

Original article

Dilemmas of security perception

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ABSTRACT

The concept of security has undergone transformations along with the development of civilization. The rapid changes in the international security environment that have occurred over the past few decades have had a particularly significant impact on its character and significance. In this aspect, the aim of the article is to present the essence of security and dilemmas related to the interpretation of this concept. The article explains etymology and the importance of security. It characterizes how security evolved, how it was understood and interpreted. The traditional and non-traditional perception of security is explained.

KEYWORDS

security, threats, values



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Introduction

Over the past few decades, rapid changes in international relations have been observed, which have resulted in dramatic changes in the strategic security environment. The consequence of these changes is the rich scientific oeuvre in security studies visible in many fields and disciplines. This demonstrates the strong relationship between security practice and theory. Recent decades confirm the thesis that security is no longer a dominant category only in the sphere of international relations and the subject of research only in political science, but more and more often in economics, sociology, history and psychology, and above all in security sciences. Despite the fact that security has become a superior category, the analysis of security theory and practice and public debates indicate that humanity operates under conditions of permanent danger. At the same time, the concept of security appears in every dimension of the functioning of international organizations, individual states and collectivities, which confirms the view of some researchers that security takes the form of securitization.¹

¹ In English *securitization* means one of the most important theoretical approaches in studies on international security and covers the theoretical and practical dimension of security constantly being extended with new issues, initially not considered at all or to a small extent. In Polish, there is no equivalent

In the sphere of theory, a departure from the orthodox perception of security only through the prism of the state and(or) the nation is also observed. New schools of thought and hypotheses appear, often contradictory to generally accepted views, and sometimes totally contradictory. Emerging scientific trends indicate a deeper sense and broader scope of the concept of security. Security becomes dependent on the subject matter, perception of threats, protected values and the measures used to provide it. Threats usually have an impact on normative and empirical arguments determining the importance of economic, social and environmental problems. This, in turn, determines the values that people or groups of people protect, as well as the risk assessment for these values. In this context, the aim of the article is to present the essence of security and dilemmas related to the interpretation of this concept. Its contents are the result of solving the following research problems: 1) How to understand the concept of security and what is its essence? 2) How has security evolved?

1. The concept and the essence of security

The concept of security is widely used in socio-political and everyday life. Scientific research devoted to this issue indicates that security is an interdisciplinary term. In Latin, security – *securitas* consists of two parts: *sine* (without) and *cura* (worry, fear, anxiety) [Golas 2013]. Security was therefore understood in the quality or status category of being free of dangers, fear and anxiety. Security in the classic, Latin sense referred to peace and freedom from fears that, according to Cicero, accompanied people in everyday life [Liotta 2002]. Such perceived security could indicate pragmatic reactions of a human being limited to acting in a situation of disruption of existential peace, and instability could trigger a sense of fear. In other words, security can be reduced to a state of peace, without the risk of emerging threats. In English, the term is understood a bit broader and means a sense of confidence, stability and conviction that one is free of dangers, protected from intruders or an unexpected attack [Cf. dictionary definitions: *Security* (password) n.d.A-D]. At the same time, it is a situation free from worries, with permanently established relations with other entities and taken protective measures and security procedures [Cf. dictionary definitions: *Security* (password) n.d.A-D]. The Dictionary of the Polish Language reduces the concept of security to a state of non-threat, peace and confidence [Szymczak 1978]. Therefore, the simplest state of security can be defined as a state in which there are no threats. However, it should be noted that the sense of threat is original in relation to the certainty of one's security. The lexical definitions indicate that in addition to the absence of dangers, the notions of security are protection against threats as well as security and certainty [Cf. Zieba 1989]. In this aspect, A. Wolfers offered quite a comprehensive definition, which maintains that security in the objective sense refers to the lack of threats to specific values, while in the subjective sense it is understood through the lack of fears that these values may be violated [Wolfers 1952, p. 485]. B. Moller is critical on values since he thinks that it is uncertain whose values they are, what the values are, who could

to the word *securitization*, and in security studies this concept should not be confused with the concept of securitization used on financial markets.

threaten them, with what means, whose fears should be taken into account and how to distinguish real fears from false ones [Brauch 2009]. In the most general sense, security boils down to satisfying existential needs such as existence, survival, peace, which reduces the state of tension. Regardless of this, man strives to provide himself with benefits and goods, which is connected with the certainty of functioning and possibilities of his own improvement and continuous development. Such a chance gives a state of confidence. Simultaneously, it guarantees no risk of losing something that a person particularly values [Cf. Pazdzior and Szmulik 2012, p. 2]. In this aspect, security is the freedom of action, which is not accompanied by a sense of threat, and thus a state of mind [Stanczyk 1996, p. 16] free from fears that something bad may happen. Objective factors in the perception of security are necessary but not sufficient. The security perception is mainly influenced by subjective factors. Taking into account the abovementioned arguments, it can be concluded that security is a state of certainty that allows meeting needs of existential character, and also gives us the possibility of existence, survival and development. *In the most general sense, security can be defined as the certainty of existence and survival, the state of ownership and the functioning and development of an individual. Confidence is the result not only of the absence of threats (their absence or elimination), but also arises as a result of the creative activity of a given individual and is variable in time, i.e. has the nature of the social process* [Zieba 2012].

