

Rethinking Security and State Stability: A Conceptual and Epistemological Analysis

Basheer Tourki Sabah Kreshan

Correspondence: Basheer Tourki Sabah Kreshan, Faculty of Arts, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Ma'an, Jordan.
Email: drbasheer@ahu.edu.jo, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3750-1103>

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Abstract

The transformation of contemporary security challenges has exposed the limitations of traditional state-centric and militarized security frameworks. Despite sustained military capacity, many states experience persistent instability driven by non-traditional threats such as climate change, irregular migration, food insecurity, pandemics, and transnational crime. This paper addresses a central theoretical question: how and why persistent deterioration in human security generates pressures that undermine state stability even in the absence of direct military threats. The study adopts a conceptual–analytical methodology grounded in epistemological clarification and theoretical synthesis. Drawing on realism, human security, and securitization scholarship, it develops an integrative framework that reconceptualizes security as a multidimensional and interactive process linking human vulnerability to governance and legitimacy outcomes. The analysis argues that non-traditional security threats destabilize states indirectly by eroding institutional capacity, social cohesion, and political legitimacy rather than through immediate existential confrontation. In this framework, human insecurity functions as a causal mechanism that translates structural vulnerabilities, such as economic precarity, environmental stress, and social exclusion, into institutional fragility and governance challenges. The paper's main contribution lies in advancing an explanatory framework that subsumes traditional and human security perspectives within a unified analytical logic. It concludes that sustainable security depends on multilevel governance strategies that integrate military preparedness with human security, institutional resilience, and socio-economic stability.

Keywords: security, state stability, human security, transnational threats, institutional resilience

1. Introduction

Developments since World War II have fundamentally transformed the foundations of security and strategic studies. Security was about protecting territorial sovereignty and national interests through military defense against external threats and mitigation of interstate conflict. The Westphalian system established this assumption, which was strengthened during the Cold War. The state was considered the source and protector of security. In other words, the state was secure as long as it could persist against threats from outside and maintain territorial sovereignty. A narrow definition of security described the post-Cold War world, revealing the shortcomings of security paradigms that associate stability solely with the employment of force.

With the rise of globalization and accelerating technologies, security challenges are becoming increasingly transnational and a convergence between internal and external threats is emerging. Climate change, forced migration, transnational crime, terrorism, hunger, pandemics, and energy crises affect the stability and security of states in ways that can hardly be described as military conventional aggression. States are militarily powerful and territorially anchored, but many of them are insecure in terms of politics, discontent in terms of populations, and lacking credibility in terms of institutions. Hence, the military is not the sole focus of security studies anymore; security studies explore economic, social, environmental, and human parameters of security alongside military issues.

Moving along with the broadening of this concept were significant shifts in thinking. The post-positivists and the critical thinkers brought into question the privileged ontological position of the state and the focus on military threat, bringing to the forefront individuals and societies as objects of security. Ken Booth conceptualizes the meaning of liberation as transforming security by removing those structural, political, and societal impediments that prevent individuals from living lives that are meaningful, so long as in doing so they are not infringing on the liberties of others. For him, security should not be conceptualized as having no threats or challenges on a military level, but on having secure conditions that

provide for human dignity, social cohesion, and political legitimacy. In this way, human security has developed as a way of mapping deeper causes of insecurity, complementing the traditional national security concept's emphasis on defense of national territory and its military capabilities (Baldwin, 1997; Buzan, 1991).

Yet, despite this move, an important analytical dilemma persists in the literature on security. While it is widely acknowledged that threats to contemporary insecurity are multiple and other than military (Baldwin, 1997; Buzan, 1991; Booth, 2007), there is little agreement on how the elements of traditional security and human security are related to one another in explaining state stability. Many works seem to treat them as complementary or competing perspectives for understanding insecurity within states. Security studies, thus, have had little success in tackling an increasingly common puzzle in the realm of empirical research: How can states that are militarily superior and formally sovereign seem to continually struggle with internal instability arising from other vulnerabilities? In other words, given that traditional security is concerned with survival of the state and human security with the lives of the people, how can persistent human insecurity exert destabilizing pressure on the state in the absence of any direct military threats?

The unanswered question remains a theoretical and practical significance. Without understanding the dynamics connecting human and state insecurity, reasoning about security problems will largely remain rich in description but poor in explanation. Policymakers may respond with more martial walls and fences, paying little attention to the roots of human insecurity – impoverishment, climate change, and related social issues (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2013; Brauch, 2011).

