Security

How do we know when we are investing wisely in security? Answering this question requires investigating what things are worth securing (and why); what threatens them; how best to protect them; and how to think about it. Is it possible to protect them? How best go about protecting them? What trade-offs are involved in allocating resources to security problems? This book responds to these questions by stripping down our preconceptions and rebuilding an understanding of security from the ground up on the basis of a common-sense ontology and an explicit theory of value. It argues for a clear distinction between objective and subjective security threats, a non-anthropocentric understanding of security, and a particular hierarchy of security referents, looking closely at four in particular – the ecosphere, the state, culture, and individual human beings. The analysis will be of interest not only to students and scholars of International Relations, but also to practitioners.

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A Philosophical Investigation

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For Nathaniel, whose generation is paying the price for the sins of my own; with love and apologies.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book has been twenty years in the making. It had its origin in a course I taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the purpose of which was to get students to radically question their understandings of security so that they could rebuild them from the ground up. I had the pleasure and privilege of discussing the issues that I engage with in this book with smart, motivated, creative students in intensive small-group discussions. I tortured them with hard questions about such things as what, if anything, can be said to have intrinsic (as opposed to merely extrinsic) value; whether our default anthropocentric understanding of security can be justified; whether it is more important to try to protect natural planetary systems or human social systems; what such things as ecospheric security, state security, cultural security, and human security really mean; whether any of the implicated security 'referents' that these concepts address can actually be secured from plausible threats; and how (or how far) we can know that we are allocating resources wisely in an attempt to secure them.

Of the nearly 200 students who took the course from me over the years at the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, and the Balsillie School of International Affairs, not one admitted to finding it easy. All found it somewhat frustrating. As far as I can tell, however, all also felt it worthwhile. A few have described it as life-changing (at least one, as a result of questioning his own anthropocentrism, became a vegetarian). For a teacher, there is nothing more gratifying – not the (single) conversion to vegetarianism, but the (general) deep engagement.

Every year, however, my students would ask me how I would answer my own questions. I always demurred. My job was not to tell them what *I* thought, I said, but to help them figure out what *they* thought. I think there may have been an element of cowardice in this. As a result of intense debates with smart students over the years, I found my views on these issues changing in response to arguments

they would make or challenges they would pose. I may have declined partly because I was unsure about where I stood. Eventually, however, I felt I should bite the bullet.

This book is my collected set of answers to my own questions. I offer it not as the final word on any of them, but in the spirit of encouraging others to seek their own answers by making the case for radically questioning preconceptions, self-consciously attempting to begin from philosophical first principles, and reconstructing an understanding of security grounded in an explicit theory of value.

I wish I could claim credit for the idea of the course, and thus also for this book. I cannot. The inspiration was that of Franklyn Griffiths, the inaugural George Ignatieff Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Toronto, now retired, whom I succeeded in that role. Frank is someone with an extraordinary capacity to think outside the box. The course he designed was the capstone seminar for a genuinely interdisciplinary program that brought together literatures from fields as diverse as politics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, physics, biology, chemistry, systems design engineering, and complexity theory. His syllabus included readings from all of these, and more. When Frank stopped teaching the course, Thomas ('Tad') Homer-Dixon stepped in. Tad brought experience with, and knowledge of, additional areas of research that made a rich course even richer. I was third in line. I don't know that I can claim to have brought any new expertise to the table, but one of the things that made the prospect of teaching it so appealing to me was that it would give me a chance to indulge my twin loves of international politics and philosophy, which I had studied in equal measure at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Early in my career, I had hoped that I would somehow manage to keep my feet in both camps. But, having been hired into a Department of Political Science and disciplinary pressures being what they are, this became harder and harder. Teaching the course would give me a chance to return to philosophy, at least in part. It would also give me a chance to honour Frank, who, twenty years earlier, had co-supervised my overly self-confident undergraduate thesis on what I rather grandiosely called 'the philosophy of nuclear deterrence.' A circle, I felt, would close.

While the idea for this book is not mine, the execution is. I doubt that either Frank or Tad would answer my questions in quite the same way. In fact, I *know* Tad would not, as he shared generous feedback with me on an early draft.

I am grateful to many people without whom this book would never have seen the light of day. They fall into two main groups.