Aiming to explain the concept of security, one cannot omit connections with threats with negative potential, understood as the ability for destructive impact [Szymanek 1990]. In this aspect, security becomes a negative category and focuses on an individual's activities to protect his/her established values. The self-existence of security is not possible, and the emerging main problem is threats. The momentary lack of threats for certain values does not absolve from taking precautionary measures [Wolfers 1962, p.153]. In other words, threats that occur in the internal or external environment of a specific individual are the opposite of security. Sensitivities also have a significant role in shaping security. They are found in an individual and shape his/her relationships with the environment and affect the level of security [Korzeniowski 2005, p. 201]. Vulnerability or resistance to threats is directly related to sensitivities. They most often have a subjective dimension and mean the state of mind and consciousness caused by phenomena perceived as negative and dangerous [Kitler 2010, p. 52]. It follows that threats are recognized in the sphere of consciousness and, on the other hand, they cause negatively evaluated phenomena. However, it should be borne in mind that threats exist regardless of the state of consciousness of a given person. Hence, threats should be understood as *subjective (and thus dependent on the perception of an individual) and(or) an objective (real) occurrence of threat to the values important for a given individual, included in his/her security. A threat is directed at specific values that are subject to protection by a given individual* [Zieba 2012, p. 10]. E. Kolodziński's thesis seems correct in assessing the state of security, since he says that one should take into account the reality in which threats to the participants of social life arise, as well as the state of their knowledge and awareness in which the perception of these threats takes place and the feeling of security is formed [Kolodzinski 2009, p. 1]. Sub-

jective awareness of the existence of threats, lack of such awareness or lack of awareness of the possibilities of counteracting lead to a subjective formation of a sense of security. The objective security state refers to existing real threats that occur regardless of their perception. When considering subjective and objective aspects of security, in the opinion of D. Frei, it is possible to create a security model consisting of four segments [Frei 1977, p. 17-21]: 1) *a state of insecurity that is characterized by the existence of a large real external threat and the perception of this threat is correct (adequate)*; 2) *the state of obsession that occurs when a slight threat is perceived as large*; 3) *a state of false security, which means a situation where an external threat is serious and is perceived as small*; 4) *the state of security taking place when an external threat is insignificant and its perception is correct* [Cf. Korzeniowski 2005, p. 203; Zieba 2012, p. 11].

Striving to create an ideal security model, action should be taken to eliminate or reduce threats. Using this philosophy of thinking and noticing various aspects of threats, B. Buzan understands security in a broad sense as a process of seeking to reduce threats, aimed at maintaining the national identity and territorial integrity of the state in the situation when hostile forces are trying to impose changes. Thus, accepting B. Buzan's arguments, one can come to the conclusion that the essence of security is to ensure survival by focusing on its physical aspects. However, one should not forget about the conditions of existence in situations of uncertainty of everyday life.

Focusing on minimizing threats to the values set by an individual leads to the protection of these values at a specified minimum level. It is also often said that there are no difficulties or obstacles in using the available values (belongings, privileges, etc.). Returning to the aforementioned A. Wolfers's security definition, it may be concluded that security is a value in itself and at the same time an instrument for providing other values. When striving to guarantee security, one can use the products or the consequences of having these values. Sometimes individuals or groups behave as if security were the highest value, but later it turns out that they were security advocates just to protect something else, for example self-interest, property or the ability to satisfy the higher order (spiritual) needs.

Empirical experience indicates that the level of security is not a fixed value, but diversified over time. Security varies according to a specific territory or group of people. Some people, social groups or nations may be more secure than others [Hermann 1977]. Both values that are subject to protection and threats to these values are also changing. It is particularly difficult to estimate the expectations towards the future, as the mental state of people will change and with it the level of social needs. Extending slightly the A. Wolfers's definition, one can assume that not only does security refer to the values currently held, but also to those that can be used in the future. Thus, security cannot focus merely on avoiding losses, but also on preventing and safeguarding the state of benefits possessed [Hermann 1977]. In this aspect, security becomes a kind of policy in case unfavorable phenomena occur in the future. In the opinion of H. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, security is highly desirable as the value and state of realistic expectations of maintaining influence on reality [Laswell and Kaplan 1950, p. 61]. Thus, entities

responsible for security should not only react to emerging threats but also actively create a security environment. It should be noted, however, that too much importance is attached to the current state of reality, and the quality changes of protected values are ignored. Taking into account the above-mentioned arguments, security can be understood as the expectation of maintaining and improving access to common obstruction-free values [Cf. Hermann 1977].

