Defining International Security Studies

International Security Studies (ISS) grew out of debates over how to protect the state against external and internal threats after the Second World War. Security became its watchword (Wolfers, 1952; Yergin, 1978), both distinguishing ISS from earlier thinking and the disciplines of War Studies and Military History, and, as it evolved, serving as the linking concept connecting an increasingly diverse set of research programmes. Looking back on more than sixty years of academic writing on international security, the first pertinent question for an intellectual history of ISS is to define what makes up the sub-field and where the boundary zones between it and adjacent academic disciplines are located.

To delineate ISS is unfortunately not as straightforward an exercise as one might wish. The label ‘international security’ was not adopted from the outset, but only gradually became accepted, and there is no universally agreed definition of what ISS comprises, and hence no accepted archive of ‘ISS-documents’ that define our object of study. As this book will demonstrate, not only is there a large body of ISS literature, it is one whose themes, discussions and participants change across time and place. The composition of ISS has mainly been taken for granted, with the consequence that little self-reflection on what made up ISS or its boundaries has been produced. The absence of a universal definition of what makes up ISS means that ISS has at times become a site for disciplinary politics with different perspectives arguing that they should be included while others (usually different sorts of widening perspectives) should not.

The delineation of ISS is complicated by the fact that as time goes by we get a different perspective on what falls in and what does not. To paraphrase Foucault’s genealogical understanding of history as always being told from the point of the present, the fact that we tell the story of ISS from a 2008 perspective means that we look at a field which has some strikingly different preoccupations, both substantive and epistemological, from those that dominated it in, say, 1972. And it would have been easier to delineate ISS had it always been explicitly centred on the concept
of security. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Indeed, after its first decade of explicit theoretical and conceptual innovation, the field’s mainstream carried out its work without much conceptual reflection (Baldwin, 1997). During the ‘golden age’ of Strategic Studies it would have been easy to think that ‘strategy’ was the dominant concept, albeit strategy now dominated by civilian rather than military thinkers. Thus in 1983, Buzan (1983: 3) could point out that security was an ‘underdeveloped concept’ and ‘seldom addressed in terms other than the policy interests of particular actors or groups, and the discussion has a heavy military emphasis’. ‘Security’ is, as this and the next chapter will lay out, about crucial political themes such as the state, authority, legitimacy, politics and sovereignty, but even today the majority of articles and books that fall within the discipline of ISS do not contain lengthy meta-theoretical or philosophical discussions, but speak from within an implicit position on the conceptual terrain.

Our solution to the problem of delineating ISS starts from understanding conceptual security debates as ‘the product of an historical, cultural, and deeply political legacy’ (M. C. Williams, 2007: 17), not as something that can be solved through references to ‘empirical facts’ (Baldwin, 1997: 12). This means that we take the power of inclusion and exclusion seriously. We cast our net widely and include the work of those who self-identify as participants in ISS (mainly in terms of how they title their work, who they seem to regard as their appropriate audience and, up to a point, where they publish) regardless of whether all others who self-identify with the sub-field accept them as ‘members’ or not. Our ambition is not to find the ISS-winner, but to provide a rich and structured account of ISS that shows how multiple perspectives connect to a set of shared discussions on security. Since our point of reference is the (contested) disciplinary history of ISS, rather than the elaboration of what we think should be the theory or concept of security, we do not follow Kolodziej (2005) in coming up with suggestions for new concepts or dimensions to be included. Nor do we offer free-standing discussions of Hobbes, Clausewitz and Thucydides or other pre-ISS Classical figures. Clearly these and other early Realist and Liberal writers have been important to the foundation and development of IR, but our concern is with the evolution of modern ISS and the use to which Classical political and military theorists have been put in the post-1945 literature, rather than with these classics in their own right.