This paper addresses this mystery through the conceptual and epistemological analysis of the changing concept of security and emerging threats to the state. Instead of seeing the traditional and human security as opposing paradigms, this paper argues that the contemporary concept of security entails processes in multiple dimensions where forces interact, and military and non-military forces are causally linked. Under this concept of security, human security is recognized as a structural condition not only of the state's ability to govern for the welfare of its citizens but also of social trust, economic resilience, and political legitimacy.

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to propose that the security concept has historically evolved in terms of epistemology from state-centric to multidimensional and human-centric approaches to security (Baldwin, 1997; Booth, 2007). Second, to analyze how dominant security theories have addressed new threats such as environmental degradation, migration irregularities, terrorism, organized crime, energy insecurity, and food shortages; and third, to examine how these threats create indirect routes to insecurity by weakening the efficacy of institutions and social trust instead of confronting actors directly as in the case of military conflicts.

The conceptual analytical method employed in this study is based on a critical reading of the dominant currents and influential work in security studies. Conceptual debates about security—between realists, human security advocates, and securitization theorists—are surveyed, and an analytical framework is constructed that connects the conceptual debates to contemporary dynamics of stability and characteristics of insecurity of the international system.

The originality of this paper lies in its problem-driven approach. Instead of providing an endless list of security threats, this research aims to explain the connection between human insecurity and state stability. It seeks to identify the causal mechanisms through which human vulnerabilities lead to institutional fragility and governance problems. This study aims to contribute to a more integrated conceptual understanding of security in a complex world. It argues that sustainable security should not initiate militarized responses to security threats but should implement multilevel responses that address the structural conditions affecting humans and states.

2. Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Debates on Security

2.1 The Classical Foundations of Security Studies

Early security studies belonged to a realist tradition that focused on issues of state survival, territory, and military power. This realist tradition of security studies was not, of course, born during the Cold War; it dates back at least to the classical political thought of Thucydides, who described the security dilemma whereby the increase in one's power causes fear in others, leading to balancing reactions, and whose analysis of power politics in the Peloponnesian War stands as a founding statement of realist thought (Thucydides, 1972). Yet other philosophical roots for realist thinking about security are found in Hobbes' description of political order in a situation of anarchy, and the need for authority and power to ensure order (Hobbes, 1996).

The realist tradition was developed in significant detail by Hans Morgenthau, who emphasized the struggle for power in international politics and anarchy in the international system, further elaborated by a structural realist interpretation that described the dynamics of power distribution and deterrence (Morgenthau, 1948). Later scholars, such as Robert Jervis, followed this tradition with his work on the security dilemma and misperception in international conflict (Jervis, 1978).

In this tradition, security was tied to notions of deterrence, balance of power, and the management of interstate conflict within an anarchic international system (Walt, 1991). The state was the primary referent object of security and the main

provider of security, while non-military threats and sub-state actors were neglected. Wolfers' well-known elaboration on the concept of national security as an ambiguous symbol made an important contribution on the difference between threats and feelings of insecurity, but it did not deviate much from the state-centric ontology of classical security (Wolfers, 1962).

During a period in which the primary source of insecurity was military confrontation, realism illuminated this analytical process. In the current period of insecurity, the analytical process proposed of realism has increasingly come under criticism. Baldwin's elaboration of the distinctions was a telling example of how realism understands of security gave a partial solution to the problem of first focusing on military power and ignoring the many other ways in which a state might be vulnerable to harm from other states (Baldwin 1997). Just as the critiques proposed of Baldwin were not new, the responses of policy-makers cannot easily overcome realist assumptions about the link between military power and state security. Classical security studies explain competition and balancing in an anarchic system, but offer almost no explanatory power for how non-military pressures alter the internal dynamics.

2.2 Broadening Security Beyond the Military Domain

Security studies underwent critical developments after the Cold War. Barry Buzan's approach within his sectoral framework helped distinguish military, political, economic, societal, and environmental security sectors (Buzan, 1991). He widened the scope of security studies by emphasizing that many elements can jeopardize the stability of one or more sectors, only military threats.

The problem of interaction between these dimensions was not fully addressed by the sectoral differentiation. Although Buzan treated the sectors of security as interlinked, in his approach they remain separate categories that coexist rather than security processes that interact. Thus, his approach explains little about how dynamics in one sphere, for example the environment or food can have a significant impact for the political dimension.

In some sense, the criticisms of militarized security thinking above already anticipated this development. "If military strength is not matched by social and economic progress, people feel secure in a military sense but in reality, are not," wrote McNamara (1968), emphasizing more than two decades earlier the notion of vulnerability due to poverty, inequality, or weak institutions that would later define human security (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Yet even here, the understanding of how these vulnerabilities contribute to instability at the level of the state remain lacking.

