Is the Security Dilemma Still Relevant in International Relations?

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John H. Herz first described the security dilemma in 1951 in his book *Political Realism and Political Idealism* and referred to it as "A structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening"(Hurz 1951: 7). Since the fall of soviet Russia however, views began to shift and political scientists such as Alexander Wendt ceased to recognize the security dilemma as a central guiding aspect of international relations. This essay will serve to normatively assess whether the security dilemma should be part of international relations and then descriptively show its role in them. I will do this to convey both that the security dilemma should exist and that it does exist. It is important to prove that the security dilemma should exist because without that it is difficult to make the claim that it exists based solely on empirical evidence. In political science, and any science, one can create a hypothesis based on observations or examples but in order to make it a theory, a uniform formula or model must be actualized; my model will therefore be rationality. First I will determine the role that rationality plays in an ideal composition of international relations, then I will prove, with the assistance of game theory, that the security dilemma is in fact rational before moving the discussion onto the real world, where I will demonstrate through the analysis of examples how the security dilemma was, and still is, a prominent aspect of international relations.

In order to create the best possible model for international relations it is important to step back and evaluate our own intuitions about what would be indicative of good policies and practices for states engaging with one another. In other areas of relations between two agents rationality is a key feature in our assessment of whether or not the two agents were successful in their interaction. If agent A and agent B attempt to have a discussion to sort out a disagreement, they need a common ground that dictates the rules of discussion. Rationality is this common ground as it supplies rules of behavior and a certain amount of uniformity so that one agent is able to persuade another of a point and avoid the infinite stalemate that would exist if each party acted without the constraints of rationality. If we now apply this concept to international relations it becomes evident that our intuition is to want states to employ the same practices as any other interacting agents as this will presumably create the best possible outcome. If we want interplay between states to work towards any objective goal it is mandatory that they conform to some sort of commonality in order to communicate and the only universal concept that could be applied is that of rationality, ensuring that states are able to work through differences and achieve their goals. Now that I have proven that rationality should occur in the context of international relation, the burden on me is to display how this relates to the security dilemma.

If it is accepted that international relations should be rational, the policies and principles that govern it should also be rational, therefore if we presuppose that the security dilemma is a central variable in a state's foreign policy it must be rational for us to want to keep it in our ideal model of international relations. In order to show that it is indeed rational I will compare it to an accepted rational concept, game theory. "Game theory is the study of the ways in which *strategic interactions* among *economic agents* produce *outcomes* with respect to the *preferences* (or *utilities*) of those agents, where the outcomes in question might have been intended by none of the agents" (Ross 2011: 1). Already from this definition we can see the similarities that exist between game theory and international relations, in order to further explain this however, I will illustrate the semblance with examples of each. One of the most concrete

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examples of the security dilemma can be seen in the arms race during the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in which each state, feeling threatened by weapons on the opposing side, built up their military strength to try and match the other. This forced a cycle in which each state created more and more weapons because although each side had enough nuclear power to destroy the other, to stop at any point would mean to lose at their original objective (Gaddis 2006: 234). This example parallels ideas behind the dollar auction game in game theory in which two agents begin to bid money to win a dollar bill, the highest bid wins but both must pay their final bid in the end. At some point the bidding will get over 1 dollar and yet the players involved will continue to bid to the point that their own economic capabilities impose a limit (Correa 2001: 7). At first glance both of these examples seem to be illogical. This is not the case however as the fact that people will bid more than 1 dollar can be mathematically shown and math cannot be illogical unless it is wrong (O'Neill 1994: 220). But even looking past the math there is a logic to their actions because in both scenarios what needs to be realized is that the goal is not the dollar bill or the ability to have enough power to destroy one's enemies, the goal is to win and have marginal loses to oneself. In the case of the dollar auction if agent A stops bidding at 1 dollar, he loses to his opponent and pays 1 dollar, in the case of the arms race, if the U.S. stops then the U.S.S.R. will win and the U.S. will still have spent its time and resources building up to that point. Therefore when we look at the similarity in definitions as well as specific examples we see that game theory, a mathematical and rational concept, is akin to the security dilemma and so by extension the security dilemma is also rational. The ramification of this is that it is something that we would like to incorporate in our ideal international relations theory.

Discussion so far has been mainly theoretical and hence is insufficient in answering the question of whether or not the security dilemma plays a role in modern foreign policy, in order to rectify this I would like to move the discussion onto specific, modern examples of the security dilemma. After the Cold War ended many people felt that there was a shift in the way that international relations occurred and that principles such as the security dilemma were no longer relevant. This claim does not account for all the facts however and we need only to look toward the Middle East to see it in effect. Specifically look towards Israel and their proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Israeli government has built these weapons as a defensive mechanism because they feel threatened by the Muslim forces in the region which seek to destroy them. In turn the Muslim countries see this buildup of powerful weaponry, feel threatened and try to match Israel in an armament race, and countries such as Iran have begun to turn to nuclear power as well (Hersh 1991: 87). The whole region is unstable due to defensive build ups on all sides that are perceived as a threat. Through this we can see that the security dilemma is a major governing principle even in today's world.

The idea of the security dilemma is not infallible and therefore its concepts breed objections which will be looked at and weighed here. Many people call upon pacts such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which limit arms build ups and display the cooperation of countries to stop arms races (Schell 2007: 127). While this is a valid point it does not discount the security dilemma as a central guiding force, it simply shows that there are other principles at work such as concern for humanitarian issues. Furthermore these treaties remove the feeling of threat which is brought about by arms buildup, since uncertainty is a large cause of this supposed threat and the removal of circumstances that create a theory does not prove the failure of a theory.

Upon analyzing these facts it becomes evident that rationality is key to decision making in international relations, that the security dilemma is rational, and finally that it is a central part of today's foreign policy. The empirical evidence alone can only go so far to prove the existence of this concept but since I have also provided evidence that there is a logical reason to support the security dilemma, I have sufficiently provided a solution to the question of whether the security dilemma is a central guiding variable in state's foreign policy.

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