Our specific way of delineating ISS is set out in the rest of this chapter. The next section argues that despite the surface appearance of being pre-occupied with policy debates, underneath, ISS can be seen as structured
by engagement with four questions: whether to privilege the state as the referent object, whether to include internal as well as external threats, whether to expand security beyond the military sector and the use of force, and whether to see security as inextricably tied to a dynamic of threats, dangers and urgency. To see ISS as structured by these four questions allows us to see how deeper theoretical and political themes are implicated in ISS, and as a consequence to point out how perspectives share common conversational ground. The third section addresses the problem that far from all ISS literature goes directly through ‘security’. We suggest that ISS can be understood through ‘security’ itself plus three ‘adjacent’ concepts that support it in different ways: by being complementary and more concrete; by being more general and linking to larger literatures; and by being oppositional challenges to ‘security’. The fourth section discusses the disciplinary boundary zones between ISS and other established areas of academic study, particularly IR. The fifth section lays out the Western-centric nature of ISS and discusses the ways in which this bias can be addressed by granting retrospective attention to Post-colonial criticism.

Four questions that structure ISS

There are four questions which have, either implicitly or explicitly, structured debates within ISS since the late 1940s. These questions can have different answers, but that is not to say that they are always explicitly discussed: a large part of the ISS literature simply takes particular answers/concepts as givens. The four questions are analytical lenses or tools through which to read the evolution of ISS; they are the deeper, substantial core that defines what ‘international security’ is about and what brings the literature together. Explicit discussions usually happen when established approaches are contested and their answers cannot be taken for granted. Viewing ISS through these questions makes it clear that there are fundamental political and normative decisions involved in defining security and that this is what makes it one of the essentially contested concepts of modern social science. Security is always a ‘hyphenated concept’ and always tied to a particular referent object, to internal/external locations, to one or more sectors and to a particular way of thinking about politics.

The first question is whether to privilege the state as the referent object. Security is about constituting something that needs to be secured: the nation, the state, the individual, the ethnic group, the environment or
the planet itself. Whether in the form of ‘national security’, or later, as traditionalist ‘international security’, the nation/state was the analytical and normative referent object. ‘International security’ was not about replacing the security of the state with the security of humanity, or the individual or minorities within or across state boundaries. Securing the state was seen instrumentally as the best way of protecting other referent objects. ‘National security’ should thus, as many observers have pointed out, more appropriately have been labelled ‘state security’, yet, what the Cold War concept of ‘national security’ entailed was more accurately a fusion of the security of the state and the security of the nation: the nation supported a powerful state which in turn reciprocated by loyally protecting its society’s values and interests. To what extent this was a proper way of understanding the relationship between states and their nations, between governments, citizens and populations – that is, the question of ‘what or whom should be the “referent object” for security?’ – has been one of the central lines of debate within ISS and will be further explored in chapter 2.

The second question is whether to include internal as well as external threats. Since security is tied into discussions about state sovereignty (whether as something to be protected or criticised), it is also about placing threats in relation to territorial boundaries. Wolfers famously described ‘national security’ as ‘an ambiguous symbol’ and he contrasted the post-Second World War political climate with the one of inter-war American economic depression, holding that the ‘change from a welfare to a security interpretation of the symbol “national interest” is understandable. Today we are living under the impact of cold war and threats of external aggression rather than depression and social reform’ (Wolfers, 1952: 482; emphasis added). ‘National security’ had shifted from a concern with domestic economic problems to external threats stemming from ideologically opposed, and thus presumed hostile, powers (Neocleous, 2006a). As this shift became institutionalised, the concept of ‘international security’ came to accompany, but not replace, ‘national security’, and was eventually more influential in giving the discipline its name, hence International rather than National Security Studies. This labelling concurred with the growing disciplinary status of International Relations (International Security, 1976), which was based on distinguishing international from domestic politics, of which ISS was increasingly a sub-field. The internal/external dimension was partly re-opened as the Cold War ended and the overriding concern with the external threat of the Soviet Union disappeared from American and Western security discourses. Both
IR and ISS faced mounting challenges from globalisation to blur, or even collapse completely, the inside/outside distinction.