2.3 Human Security and Critical Reinterpretations

Human security advocates aimed to address the limitations of government-focused approaches. In 1994, the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identified how security entails protection from chronic threats like hunger, disease, and repression. Their approach shifted the referent object of security from the state to the individual by emphasizing the protection of human dignity.

Later scholars added a prescriptive or analytical dimension. Amartya Sen (and similar contributions from Martha Nussbaum) offered philosophical arguments in the tradition of defining security as the safeguarding of fundamental human rights or opportunities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Others elaborated further the policy dimensions of the concept. Fen Osler Hampson and a team of researchers expanded on the relevance of human security to global governance and the cessation of violent conflict (Hampson et al., 2002). King and Murray (2001) offered metrics with which to measure human security.

Moreover, human security scholars have looked at political stability in relation to structural insecurity. More recent studies identify economic pressures, health threats, environmental insecurities, and political marginalization as interrelated factors of institutional insecurity (Afolabi, 2015; Hama, 2017). More recent works examine the relationship between human security and government capacities. For example, Kelshall et al. (2024) identify the human infrastructure that contributes to state resilience, proposing it as an undervalued resource, and Buitelaar (2024) explores how a lack of accountability and human protections can destabilize post-conflict politics.

Simultaneously, there is a concern articulated by others that the human security agenda will be subject to conceptual overstretch due to issues it encompasses. There is a general debate within security studies over the implications of enlarging the concept of security to accommodate myriad social and economic issues. This study seeks to respond to this criticism by conceptualizing human security not in terms of an unlimited number of social issues but in terms of systemic pressures involving access to food, public health systems, environment, and economic resiliency relative to the capacity to govern and offer political legitimacy. In this sense, human security captures an empirical meaning of structural risk rather than a normative standard.

2.4 Securitization and the Politics of Threat Construction

Another important theoretical innovation in security studies addresses the promptings of threats. The Copenhagen School, led by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, you may be familiar with their work; this is the securitization theory. This theory

focuses on how political actors qualify certain issues as threats that require emergency measures. Instead of the objective conditions that pose security threats, political actors must persuade their audience that a certain development constitutes a threat to the survival of something they value greatly.

Securitization theory developed out of the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, who understood security as a political process, in which issues were articulated as an existential threat requiring emergency response (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998). Both of their approaches to security were focused on the speech act and the power of language as articulated by the English philosopher, J. L. Austin (Austin, 1962). Migrants, terrorism, climate change, and other issues can be articulated and enforced through a securitizing discourse as security problems that require extraordinary responses. The speech act theory has also been explored by other critical security scholars by examining concepts provided by a French philosopher, Jacques Derrida.

Empirical studies also show the effects of securitization on policy results. Research on European migration policy evidence how migration security narratives may help restrictive policy while undercutting competing, such as humanitarian, narratives (Dijk 2006; Mansour 2019). More recent works add nuance to this argument. Karyotis et al. (2025) work to investigate where a securitization politics narrative is effective, while Murray (2024) shows how civil society is able to challenge security narratives to produce policy backlash.

Securitization theory has faced criticism for its narrow research focus on the discursive construction of insecurity when compared with how material vulnerability to insecurity is under analyzed. Critical security studies scholars have been attentive to the political dimensions of the discursive construction of security threats and the very dominant security narratives marginalize alternatives constructions of insecurity. For example, Aradau (2004) and Huysmans (2006) discuss the political impact of describing social problems as security issues. In addition, like Aradau and Huysmans, feminist security scholars such as Wibben (2011) show how dominant narratives of security marginalize the constructions of insecurity used by those outside the political mainstream. Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2020) write that scholars of security studies must move beyond a focus on the state and analyze how practices of security shape social and political orders beyond the borders of the state.

Overall, securitization theory and critical security studies approaches shed light on the production of security threats in relation to political power, authority, and structural insecurities. This study aims to clarify these arguments by connecting the effects of the process of securitization and structural human insecurity in order to understand how unconventional threats might emerge as a threat to state security.

Moreover, processes within the media and communications become an integral part of securitization discourse. The media serves as one of the main actors in the process of building, spreading, and creating perceptions of danger and legitimacy in regards to the security threats. Media communication shapes the perception of migration, terrorism, or climate change as a problem of national security through framing and other means. Therefore, bringing the processes of communication into securitization theory allows understanding that insecurity is constructed by political and communicational means.

2.5 Non-Traditional Threats and the Material Foundations of Instability

Newer security challenges reveal non-military threats that do not challenge through the use of direct violence but rather through violent structures. Scholars have widely recognized the new insecurity paradigms of environment, specifically climate change, in aggravating scarcity, migration, and conflicts among vulnerable and fragile states (Burgess, 2008; Brauch, 2011). According to Simangan (2025), ecological challenges question the assumptions about the sovereign and authority of international politics.