2. Evolution of the concept of security

Key questions affecting the content of the concept of security are set by various schools and are formulated as follows: 1) What is the subject of security? (an individual, a group, a society, a state, a region, and even the whole world – a global system); 2) What is the nature of threats? (In other words, whether these are external or internal threats, what the place of their occurrence is, that is, who they concern, i.e. the political, military, economic, ecological, social sphere, etc.); 3) What entities are responsible for security? (individuals, the armed forces, the state, the Alliance); 4) How is security provided? (methods of forecasting, identifying and monitoring threats and their elimination) [Cf. Paulauskas 2007, p. 216]. Taking into account the content of formulated questions and striving to create the reality, it can be assumed that the concept of security reflects the relationship between the object and the subject of security and the environment. In this aspect, security contents can have three different meanings. In the traditional sense, security is an attribute of the state and refers mainly to threats of a military nature. In this sense, security is mainly ensured by the capabilities possessed by the armed forces to neutralize the opposing side. In a broader sense, it refers to the phenomenon of international relations or directly and indirectly to the consequences of these relations. Thirdly, security can be considered a social good and fourthly, in a universal sense, it addresses individuals and social groups and is referred to in the literature as the security of an individual (*human security*) [Mesjasz 2004, p. 4].

The review of the available literature indicates the multidimensionality and interdisciplinary nature of the concept of security, which is why one can notice numerous functioning theories dependent on the subject of security, perception of threats, values subject to protection and the measures used to provide it. The emergence of various security concepts was a consequence of debates devoted to the external and internal threats to the states that began after the end of the Second World War [Yergin 1978]. At that time, security was understood in a limited way and focused on the issues of war, peace and balance of power in the world. During the Cold War, there was a traditional, realistic approach accenting the military factor on which the sovereignty of states depended [Saleh 2010, p. 230]. Generally, it can be stated that for a long time security was interpreted very narrowly and limited to the physical defense of the territory and the protection of national interests. In a wider, global scope, it came down to nuclear security [Liotta 2002]. Military strength, however, was used not only to provide national security. Deterrence, military diplomacy and economic pressure using force constituted a rational tool for shaping foreign policy and international security

[Sheehan 2013, p. 148]. To conclude, the traditional understanding of security, despite being identified with national security, was more directed to the state than to people.

After the collapse of the bipolar world and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the concept of security was re-conceptualized. However, already in 1991, S. Walt noticed that the armed forces were not the only source of security, and military threats were not the only dangers for the state. He believed that arms control, diplomacy and crisis management played a significant role in ensuring national and international security [Walt 1991, p. 213]. For example, crisis management includes many situations related to non-military threats, which include natural and technical disasters, technological threats and, finally, terrorist acts. S. Walt's concept of crisis management goes even further and includes the so-called second level security. In his opinion, everything that has a direct impact on the probability and character of a war is included in this level. For example, these criteria are met by non-state actors using kinetic impacts similar to those that led to the destruction of the World Trade Center or impacts in cyberspace.

The scope of security was extended from a narrow political and military dimension to economic, social and environmental one, including local, regional and global levels. There was a shift in looking at security from the perspective of the state, armed forces and military alliances, and emphasis was placed on the safety of ordinary people seeking security in their daily lives. From that time, security symbolized protection against disease, hunger, unemployment, organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental pollution and social conflicts [*Human Security...* 2009, p. 3]. As a result, differences in views began to emerge and the division in the understanding of security in a traditional and non-traditional way took place. The non-traditional approach to safety was presented by B. Buzan. He argued that people were exposed to threats other than military ones. He maintained that individual units, states and international systems played a significant role in ensuring security, and the economic, social and environmental spheres were just as important as the political and military sphere for its maintenance. All five security sectors could not operate separately and form inseparable parts of one whole [Buzan 1991], which proved the complementarity of security. Military security is ensured through proper proportions and dependencies between offensive and defensive capabilities at the disposal of the state and through the intention to use them. Political security focuses on ensuring state stability, governance systems and ideology that gives legitimacy for governance. Economic security refers to the level of access to resources, the state of having finance and the functioning of the market for securing social needs and creating the power of the state. Social security focuses on maintaining and nurturing language, culture, religion, national identity and tradition. In turn, environmental safety concerns the maintenance of the local and global biosphere on which all other human activities depend [Buzan 1991, pp. 442-450].

