapore and in other parts of Asia and the world. Though ostensibly geared to defeating the terrorist menace, homeland security is also a highly elastic notion that could be made to cover all aspects of fighting “low-intensity” threats and controlling day-to-day lives. Going by the thinking of America’s leading experts on future wars, the real heroes in the coming war on terrorism would not be the “Daisy-cutters” and “Predators” of Afghanistan, but the “pervasive sensors” found in America and its fellow-travelling nations, sensors which could be “attached to every appliance in your house, and to every vending machine on every street corner, and which would then register “your presence in every restaurant and department store.”<sup>34</sup>

In projecting the growing sense of insecurity within America, homeland security blurs the once fashionable distinction between Western and Third World security approaches, in which the latter focused on their domestic front while the former pursued defence against foreign military aggression. With Americans on American soil made to feel and act more insecure than their counterparts in India or Indonesia, the home front against terrorism has brought America’s security predicament closer to that of the Third World. As both situations converge, it is well to remember the words of David Ignatius, “*But security is different. Like life itself, it is something for which people will pay almost any price.*”<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The paper shows that the new threat of transnational terrorism and international responses to it has undermined both “clash of civilizations” and “end of history” perspectives, which together formed one of the great debates in international security studies in the post-Cold War era. The new security debate in the post September 11 era should be about the role of the US in a unipolar world (especially whether and how it can be stabilizing), and the rise of the “homeland security” paradigm, which entails a

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<sup>32</sup> “The Home Front: Security and Liberty”, Editorial, *New York Times*, 23 September 2001, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> *The Straits Times*, 5 November 2001.

<sup>34</sup> David Ignatius, “Pervasive Sensors Can Net bin Laden”, *International Herald Tribune*, 12 November 2001, p.8.

reassertion of state power over societal forces and blurs the distinction between Western and Third World security paradigms.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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