Food insecurity is also said to have a reciprocal relationship with political instability through political and economic shocks, governance failures, and social unrest (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2013). Complimentarily, economic vulnerability can have direct effects on the state (Pauriené, 2025).

Regarding transnational organized crime and terrorism, Shelley and Picarelli (2005) describe how the blurring of lines between criminal and terrorist networks and activities further complicates traditional law enforcement and military approaches. These two examples provide further support for the foregoing argument that many contemporary threats work to oppose authority in an indirect manner by attacking institutional capacity to respond.

Moreover, the place that media and communication processes play in the process of securitization is another important factor. Media organizations serve as an intermediary mechanism for the development, reinforcement, and dissemination of securitization discourse to the broader population, thus helping to create a perception of threats and legitimacy. Media organizations help to shape issues of migration, terrorism, and climate change as security issues and, therefore, affect the way in which individuals perceive these issues. It becomes possible to use media and communication processes for the promotion of securitization and even for the desecuritization of certain threats, which makes it necessary to incorporate media and communication processes within the securitization theory framework.

2.6 Multilateralism, Governance, and State Stability

Collectively, these various theoretical approaches show that security cannot be reduced to military strength. However, this body of literature is divided among several competing schools of thought. Realists emphasize military power and competition between states; securitization theorists discuss the political framing of threats; and human security advocates examine structural threats to people and societies. These perspectives are typically considered independently of one another, and their combined impact on state security is ambiguous.

There appears to be too much fragmentation that hides how non-traditional threats erode stability even when military power is not compromised. This study attempts to fill the above-mentioned gaps by combining analysis of traditional and human security threats within a single framework of discourse, threat, and material insecurities affecting governing and legitimacy. In this regard, the paper attempts to map the chain of causality between human insecurity and instability.

3. Conceptual Scope and Analytical Framework

3.1 Conceptual Rationale

Theoretical and analytical approach of this study is primarily based on interpretive and post-positive approaches to security studies. The conceptual approach was selected not only for pragmatic reasons but also to ensure conceptual clarity. Security is not an empirically measurable concept but rather a mediated concept whose meaning, scope, and objects of referent change with historic and intellectual contexts. Hence, any attempts at empirical measurement without conceptual clarification are likely to produce category errors, ambiguity, and equivalence between otherwise incommensurable types of insecurity.

Explanations in the social sciences should be preceded by conceptual work. A classic work on the topic, by a renowned political scientist, Giovanni Sartori, illustrates that a lack of conceptual work disables theoretical and empirical work through conceptual overstretch and ballooning. In line with this work, conceptual analysis rigorously describes the meaning of a concept within security studies, the implicit assumptions of diverse theoretical traditions, and the interconnections between concepts that give shape to a debate (Baldwin, 1997).

The above problem is especially apparent in security studies. When security is no longer exclusively about military threats but also involves economic, environmental, and societal challenges, the concept of security within security studies becomes less defined. Conceptual analysis in this case will clarify the boundaries of the concept, draw distinctions between analytically related phenomena, and identify the interactions between different forms of insecurity within the larger theoretical explanation of stability and fragility.

Thus, this research is viewed as an exercise in conceptual analysis that contributes to theory development as opposed to hypothesis testing. This paper provides conceptual definitions, an overview of important discussions in security studies, and a conceptual model depicting the relationships among the key components of insecurity. The intention is to make a modest contribution to an analytically robust conceptual understanding that can be used for further empirical generalizations.

3.2 Epistemological Foundations

The paper adopts a diverse epistemological perspective, but mainly draws upon constructivist and critical approaches to security studies, while not discarding those from the realist tradition. Security is a function of political articulation, practice, and priorities, but also a both subjective and an objective condition.

The research here is sensitive to this point but also cautious of a tendency within critical approaches that overemphasize the discursive construction of security. The political articulation of threat does not exist in a vacuum and is influenced by existing or perceived vulnerabilities and the abilities of related institutions to mitigate them. In other words, this epistemological approach appreciates the insecurity both discursively and materially, recognizing that the political language of threat is influenced by structural factors that impinge upon institutional capacities and related social stability.

This pluralist approach enables the research to draw from various theoretical traditions without being bound to any one of them. Realists provide valuable insight into coercive power and state survival, while human security scholars draw attention to structural vulnerabilities among populations, and securitization theorists emphasize the political processes underlying threat construction. The goal is not to supersede these perspectives but to complement them within a larger explanatory framework that reflects the multidimensional nature of contemporary insecurity.