The five above-mentioned dimensions of security create a comprehensive security model that can be considered at the level of an individual, a society, a nation and a region (the international community) as well as at the global level. There are mutual interdependencies in this model. One can see some discrepancies as well as common parts, while mutual dependencies and interactions indicate that the scope of security

goes far beyond security focused only on the state. The complexity and multifaceted nature of security and interdependence focusing on its various aspects and levels clearly indicate dilemmas far beyond the traditional perception of security in the previous millennium [Liotta 2002]. This thesis is confirmed by Father Waever who points to the relationship between state security and social security. He maintains that state security focuses on threats to sovereignty, while social security focuses on threats to identity. A society is the foundation of identity, and a state should protect against external threats [Saleh 2010, p. 233]. There are also social security dilemmas. Similarly to international relations, some countries weaken others when trying to increase their own security, and the problem of lowering security of some societies as a consequence of increasing the security of others appears in the society. The question then arises of whether to use an offensive or defensive profile of social behavior? In the opinion of A. Saleh in situations where the social identity but not necessarily the state is threatened, it is the state that can use its armed forces to defend the social identity [Saleh 2010, p. 234]. Similarly, social groups within one state may militarize to defend their own identity, which may lead to internal conflicts and through confrontation result in destabilization of political security and undermining the right to legality of state actions. Even greater problems of social security, even in the international dimension, appear in multiethnic states and stateless societies and may bring the spread of terrorism, the arms race, deterioration of the economic condition of the state, even ethnic cleansing and armed interventions [Saleh 2010, p. 234].

Social security is inseparably connected with the security of an individual, which is shaped by multi-sectoral actions aimed at protecting the key values of human life, ensuring freedoms and liberties of functioning, by counteracting key and dangerous threats and preventing crisis situations. People's existence and decent life are provided mainly by economic, political, military, environmental and cultural systems [*Human Security...* 2009, p. 5]. This means that security is multi-sectoral, focused on people and directed at protection against various threats that pose dangers in the political, social and economic sphere as well as to the environment, health and food. Furthermore, threats affect the security of an individual in a twofold way. Firstly, threats overlap creating a domino effect. For example, armed conflicts can lead to poverty, which in turn can cause diseases, etc. Secondly, threats in a specific territory can transform into crisis situations in a larger area, and those in regional and even threaten international security. Ensuring the security of an individual requires a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach, and the policy of counteracting threats should be focused on cooperation and a multi-sector, integrated response [*Human Security...* 2009, p. 7]. The concept of individual security is quite controversial in its essence. P. Hough recognizes that it is much wider and deeper than the traditional concept of security and is far from military activities [Hough 2008, pp. 6-10]. In turn, B. Buzan warns against the reduction of individual security in thinking about international security, stressing that the collectiveness of efforts is a key element ensuring security of a particular person, and individual human beings are only part of the society in which they live [Buzan 1991]. Despite the controversial aspects of individual security, there is no doubt that this concept contributed to broadening the understanding of security in general and went far

beyond the traditionally understood national security. P. Liotta rightly notes that national security focused on the state is directed at the physical assurance of sovereignty and territorial integrity in the aspect of the emergence of a wide range of possible threats, while *human security* is focused on the security subject's sensitivity to these very threats [Liotta 2002]. The term also covers a much wider spectrum of problems. An example can be the degradation of the environment and its impact on human life both on the micro and macro scale [Khagram et al. 2003]. Generally speaking, optics of the individual's security can be used to redefine the concept of security as well as threats to its maintenance.

Conclusions

Security has been an overarching value in the lives of an individual, a community and a state for centuries and has played a key role in shaping international relations. Originally, it was associated with the lack of existential threats. With the development of civilization, the needs and values of security and threats to these values have changed, viewed in a subjective and objective manner regardless of their perception. The traditional concept of security was a derivative of the strength of the state and reflected the possibility of domination in international relations due to the offensive and defensive capabilities possessed by the armed forces. With the disintegration of the bipolar world it turned out that the security of the country focused on military threats was a too narrow formula. The creation of multidimensional security, including regional, social and environmental security, has begun. The change in the security formula was also influenced by the new nature of conflicts and the emergence of non-state actors, which in turn led to the emergence of both new threats and new security sectors. Climate and environmental changes, the dynamic development of new technologies and resource constraints have caused that safety has begun to be considered in a different way, in particular through the prism of an individual. The so-called *human security* has created a new, non-traditional school of thinking about security based on the multi-sector security model, which in turn led to the redefinition of the concept of security in general. In conclusion, it can be stated that the concept of security evolves in accordance with changes taking place in the international environment and within individual countries. Understanding and perception of security depends on the subjective and objective dimension of security, the nature of threats, defined values, entities responsible for security and their relationship with the environment.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

Author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. Author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical notes

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