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## Theory of World Security

What is real? What can we know? How might we act? This book sets out to answer these fundamental philosophical questions in a radical and original theory of security for our times. Arguing that the concept of security in world politics has long been imprisoned by conservative thinking, Ken Booth explores security as a precious instrumental value which gives individuals and groups the opportunity to pursue the invention of humanity rather than live determined and diminished lives. Booth suggests that human society globally is facing a set of converging historical crises. He looks to critical social theory and radical international theory to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the historical challenges facing global business-as-usual and for planning to reconstruct a more cosmopolitan future. *Theory of World Security* is a challenge both to well-established ways of thinking about security and alternative approaches within critical security studies.

KEN BOOTH is E. H. Carr Professor in the Department of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and the current editor of *International Relations*.

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This book is dedicated to  
the memory of my grandfather  
ALAN BOOTH  
(1892–1971)

As an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy in the Great War  
he sailed around the world twice,  
and to his dying day  
never knew  
why

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## Preface

This book is a work of analysis, argument, and advocacy. Its purpose is to explain and advance the case for a particular theoretical framework with which to explore and engage with the security of real people in real places. The overall approach is an attempt to construct a *critical theory of security*, and at its heart is *emancipatory realism*. Focusing on the primordial search for security, the book grapples with some of the biggest questions faced by human society. What is real? What can we know? How might we act? As such, it seeks to offer a theory for our times, a small bugle-call in an era of world-historical crisis.

*Theory of World Security* addresses various (overlapping) audiences: students of security within universities, people everywhere who are angry at the world they have inherited and disappointed at the complacency of the most powerful, and readers who already share the general conclusions of the book but who need more light to be shed on them. It would be encouraging if the book were to be read with an open mind by officials and politicians, or managers in control of the most powerful corporations: but I do not expect it. Nor do I expect much sympathy from the self-referential international relations orthodoxy in the United States and elsewhere – ‘realists’ of one sort or another – because the theorising represented here will be regarded as alien (even where it is allowed to be regarded as theory). Plenty of colleagues in the non-orthodoxy will also be unsympathetic. Be that as it may, the overlapping audiences who will be amenable to the arguments below are growing: they are people who know that world politics do not work for most of the planet’s inhabitants, who believe that the future is ever threatening even for the privileged minority world, and who are certain that business-as-usual on a global scale is not the answer to the looming threats (among others)

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*Preface*

of spreading nuclear dangers, coming environmental chaos, and global population overload.

The book will have failed if those readers who manage to stay with it to the end do not put it down with a promise (at least to themselves) to do something different – however little, however fallibly – in the interests of promoting world security. This promise could be anything from undergraduate students deciding to write more thoughtful essays in a security studies class, to research students changing their thesis to a topic more relevant and challenging, to people deciding to donate time or money to organisations (political parties even) promoting social justice, locally or globally. However often it is used, Gandhi’s aphorism in this regard is always mint fresh: ‘We must be the change we wish to see in the world.’

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## Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my grandfather, who was a miner, sailor, socialist, local politician, and person who struggled through his life to improve the prospects for succeeding generations; without people like him, people like me would never have received a free and lengthy education, and the benefits of the NHS. My biggest thanks for completing this book go to Eurwen, Rob, and Tom, who have changed my mind on many things, and from whom I have learned most about life; they will find in these pages more reflections of their own ideas than they will expect.

As this work represents the longest elaboration so far of what I understand to be a critical theory of security, it is a pleasure to record some old intellectual debts. In particular, on engaging with the great issues of peace and war, the people who have been most important over the years have been Bernard Brodie, Kenneth Boulding, Richard Falk, Michael Howard, and Michael MccGwire. In different ways, they lit the way for the critical security theory the book will analyse, argue, and advocate. Influential in a different way, I must also acknowledge the robust realism of John Garnett and Colin Gray, whose ideas have been a source of productive challenge for many years.

In the long process of discovering the inadequacies of much of what I learnt as a student of international politics, exchanges with Nicholas Wheeler and Richard Wyn Jones have been decisive. Between the anvil of the former's English school expositions, and the latter's Anglesey school hammer, there emerged what I long ago started calling – in provocation – the Welsh school of critical security studies (CSS). It was Nick who showed me how international relations theory could challenge the rolled-up-sleeves approach to practice (the common sense of so-called practitioners) and the potential for developing a more reflexive, theory-guided approach to who gets what in the world. The experience of

### *Acknowledgements*

co-authorship with Nick has been one of the pleasures of my career, not least the twenty years' crisis of writing *The Security Dilemma* together. Others no doubt will have a different version to mine of the intellectual history of CSS to date. My own claims that it was in the Department of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, that actually existing CSS was born and nourished. One catalyst for this was the prolonged gestation of the doctoral thesis of Richard Wyn Jones, which began at the end of the 1980s and was published at the end of the 1990s as *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory*. The discussions I was involved with during this period, as Richard's PhD supervisor and then colleague, were central to the development of a particular critical theory of security, bringing together long-established international relations concerns about security and strategy with the discipline's growing interest in critical political and social theory. Without the influence of Nick and Richard, it is unlikely that the theory of world security advanced in this book would have taken the shape it has.