3.3 The Nested Security Framework

The past sections have shown that current work on security has been moving along avenues associated with traditional security theory, human security research focusing on structural vulnerability, and the political threat construction of securitization theory. Each is useful, but none explains how the cumulative effect of human insecurity may generate destabilizing pressures on the state. The conceptual analysis in this study is synthesizing these security traditions and

explains how vulnerabilities, discourse, and institutional capacity interact. The formulation of the conceptual framework developed here, the Nested Security Framework, is derived from this synthesis and is essential to explain the interaction of several levels of insecurity including discursive and communicative processes mediated through media institutions, and their effects on state stability.

From this conceptual analysis, the primary analytical contribution of this research is the creation of a heuristic model I call the Nested Security Framework. This framework is developed from the earlier conceptual discussion of security debates and blends aspects of realism, human security literature, and securitization theory into a single analytical framework.

Rather than a single outcome from military capability, stability is an outcome of interactions and multiple security realms. Figure 1 depicts the Nested Security Framework, where state stability is the outcome of three interdependent subsystems.

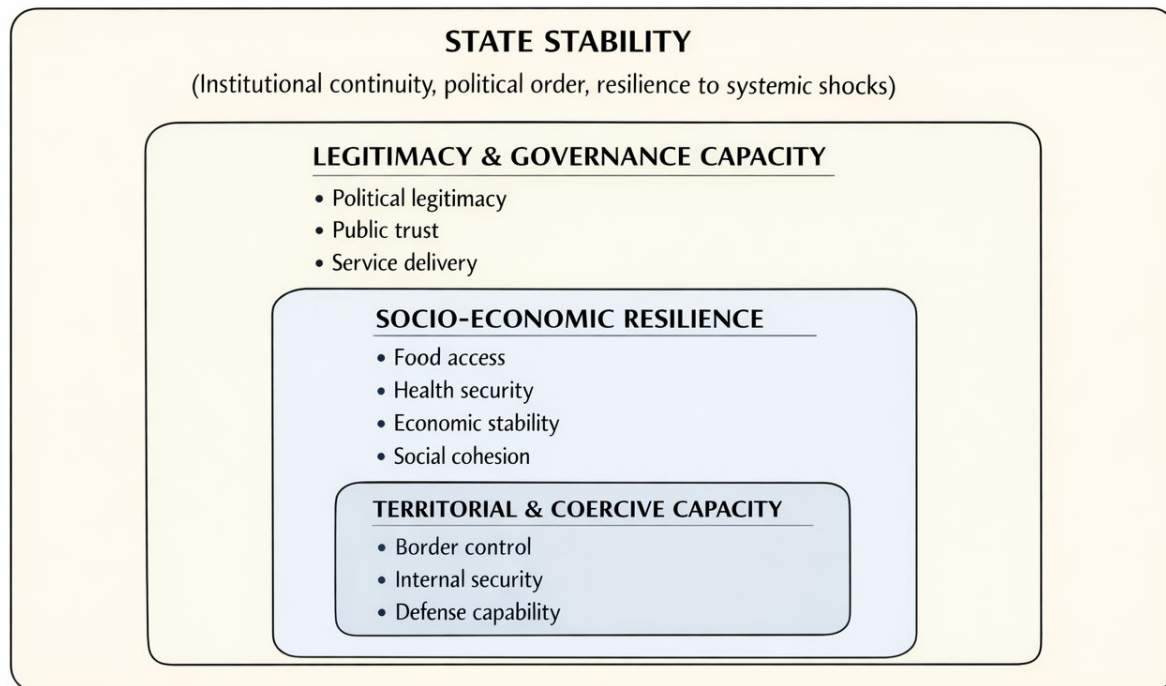


Figure 1. The Nested Security Framework Linking Human Insecurity to State Stability

In this model, the external structural condition of state stability relies on the inner workings of three cohesive subsystems. The first is the legitimacy and governance capacity of political institutions to exercise authority, offer public goods, and gain public consent. The second is socio-economic resiliency, which accounts for economic stability, food security, public health capabilities, and social cohesion. The third is territorial and coercive control, which includes border management, the monopoly of legitimate violence, and the ability to defend against organized armed threats.

In all these sub-systems, the processes of communication, especially as facilitated by media institutions, are integral in the construction of the nature of insecurity that exists and its political mobilization. This means that media discourse shapes the legitimacy of the policies of governance adopted, the way social and economic vulnerabilities are read and the territorial security problems framed. In other words, media sub-systems are not outside the security dynamics but are intrinsic to them, just like human insecurity.