The first group is the students who suffered heroically through my classes and who had such a profound effect on my own thinking: Noha Aboueldahab, Stéphanie Ah Tchou, Mana Alraddadi, Samuel Ameh, Farkhod Aminjonov, Greg Anastasopoulos, Solanna Anderson, Carla Angulo-Pasel, Justin Anstett, Alex Apostolopoulos, Linamaria Aristizabal, Cole Atlin, Betsy Aziz, Ioana Bala, Ali Bangi, Greg Baribeau, Hanae Baruchel, Sangarasigamany Bhahirathan, Farnam Bidgoli, Tuca Bihari, Allie Bly, Chris Bordeleau, Josh Bowen, Eric Boynton, Shanly Brennan, Skylar Brooks, Kristen Brown, Amelia Bulloch, Mark Carter, Marie-Adele Cassola, Isaac Caverhill, Jeff Chalifoux, Evelyn Chan, Moses Chan, Jerry Chang, Joelle Charbonneau, Andrew Chater, Kevin Cherry, Janet Chow, Evan Cinq-Mars, Warren Clarke, Vanessa Corlazzoli, Mary Crawford, Nikola Danaylov, Terry D'Andrea, Vincent Di Sciullo, Jonathan Diab, Jasmina Djikic, Quinton Doiron, Tristan Downe-Dewdney, Darlene D'souza, Stephanie Dudkowski, Dave Eagle, Isabelle Ekwa Ekoko, Inas Ettayebi, Asif Farooq, Julie Fellmayer, Mike Fleet, Aaron Francis, Patrick Fraser, Karen Frecker, Elayna Fremes, Anika Ganness, James Gardener, Vanessa Gastaldo, Ivana Gazibara, Jason Glasbergen, Ash Goertz, Marcos Gomez, Michael Gray, David Gudjonsson, Cassandra Haig, Tanzeel Hakak, Guy Halpern, Durre Hanif, Meghan Hanley, Kyle Harris, Brendan Heath, Venus Ho, Brett Hockley, Shani Hormozi, Aminah Husain, David Isern, Omar Ismail, Hazem Jamjoum, Fiorella Jaramillo, Amanda Joynt, Oliver Jull, Alesia Kachur, Filip Kedzior, Max Kelly, Sarah Kelsey, Safina Khan, Craig Kielburger, David Kim, Melanie Klein, Conrad Koczorowski, Maja Kokotovic, Andrew Koltun, Dan Koscinski, Bryony Lau, Denise Lau, Michael Lawrence, David Leach, Ah-Jung Lee, Rosita Lee, Jennifer LeFeuvre, Jee Yeon Lim, Victoria Long, Jennifer MacDowell, Rhys Machold, Katherine Mackenzie, Jesse Maclean, Titli Maitra, Sana Malik, Tina Mangat, Joanna Mantello, Adela Matejcek, Shane McCaughey, Jenna Meguid, Lars Meling, Manjana Milkoreit, Annahita Mirsalari, Trisha-Ann Mirza, Pallavi Misra, Sara Mojtehedzadeh, Mallory Motley, Zak Naimpoor, Emily Newcombe, James Nicol, Momoko Nomura, Liora Norwich, O. P. Onadipe, Sriram Pakeerathan, Sharon Peake, Ryan Phillips, Jinelle Piereder, Michael Poon, Alisha Preston, Caroline Price, Rebekah Pullen, Jenn Quito, Eleanor Rae, Sadia Rafiquddin, Aaron Raths, Matt Redding,

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I would also like to thank Romona Morgan, Dayna Nelson, Nicholas Rance, and Steven Smith for answering various questions beyond my expertise and Melissa Williams for helping me solve the single most difficult challenge I faced writing this book: settling on a title.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, without which this book – and so much else – would not have been possible.

A Note on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

This book was already in production when Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Whatever the denouement, that invasion is likely ultimately to prove to be an event of world-historical consequence.

The question naturally arises whether my argument would have been different if I had written the book after the fact with the full benefit of hindsight.

Time will tell. But I suspect not. Ukraine certainly stands as a counterexample to my claims that 'most states today can effectively address the threat of interstate war with a relatively small investment' and that military spending 'is in most cases best thought of as insurance against an increasingly unlikely peril' (Chapter 4), but I suspect that the larger point will still hold. Russia's aggression is indeed extraordinary. If Russia ultimately pays the material, moral, and reputational costs that it now seems likely to incur as a result, the event will probably bolster, not weaken, the global norm against territorial conquest and John Mueller's 1989 argument about the obsolescence of major war.

Vladimir Putin's evident disregard for the welfare not only of the Ukrainian people but also of the Russian people would certainly have inclined me to speak at greater length of him as a particularly powerful example of a leader whose actions undermine the case for the worthiness of the security of their own regime. Accordingly, he would have featured more prominently alongside (for example) Xi Jinping and the Communist Party of China in my discussions on this head (Chapters 5 and 6). I do not, however, see at the moment any reason to believe that his actions affect the substance of my analysis there or elsewhere.