It was in Aberystwyth that the first course explicitly organised as Critical Security Studies was taught. Many students have now taken it at Master's level, and some have gone on to do PhDs. They have taught me, as much as they have been taught and supervised, and it gives me pleasure to acknowledge the promising work of the first generation: the theses of Pinar Bilgin, Simon Davies, Eric Herring, Thomas Jaye, Tungay Kardas, Patricia Owens, and Paul Williams combined theoretical exposition with empirical case studies, and vastly improved my knowledge of the Middle East, Turkey, South America, the Indian subcontinent, various parts of Africa, and the United States – not to mention the Frankfurt school, nuclear strategy, conflict resolution, regional organisations, Hannah Arendt, the role of intellectuals, and international relations theory. There are many other PhD students I could mention, though I did not work closely with them, but all contributed to the incomparably stimulating graduate school that grew in Aberystwyth during the 1990s, and which continues to the present. But for my efforts in helping to build this vibrant community of young scholars, together (in particular) with Tim Dunne, Len Scott, Steve Smith, and Nick Wheeler, this book might have been written many years ago, but I know for sure that I was right in judging which project should have priority.

I have benefited enormously from the writings of a number of far-flung friends, although in some cases they were not self-consciously writing about security. I want to recognise the work of Hayward Alker, Philip Allott, Chris Brown, Hedley Bull, Cynthia Enloe, Tony Giddens,

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Fred Halliday, John Herz, James E. King, John Mearsheimer, Bhikhu Parekh, James N. Rosenau, Ann Tickner, Peter Vale, Rob Walker, and Kenneth Waltz. Barry Buzan deserves particular mention. Not only has his work on the concept of security been so influential, but when he was chair of the British International Studies Association he invited me to give the plenary lecture at the organisation's 1990 annual conference. For reasons to do more with curiosity than vision, I entitled it 'Security and Emancipation', and I have subsequently followed where that moment of curiosity pointed. Barry, like other realists mentioned earlier, shares more responsibility for actually existing critical security theorising than he probably realises.

At an important stage in the development of the Welsh school, following the emancipatory bugle-call, a conference was held in 1994 at York University in Toronto, organised by Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams. The conference was an attempt to think through what it meant to be studying security in the final years of the twentieth century. I want again to thank them for one of the most stimulating conferences I have attended. Their own account of CSS, and the papers from the conference, were published in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (1997). Mike Williams, I am pleased to record, now works in the Department at Aberystwyth, within the embrace but not (yet) control of the Welsh school.

While I wait for the phone to ring from Whitehall, I record thanks to several organisations over the last few years which have helped me try out and spread some of the ideas in this book, as well as learn about different perspectives: the Armed Forces Defence Academy in Canberra, the Diplomatic Academy in Lima, the Center for Eurasian Studies in Ankara, the Instituto da Defesa Nacional in Lisbon, Just Defence in the UK (regrettably wound up in 2005), the Oxford Research Group, and the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Peripheries of the world unite!

Had I put in a proposal to a funding body with such a preposterously ambitious title as *Theory of World Security*, immediate rejection would have been predictable. Special thanks for coming to a different conclusion are therefore due to Cambridge University Press, its Social Science editor John Haslam, and the Board of the BISA/CUP Series. I want to thank John for his patience, support, and advice and Mike Leach for preparing a first-class index. An anonymous reader gave me more encouragement from his/her remarks than could have been imagined.

For commenting on parts of the manuscript I want to thank Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Doug Stokes, while Paul Williams deserves very

*Acknowledgements*

special thanks for reading it all, and sending me material. My apologies go to all three for not always following their advice, but I did always engage with their points. Emilia Faria and Vitorina Augusta Becker Córte provided me with gracious hospitality which helped me to break the back of the writing, allowing me to work with the sun streaming through the balcony doors, and the sound of the sea outside: *muito obrigado*.

Colleagues (past and present) in the Department at Aber have been especially significant, and I want to record my appreciation of William Bain (for his intellectual rigour and the use of his bookshelves), Ian Clark (for showing how to embed theory in history), Mick Cox (for his intellectual brio and breadth), Tim Dunne (for being such an energiser and enthusiast for the subject), Toni Erskine (for reviving normative theory), Andrew Linklater (for his immense knowledge of the subject, and for making critical theory relevant to the discipline), Colin McInnes (for casually suggesting over coffee that I should write this book, and offering the view that it might not be too difficult), Steve Smith (for leading the way on so much), Colin Wight (for his ability to see the flaw in all arguments at one hundred paces), and Howard Williams (for leading me through the work of Kant). I could not have contemplated the book without the Department's great support staff. They are now too numerous to list for praise, but they know they are the skilful unsung in British higher education who help make academic life still possible when so many in higher places conspire to undermine it. When I was Head of Department, Caroline Haste was an outstanding co-worker, and Elaine Lowe and Joan Williams continue to be. Colleagues such as these make the Department at Aberystwyth, the world's first International Politics Department, a place of collegiality, as well as a home for cutting-edge pluralistic research and teaching. As the Department's centenary approaches, it continues to go from strength to strength, and is now housed in a magnificent new building. For so generously backing the Department in this material form, following years of my nagging, I owe enormous thanks to the former and present Vice-Chancellors of the university, Professor Derek Llwyd Morgan and Professor Noel Lloyd respectively.

In 1975 I came out of a panel at the ISA Annual Convention in Toronto having presented a paper entitled 'Strategy and Ethnocentrism'. It was a very long paper in a very small panel. The other presenter did not show, nor did the chair. The audience was three strong. As I was leaving, the peace researcher Charles Chatfield said: 'You have given yourself

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a thirty-year project to work on.’ In the course of writing this book, I have come to realise that the attempt in this book to construct a critical theory of world security is indeed a culmination of that concern long ago with the perils of allowing world politics and military strategy to be dominated by the views of those people who are convinced that the beliefs they inherited from their own people in their own patch of earth are truer, better, and more important than those of people from other places. Charles, I am amazed by your prediction, and – wherever you are – thank you for filling out the audience that day and giving me encouragement. I hope this latest version of that ancient paper meets with your approval.