Non-traditional security threats impact the various subsystems in different ways. For instance, food insecurity compromises the socio-economic subsystem but may also affect the political legitimacy of the ruling authorities if not adequately addressed. Irregular migration primarily affects territorial governance but also stretches the social subsystem. Climate change threatens all the subsystems with environmental, economic, and population challenges.

The interest of the Nested Security Framework is not to presume the existence of any particular causal relationship, but to map out the channels through which various pressures may pass through adjoining or distant institutional domains and ultimately contribute to volatility. The Nested Security Framework conceptualizes security as a system that, through various channels and over time, can create conditions in which even highly militarized states can become vulnerable and unstable when accumulated pressures degrade the quality of governance and social resilience.

3.4 Analytical Logic

This framework application will involve a process of analysis with three steps that respond to the logic of conceptual analysis. First, there is conceptual clarification, which looks at key security concepts to see what definitions, assumptions, and overlaps they have across theories.

The second stage is the theoretical interpretation. In this stage, the analysis refers to major security theories, including realism, human security scholarship, and securitization theory, to see how each of them can explain the new threats in the security field and their relationship with the stability of states. Here, this task will not be based on one theoretical perspective but on assessing the strength and weakness of each.

The third stage is the integrative synthesis where all of the previously mentioned insights are put together to speculate on the causal pathways between human insecurity and state instability. This juncture yields the Nested Security Framework, which acts as an analytical model to explain the ways in which discourses, structural vulnerability, and institutional capacities interact to determine stability.

3.5 Analytical Scope

This research study will focus on the major non-traditional security threats such as climate change, irregular migration, terrorism, transnational organized crime, energy insecurity, and food insecurity. These are not the only non-traditional threats, but some are representative of the changing patterns of security structures.

They have been chosen because they are among the most discussed in current security debates and because they create pressures simultaneously across multiple institutional domains. All three threats illustrate how non-military vulnerabilities affect the ability to govern, to withstand economic and social disruptions, and ultimately to maintain political support, the indirect routes to instability.

3.6 Theoretical Contribution

As this is not a statistically based study, conceptual validity is achieved through internal logic, reference to relevant literature, and clear rationale.

The primary contribution of this analysis is its elucidation of the relationship between non-traditional security threats and institutional relations with the stability of states. The conceptual framework offered here defines human insecurity as a stressor within a system that influences the government's ability and legitimacy to govern, thereby constituting a bridge between traditional security and human security.

In sum, this study moves the discussion within security studies by offering a methodological approach that links conceptual debates to current stability and fragility trends. It lays the groundwork for future empirical research and addresses the conceptual fragmentation that leaves the field lacking in explanatory power.

4. Security Implications for State Stability

Based on the above discussion, it is possible to make the following analytical inferences regarding the impact of the new security concerns on the stability of the states. The purpose of this section is not to present empirical results but to bring together the arguments put forward in the previous section to explain the way in which the new security concerns may cause vulnerability.

One of the implications is that security is perceived as a hierarchical process. Traditional notions of security have focused on military strength, territorial integrity, and external threats. While these are still pertinent in the context of war between states and sovereignty, what has evolved is not simply the widening of the concept but also changes in the nature of threats. Many of today's insecurities arise from converging pressures of social, economic, ecological, and political factors that together alter the terms of state power.

The second implication is that a majority of contemporary security risks have an indirect and cumulative bearing. Non-military security risks such as climate change, famine, pandemics, and irregular immigration do not risk the immediate survival of territorial states as do wars and conflicts between states. Instead, they slowly impinge upon governments by overwhelming services, affecting employment, and weakening infrastructures and welfare systems. The weak functioning of political institutions will exacerbate inequalities, intensify discontent, and breed mistrust of governments. This is the nature of states that can be immune to military attacks yet vulnerable internally.

A third implication relates to the role of the state as a provider, and potentially producer, of security. The state remains central to providing collective security; but the experience of insecurity points to the limits of a solely state-based response. Security discourses and policies that emphasize violent and militarized responses to structural vulnerabilities may inadvertently reinforce or relocate insecurity, producing new problematics. For example, heightened border controls, states of emergency, and exclusionary measures may contain certain threats only to create others.

A fourth implication pertains to the ambivalent effects of securitization. When challenges like migration, energy supply, or environmental degradation are perceived as security issues, they can galvanize political attention. However, over securitization may lead to exceptional responses that hamper civil liberties and strengthen exclusionary narratives. Over time, such developments could erode democratic accountability and social cohesion, undermining the stability that securitization intends to safeguard. In this respect, securitization can become both a tool for political mobilization and a source of institutional strain.