The third question is whether to expand security beyond the military sector and the use of force. Since ISS was founded during the Cold War and the Cold War was so overwhelmingly about the military (conventional and nuclear) capabilities of foes, friends and Self, ‘national security’ became almost synonymous with military security. This did not mean that other capabilities were not considered, the editors of *International Security* stressed, for instance, the need to incorporate economic vigour, governmental stability, energy supplies, science and technology, food and natural resources. These were, however, to be incorporated because they impacted on ‘the use, threat, and control of force’, and thus on military security, not because they were to be considered security issues in their own right (*International Security*, 1976: 2). But this conception of security was not entirely uncontested. During the Cold War, Peace Researchers pointed to the necessity of granting equal priority to basic human needs and ‘structural violence’, and challenges to military security became an established part of ISS from the 1980s onwards as scholars called for the inclusion of environmental and economic security (Ullman, 1983; Buzan, 1983, 1984b; Mathews, 1989). Later a more general sectoral widening of security included societal, economic, environmental, health, development and gender.

The fourth question is whether to see security as inextricably tied to a dynamic of threats, dangers and urgency. ‘National security’ developed in a political climate where the United States, and the West more broadly, understood themselves as threatened by a hostile opponent. As in Herz’s (1950) famous formulation of the security dilemma, ‘security’ had to do with attacks, subjection, domination and – when pushed to the extreme – annihilation. This would lead groups to acquire more capabilities, in the process rendering their opponent insecure and thus compelling both sides to engage in a ‘vicious circle of security and power accumulation’ (Herz, 1950: 157). Security was about the extreme and exceptional, with those situations that would not just raise inconveniences, but could wipe out one’s society (Williams, 2003). During the Cold War, this seemed rather common-sensical to the mainstream of ISS: the Soviet Union constituted a clear threat, and nuclear weapons were justified as a way to deter the Soviet Union from a first strike. As the debates over the expansion of the concept of security gained ground in the 1990s, this linkage of security to urgency, and to extreme and radical defence measures, was central. Some, most prominently the Copenhagen School, argued that the concept could be
expanded as long as referent objects, threats and dangers were constituted with this logic of urgency and extreme measures (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998). Critics countered that this understanding of security was itself linked to a particular Realist view of the state and international politics. In keeping with a longer critical and Liberal tradition, it was argued on normative grounds that politics could be different and that one’s analytical framework should incorporate this possibility (Williams, 2003; Huysmans, 2006b: 124–144).

Security and its adjacent concepts

We have defined ISS as those approaches that self-define either with the label of ISS, or with some branch of Security Studies (Human Security, Critical Security Studies, the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, Constructivist Security Studies and so on), and held that ISS is organised around different responses to the four questions laid out above. A further way to both delineate and to get at the ways in which ISS has evolved is to understand the field as structured by a set of key concepts. Obviously, the central concept of ISS is ‘security’, but it is also the case that conceptually explicit discussions were few and far between after the first decade of the Cold War. Even those who challenged Strategic Studies and ISS generally did not go through the concept of security, but through the concept of peace or more concrete discussions of disarmament, arms control, peace movements and world order. The concept of security was underdeveloped and unproblematised by those who used it, and an antagonistic concept to Peace Researchers insofar as it was located on the Realist, Strategic, military side of the political and academic battles. From the mid-1980s, as the Cold War unravelled, security became increasingly explicitly addressed and it became adopted by new and former critics of Strategic Studies. Security approaches thus appeared which fifteen years earlier would have been unlikely to adopt this label: Critical Security Studies (with key concepts of individual security and emancipation); the Copenhagen School of Security Studies based at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute; and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRI0) based journal Bulletin of Peace Proposals changed its name to Security Dialogue. This certainly did not mean that ‘security’ was an uncontested concept, in fact it became more contested than ever, but it showed that after the Cold War ‘security’ became a concept which generated – and hence could unify – debates across perspectives previously opposed.
A delineation of what falls within ISS based religiously on an explicit discussion of the concept of security would as a consequence leave out the majority of the Cold War contestants. This in turn would make it difficult to explain the resurgence of widening approaches in the 1990s, as these grew out of Cold War Peace Research, Feminism, Poststructuralism and Critical Theory. To tell the story of Cold War ISS without incorporating the criticism it generated would unduly homogenise the academic and political terrain on which ISS was situated. What we suggest is thus to see ‘security’ as supported by or conducted through three kinds of concepts: first, through complementary concepts, like ‘strategy’, ‘deterrence’, ‘containment’ or ‘humanitarianism’, which point to a more specific and narrower set of questions; second, through parallel concepts, like ‘power’, ‘sovereignty’ or ‘identity’, which take security into a broader, Political Theory or wider IR frame of reference; and third, oppositional concepts which work through security, but argue that it should be replaced, such as by ‘peace’ in Cold War Peace Research (see chapter 5) or ‘risk’ or ‘the exception’ in twenty-first-century widening debates (see chapter 8). Figure 1.1 illustrates the three kinds of adjacent concepts and their relationship to the concept of security.

