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International Security

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NATALIE JESTER, APR 12 2022

This feature is part of the online resources to accompany the textbook *Foundations of International Relations*.

Security is a unifying component in each of the global issues we face in the world today, and for that reason a central theme in International Relations. It is also a contested concept that has occupied minds for thousands of years. The central debate is whether security should be about protecting the state or the individual – or both. Extending that, another question emerges as to who, or what, should provide security. For example, should this power remain with states or should it be relocated in whole, or in part, to international organisations?

Traditionally, International Relations emphasised the security of the state, marking a clear preference when answering the question of who, or what, should be ‘secure’ in the global system. This is broadly referred to as ‘national security’. Repeated episodes of human suffering have caused scholars and practitioners to take stock and ask whether human suffering might be more important. When attempting to draw up an internationally recognised framework to answer such problems, such as the Responsibility to Protect, there comes embedded within such initiatives an unavoidable challenge to sovereignty. This is controversial considering that sovereignty is the bedrock of the global system. Yet it also indicates the gradual evolution of how sovereignty works, inspired in part by debates around the changing definitions of security that have been explored in this chapter. Security may still be about bombs and borders, but it can be about bodies too. By stressing the individual level as opposed to the state level, this interpretation is referred to as ‘human security’. The central debate within defining security therefore is one that has at its origins a levels of analysis issue.

Text adapted from Jester, Natalie in McGlinchey, Stephen. 2022. *Foundations of International Relations*. London: Bloomsbury.

Below is a collection of multimedia resources that help unpack, and explain the importance of security in International Relations

General overviews on security

Advanced debates on security

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Natalie Jester (she/her) is a lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire, UK. Her research focuses on the relationship between identity and security in digital spaces. Common themes include gender, state identity, violence and the everyday. Her research interests are reflected in her teaching, which covers a range of modules related to international issues, identity, and digital methods.

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