A fifth implication concerns multilevel security governance. Many new threats are transnational and cross-sectoral, and cannot be addressed by one single state. Climate change, transnational crime, and irregular migration cross borders and policy domains, requiring coordination among national governments, regional organizations, international institutions, and civil society actors. Security governance is characterized increasingly by collaborative and multi-actor arrangements, rather than solely by sovereign state responses. The state remains indispensable, but its ability to provide security and stability also depends on its capacity to coordinate external cooperation with domestic legitimacy and institutional coherence.

Finally, the conceptual synthesis developed in this study suggests that human security is a critical measure of the long-term stability of states. Insufficient access to food, inadequate public health infrastructure, unchecked pollution, and social and political exclusion often reveal underlying gaps and weaknesses in governance well before these are manifested in states' overt instability. Human insecurity serves as an early warning gauge of stress and strain in political institutions. As competing vulnerabilities emerge, states become increasingly prone to shocks and crises that can convert social frustration into political havoc.

Overall, these implications point to the primary contention of the research paper: that contemporary security is a complex web in which both traditional and human security dynamics converge to affect the stability of states. Qualitative security responses such as militarization and isolationism are not enough to tackle the root causes of insecurity. In a complex and interdependent world, long-term stability can only be achieved by striking a balance between state capacity, human security, and cooperative governance at various levels of institutions.

5. Integrative Discussion and Theoretical Implications

5.1 Rethinking Security beyond Paradigms

The conceptual analysis in the present study confirms the validity of the claim that security cannot be defined solely in state centered and militarized terms. Classical and neorealist views of security as protection of territory and survival of states in the anarchic system are valuable in understanding issues of conflict and deterrence among states (Walt, 1991; Williams, 2008), but focusing exclusively on military threats emanating from other states risks neglecting the multiple structural threats to insecurity today (Baldwin, 1997).

This paper's analysis therefore justifies the need to broaden the security agenda and also explains the causal logic of its need to do so. The need to move into non-military security is not just due to the redefinition of the concept, but a structural evolution in security threats. Sources of insecurity are within states, developing gradually, and challenging sovereignty indirectly through lack of governance and political authority.

In this regard, the notion of security in the state-centric analysis of security can prove to be inadequate. From a military perspective, this state may seem secure, but from a social and economic perspective, it may be deeply vulnerable.

5.2 Limits of Militarized Security

This would partly support Buzan's claim that it is still the threats of a military aspects that are paramount in national security thinking, for example with regard to sovereignty and external attacks (Buzan, 1991). However, the concepts developed in this research project would indicate that threats that are not of a military aspect cannot simply be regarded as other sectors alongside security.

According to the Nested Security Framework, even fragile political orders can rely on militarized repertoires. Military power can insulate political orders from threats external to the state while the domestic political order remains exposed to threats generated by economic insecurity, environmental change, and social disintegration.

This view can be considered an extension of Wolfers' distinction between objective security and subjective security (Wolfers, 1962). States may be measured by traditional measures of military capacity increasingly secure from an objective standpoint, but at the same time declining in their ability to govern or failing to do so as a society. The internal pressure of these failures is neglected measured by a narrowly realist view of security.

Realism is not rejected outright; rather, its insights are embedded in a broader framework that explains both external and internal insecurities.

5.3 Human Security as Causal Explanation

The findings of this research also add to the discussion related to human security literature. While security from an

emancipatory perspective as articulated by Booth means being free from structural constraints where the protection of human dignity and agency is a normative priority (Booth, 2007), this research attempts to contribute to this literature by adding human security not only as a normative goal but also as an explanatory tool for state stability.

A common criticism of human security is that it is too broad, rendering it elusive and imprecise. This research seeks to use the notion of human insecurity to explain the systemic effects on governance and political output. Food insecurity, epidemics, environmental issues, and political marginalization are sources of stress on systems that ultimately impact individuals but also generate cumulative pressures on the structural matrix that govern system stability.

In this regard, human security does not replace national security but rather constitutes national security. If not adequately addressed, human insecurity could undermine institutions and ultimately public immunity, turning human insecurity into political insecurity. This provides meaning to the concept of human security while removing generic criticisms about the concept (Hubert, 1999; Afolabi, 2015; Buitelaar, 2024).

5.4 Securitization and Political Dynamics

Finally, the study refers to securitization theory for its concern with the construction of threats. Securitization theory is indicative of how political voices construct threats to public safety and national security by framing issues through communicative processes, often mediated and amplified by media institutions, that call for extraordinary policy measures (Baldwin, 1997; Karyotis et al., 2025). While this perspective certainly contributes to an understanding of the political construction of threats, the arguments developed herein show how securitization theory falls short of fully accounting for the relationship between security discourse and material insecurity. Discursive framing may influence political reactions, but the long-term viability of political systems is contingent upon other institutional and socio-economic factors.