The advantage of the security plus three adjacent concepts framework is that it allows us to conduct a structured conceptual analysis, particularly
of those literatures that do not explicitly link to debates over the concept of security in ISS. Literatures may be ‘conceptually silent’ because they are adopting a taken-for-granted concept, are written in a rather straightforward empirical manner that downplays lengthy conceptual discussions, or because they come from other disciplines less reliant upon ‘security’ debates. Even if an approach does not explicitly discuss its conceptualisation of security, the way it mobilises complementary, parallel or oppositional concepts allows us to see the river delta of ISS perspectives as engaged in the same meta-conversation about what ‘security’ entails. An understanding of such conceptual points of engagement is, as we will return to in chapter 9, an important element in providing ISS with enough cohesion to make it an academic sub-field with a shared identity rather than a set of fragmented camps.

A different, but related, boundary-drawing question concerns literatures on security that are attached to prefixes not normally considered part of the ISS repertoire. Noteworthy examples include ‘social security’ and ‘computer security’. Social security is usually considered part of discussions of wealth, income distribution and domestic justice, not ‘security proper’. Computer security is a technical term used by computer scientists referring to problems in computer hard- and software, some of them accidental bugs, others as outcomes of malicious outside attackers. The standard ISS reply is that such concepts lack the drama and urgency of ‘national/international’ security, that they deal with domestic–individual questions in the case of social security and ‘technical’ rather than political–military threats in the case of computer security. In spite of a semantic similarity to (national) security, there is not a substantial, discursive resemblance.

This reply may be accurate in that these literatures do lack these characteristics and that they have historically not been considered part of ISS. But we should keep in mind that ISS is also a dynamic field that has expanded its legitimate contenders quite significantly in the past twenty years, and that what is considered to be part of it or not is not (solely) based on some static ‘national/international security essence’, but on how ISS evolves with its political environment. What academic and political actors manage to get accepted as part of ’international security’ changes over time. Environmental security was not considered part of mainstream ISS in the early 1980s, yet it is hard to imagine it being excluded today. Such conceptual inclusion may be aided by the securitisation of hyphenated concepts, that is the constitution of something/somebody as radically threatening, as has been the case with health/disease security by prominent politicians.
or the media (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998; Peterson, 2002/3; Elbe, 2003, 2006; McInnes and Lee, 2006). Hyphenated securities might also make it onto the security agenda proper through conceptual analysis that explores and problematises the ways in which they are being excluded. A recent analysis by Neocleous (2006a) shows, for instance, how ‘national security’ was tied to domestic economic concerns during the 1930s and that this discourse mobilised the same drama and urgency as ‘national security’ did in the 1950s.

The disciplinary boundary of ISS

To see ISS as constituted through the questions and conceptual framework above still leaves the question of where ISS ends and other academic disciplines, particularly IR, begin. The boundary between ISS and IR is difficult to draw. In the early decades following the Second World War, the answer to this problem could have been given with some accuracy as: ‘What distinguishes ISS from the general field of IR is its focus on the use of force in international relations.’ In the traditionalist perspective on ISS, ‘use of force’ was and is primarily defined as ‘state use of military force’ and the threats states face are predominantly military in kind. Yet even this apparently narrow framing implies potentially quite a broad scope. It is about war and the various ways in which military power can be deployed, but also about the foundations of military power (and thus, up to a point, about economics and the socio-political structures of the state), and about the causes of conflict in international relations that result in states and other actors creating, maintaining and sometimes using military power (thus potentially bringing in not just economic, but also environmental and identity issues). This type of ISS features the general dynamics of interaction amongst rival armed forces: arms racing, arms control, the impact of technological developments and suchlike. Because of its strong state-centrism and assumptions about power struggles, it can, at the risk of some simplification, be thought of as the specialist military–technical wing of the Realist approach to IR. In the UK literature this whole understanding and approach is often labelled Strategic Studies. By the 1970s, however, the simple ‘use of force’ answer was becoming increasingly inaccurate. It remained true that the traditionalist position provided the foundational template, focusing on the international level and on threats that were about survival (Buzan et al., 1998: 21). But as the agenda of ISS began to widen towards the end of the Cold War, and more rapidly after it, the ‘use of force’ answer became too narrow.
a description of what the field was about (at least for a large number of those participating in its debates). What increasingly distinguished ISS from IR was that it centred itself either on assumptions or on debates around and about the concept of international security.