Empirically, these dynamics are illustrated in studies on migration policy. Securitized narratives of us-versus-them othering in the socio-cultural imaginary can arouse existential fear over migration, providing political justification for reactionary policies, even though they may also promote social division and mistrust of authorities (Dijck, 2006; Mansour, 2019; Kakachia et al., 2025). Securitization in such instances may stir political conflict without removing the underlying causes of insecurity.

The Nested Security Framework accounts for this gap by considering the discursive and material aspects of security simultaneously. It reveals how securitized narratives are nested within governance and socio-economic pressures that may enhance insecurity.

This points out that the success and effects of securitization cannot be separated from media functions, since the medium through which messages flow affects both the dissemination and acceptance of security discourse.

5.5 Security Governance

The results of the conceptual analysis are in line with the institutionalist literature on the importance of multilevel governance in tackling transnational security issues. Ruggie's understanding of multilateralism included the utilization of institutional collaboration to resolve collective action difficulties in the international environment (Ruggie, 1983). Similar research highlights the significance of regional integration and security collaboration in combating common risks (Thakur & Van Langenhove, 2006).

However, the above analysis suggests that international cooperation cannot substitute for weak domestic governance, and works in tandem with it. For example, Newman (2007) and Webber et al. (2004) have shown that security governance is highly dependent on the interplay between international institutions and domestic political legitimacy.

Thus, within the Nested Security Framework, multilevel governance does not replace state capacities but complements them. International cooperation can foster the ability of states to address transnational threats, but the functioning of these arrangements ultimately depends on the resilience of domestic institutions and the legitimacy of the governance.

5.6 Conceptual Contribution

The main contribution of this research is an attempt to bring together incoherent theoretical approaches from security studies. Realists stress coercive power and competition between states, human security proponents emphasize structural insecurities for individuals, and securitization theory focuses on political dynamics of perceived threats.

Each perspective offers only a partial explanation of contemporary insecurity when utilized in isolation. Nevertheless, by combining these approaches, the Nested Security Framework presented in this study outlines a conceptual model that links discursive processes, vulnerabilities, and institutional capacity.

Insofar as existing literature has not yet explained how human insecurity and state instability are interconnected via a systemic stress within the system, this approach addresses this gap. This approach does not see human security and national security as a competing paradigm but shows the systemic paradigm in which they relate to each other as part of a larger set of factors constituting political stability (Buzan, 1983; Moore & Yom, 2024; Simangan, 2025).

5.7 Future Research

The research conducted for this paper suggests multiple topics for future research. Specifically, this paper provides a foundation for comparative case studies that will apply the Nested Security Framework to analyze varying state responses to identical non-traditional security threats. For instance, a comparative analysis of differing state responses to climate-related food insecurity would show how institutional capacity mediates the relationship between human insecurity and state stability.

The second option for quantitative research is to operationalize the main dimensions of this framework by developing measures for governance capacity, socio-economic resilience, and territorial control. These may be analyzed to various types of insecurity to test the causal mechanisms proposed in this framework.

Furthermore, policy-oriented studies can also assess existing approaches to security in relation to the proposed framework. An assessment of the role and extent of militarized responses as opposed to assistance in resilience-building that regional organizations such as NATO or the African Union provide could be illustrative of what the proposed model would entail in practice.

These directions serve to show the wider possibilities of the Nested Security Framework in connecting conceptual theorizing to later empirical research.

6. Conclusion

The current study reinterprets security as a multidimensional concept where both traditional and human security intersect within a larger institutional and societal context. Contemporary threats are not direct but rather cumulative and affect the state's ability to govern itself despite being militarily strong. From the results, it is evident that although the state is key, its ability to provide security becomes conditional. Overreliance on security mechanisms that are based on military and exclusionary approaches may increase insecurity if it is accompanied by media-driven scare tactics. The strength of any state is thus strongly associated with the extent of human security in such state. The most important contribution in this study comes from what the paper has referred to as the Nested Security framework which provides a conceptual understanding of the human insecurity as a source of systemic strain on governance capacity and legitimacy. Integrating the realism approach, human security and securitization approaches have provided an elaborate explanation of state stability. For future research on state stability, it will be important to apply and test the effectiveness of the Nested Security Framework further.

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Author contributions

Basheer Tourki Sabah Kreshan was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, theoretical framework development, literature review, conceptual and epistemological analysis, analytical model construction, manuscript drafting, revision, and final approval of the manuscript. The author solely conducted all stages of the research and approved the final version for publication.

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