Still there are inevitable overlaps between IR and ISS, particularly insofar as ISS has become more theoretically driven and that important IR debates simultaneously have evolved around security. As an example of the former, Waltzian Neorealism has been key to debates in the more theoretically informed parts of Realist Security Studies, particularly on how the polarity of the system impacts stability and grand strategy. There is, for instance, a rich literature on how to define polarity that is not strictly speaking about the concept of security as such, or how it may change in the light of shifting polarities, etc. (Goldgeier and McFaul, 1992; Huntington, 1993b, 1999; Waltz, 1993; Posen and Ross, 1996/7; Kupchan, 1998; Kagan, 2002). One reason this literature does not explicitly discuss the concept of security is that it takes a conventional conception of security as national security for granted.

The overlaps between IR and ISS have also multiplied in that ‘security’ has been selected as the arena for IR debates of a more general kind, noticeably over the status of Constructivist theory from the 1990s onwards. The programmatic statement of Conventional Constructivism in Katzenstein’s *The Culture of National Security* explicitly adopted ‘security’ as the ‘hard case’ where Constructivist theories emphasising ideas, culture, norms and identity should stand trial in comparison with Neorealist and Neoliberalist approaches (Katzenstein, 1996a). Yet there was no explicit discussion of ‘security’ itself: what was contested were Realist explanations of state behaviour in the area of security, not whether the state should be the referent object, or whether the sector of concern should be the one of military and external threats.

Such works usually draw upon general IR literatures and debates, and there is therefore a link between telling the story of the evolution of ISS and the one of IR. Yet it should be kept in mind that our concern is with the evolution of ISS, not IR, and we will therefore not go extensively into IR literatures that have not addressed security or which have not been drawn upon explicitly by ISS. It should be stressed also that while IR is by far the main overarching discipline to ISS, it is not the only one to influence it: some of the first key thinkers on game theory, which influenced deterrence theory during the Cold War, were economists and physicists and other ‘hard scientists’ explicitly engaged in debates over the nuclear condition. As conceptual debates started to take off in the 1980s
and flourished in the 1990s, a series of sociologists, feminist theorists, philosophers, development theorists, anthropologists and media theorists have also joined the debates in ISS. Like the classical empires of old, ISS therefore does not have clearly defined borders. Instead, it has ‘frontier zones’ where its debates blend into adjacent subjects, ranging from IR theory and International Political Economy (IPE), to foreign policy analysis and Political Theory. Since we cannot meaningfully cover both ISS and all of these frontier zones, we are often going to discuss the particular ISS engagements that bring in the frontier, while noting that there is a larger literature that those who wish to pursue a given theme should consult more thoroughly. We mention, for instance, the democratic peace literature in chapter 6, but do not have the space to go into all of its detailed arguments. Also, like the classical empires, these frontier zones can change, becoming more, or less, active as fashions and imperatives change. We try to show these movements in our analysis of the ISS literature in chapters 4 to 8.

Even taking a broad view of what counts as ISS has not enabled us to avoid all the difficult decisions about inclusion and exclusion. This book is much longer than we or Cambridge University Press originally thought it would be, and space constraints have been a real issue. In seeking to identify the core of the subject, and to reflect the uniqueness of its civilian strategy character, we have favoured conceptual issues over operational ones. This means that we have largely excluded the large literature on intelligence, which comes up mainly in the context of imperfect information and strategy.\(^1\) We cover some aspects of military operations, but have not included the enormous literatures to be found in the many journals that are closely linked to the armed services, and which reflect professional military discourses. Turning to the boundary between ISS and Peace Research, we have included the literature dealing with substantial issues and conceptual debates on ‘peace’ that either mirrors debates in ISS or directly challenges ISS perspectives, but not covered more distinct Peace Research concerns such as peace education or the substantial literature on the practical side of conflict resolution, including conflict mediation, dispute settlement and suchlike (Bercovitch et al., 2008; Sandole et al., 2008). Some will no doubt think these exclusions a mistake, and they may be right. Our judgement has been that with a few exceptions, these literatures exist in their own worlds, and have played only a

\(^1\) On intelligence, see, inter alia, Intelligence and National Security, The Journal of Intelligence History, ISA Intelligence Studies Section (http://iss.loyola.edu/index.html – accessed 27 August 2008) and Johnson (2007).
marginal part in what we see as the great conversation of ISS. If we are wrong about this, then there is an opening for someone else to write that book.

The Western-centrism conundrum

Our focus on the evolution of ISS also implies that our analysis to some extent reflects the strengths, weaknesses and blind-spots of the discipline itself. Although ISS has evolved through engagement with particular policy events, it has not treated all events as equally important. The majority of traditional Cold War Strategic Studies was for example overwhelmingly concerned with bipolarity and nuclear deterrence, while Third World security issues were addressed almost exclusively only to the extent that they impacted on superpower relations. Questions that concerned local and internal wars, not to mention non-military security issues, simply did not register with the mainstream of the field (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006). Moreover, ISS is by birth an Anglo–American discipline which has been based on a Western conception of the state. This conception has arguably limited empirical and political relevance for major parts of the non-Western world, where the drawing of colonial boundaries irrespective of local communities and allegiances has produced a radically different set of political, economic and cultural structures (Ayoob, 1984; Krause, 1996; Bilgin, 2008).

This history of Anglo-centric (and militaristic and patriarchal) bias leaves us in a bit of a conundrum. On the one hand, it is our ambition to analyse the evolution of ISS as it has taken place, not as we wish that it should have gone. Chapter 4 on Strategic Studies during the Cold War is, for instance, concerned predominantly with the logics of nuclear deterrence under a system of bipolarity, which implies that certain events, like the Vietnam War, are played down precisely because that was the case in ISS. On the other hand, it is clearly unsatisfactory merely to register this bias without subjecting it to critical scrutiny, and we do seek to address this bias in two ways. First, we grant critical, including Post-colonial, approaches more space than they have held quantitatively. The analysis of ISS during the Cold War in chapters 4 and 5 includes, for instance, a rather substantial account of Feminism and Poststructuralism, which, relatively speaking, generated many fewer writings than did conventional military Strategic Studies at the time. Some sense of quantitative measure is significant in that it registers how the dominant parts of ISS approached security, but a qualitative measure that registers key articles, new challengers and
contestation is equally significant in that it shows the way in which the field moves and changes. This implies also that more attention is devoted to the – often critical – texts that make up ISS’s canon. These texts are usually more theoretical than the average one, hence our focus on significant conceptual articles and books that define or coin a particular hyphenated security concept such as Wolfers (1952) on ‘national security’, Herz (1950), Jervis (1978) and Booth and Wheeler (2008) on the ‘security dilemma’, the Copenhagen School on ‘societal security’ (Wæver et al., 1993) and ‘securitisation’ (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998) and Deutsch et al. (1957) on ‘security communities’. It also implies that there is an emphasis on those periods where approaches and concepts were formed and contested, usually when there was no established consensus on what was ‘normal science’ (Kuhn, 1962) and the security concept. Second, the biases and centrisms of ISS are also acknowledged through the signposting of later critiques. Thus the Western-centric notion of the state which underpins Strategic Studies is, for instance, noted in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5 and even more thoroughly in chapter 7.

The next chapter continues this discussion of the basic questions at the heart of ISS by turning to the historical developments that have produced the field’s understanding of the state, government and politics.