David Grondin

(Re)Writing the "National Security State"

How and Why Realists (Re)Built the(ir) Cold War

Occasional paper **4** published by the Center for United States Studies of the Raoul Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies

Chaire Raoul-Dandurand
en études stratégiques et diplomatiques
Raoul-Dandurand Chair
of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies

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Editing: Andréa Lévy
Design: Olivier Lasser

Dépôt légal – Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2004
ISBN 2-922844-39-0

Chaire Raoul-Dandurand en études stratégiques et diplomatiques
Raoul-Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies

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(Re)Writing the "National Security State": How and Why Realists (Re)Built the(ir) Cold War[1]

By David Grondin

> *[D]uring the Cold War the roles and identity of those Western academics who were strategic studies and national security experts were fundamental to their sense of self. For strategic studies specialists during the Cold War, their professional identity derived from the belief that they were playing an important role in probably the most important political job of the era – containing the power of the Soviet Union. […] Changing identity is not easy, especially when it risks losing all the identity-bearing bonuses that go with it. The conservatism that is encouraged but the pressures to maintain loyalty to a highly valued label no doubt played its part in the self-disciplining of the discipline of Cold War strategic/security studies* (Booth, 1997: 89, emphasis in original).

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1. Paper presented at the annual International Studies Association Convention, March 17-20, 2004, Montreal. I would like to thank Charles-Philippe David for setting up the panel in which part of this paper was presented. I also want to thank Duke University's Professor Joseph M. Grieco for having accepted to comment on this paper, my co-panelists Frédérick Gagnon, Benoît Gagnon, and Sébastien Barthe, as well as members of the Raoul Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies for their helpful comments and advice. I especially wish to thank Anne-Marie D'Aoust for reviewing this piece in a critical manner and Nicolas Bergeron for believing in me.

Hans Morgenthau once said that "the intellectual lives in a world that is both separate from and potentially intertwined with that of the politician. The two worlds are separate because they are oriented towards different ultimate values… truth threatens power, and power threatens truth" (Morgenthau, quoted in Hill and Beshoff, 1994: xi). For Christopher Hill and Pamela Beshoff, this means that, as international relations practitioners and theorists, "Like it or not, we are 'intellectuals in politics' and 'the study of international relations is not an innocent profession'" (Hill, 1994: 12).

Comments such as these are commonplace in academia, but many scholars would contend that the latter is wrong. Positivists – be they neoclassical realists, neorealists, neoliberal institutionalists, or mainstream constructivists – hold that by exercising parsimony and rigor, and by employing the "scientific method", international relations can be studied in an objective manner, and scientific, neutral, and true knowledge can be produced. Critically-inclined scholars would, however, argue otherwise, on the grounds that "[t]heory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" (Cox, 1981: 87). Adopting a critical stance is not an easy task in International Relations today. And it is even more difficult if one chooses to view the field through poststructuralist lenses, as this means choosing to work on borderlines and in the margins (Ashley, 1989).

As a discipline, International Relations is dominated by American scholars and scholars trained in the U.S. (Waever, 1998). As Steve Smith noted in his ISA presidential address in 2003, predominantly American rationalist theories such as neorealism and neoclassical realism enjoy a hegemonic status within the discipline which reduces the theoretical pluralism and diversity of the field (Smith, 2002). In this paper, I adopt a poststructuralist approach with the aim of developing a critical understanding of how the hegemonic status of realist theories serves to legitimize current U.S. national security policy. I focus on two main points. First, I explore how the realism prevalent in the theoretical discourse of IR in the United States is itself a political practice that is constitutive of a particular reality, rather than merely neutrally describing it. Second, I maintain that these realist discourses subjectively and artificially lock U.S. national identity into a Cold War-like national security focus. As such, the United States remains constructed as a national security state in realist discourses. Indeed, realist discourses do not merely seek to explain but also serve to legitimate U.S. national security conduct and its hegemonic power in the wake of 9/11. I want to show how the idea of the U.S. as a national security state is being (re)produced by practices that would neither appear nor claim to do so.

Rethinking the Political from a Poststructuralist Stance

> *[O]ur political imagination has been restricted by our uncritical acceptance of our own rhetorical construction of democracy, a construction that privileges free-enterprise capitalism and republicanism. Such a construction – limiting, as it does, our ability to understand both ourselves and others – needs to be rhetorically reconstructed to serve the needs of globalism as different nations struggle toward their own definitions, policies, and practices. The first step in such a rhetorical reconstruction is to become aware of our own language choices and the narratives and assumptions embedded in these choices* (Medhurst, 2000: 16).

A poststructuralist approach to international relations reassesses the nature of the political. Indeed, it calls for the repoliticization of practices of world politics that have been treated as if they were not political. For instance, limiting the ontological elements in one's inquiry to states or great powers is a political choice. As Jenny Edkins puts it, we need to "bring the political back in" (Edkins, 1998: xii). For most analysts of International Relations, the conception of the "political" is narrowly restricted to politics as practiced by politicians. However, from a poststructuralist viewpoint, the "political" acquires a broader meaning, especially since practice is not what most theorists are describing as practice. Poststructuralism sees theoretical discourse not only as discourse, but also as political practice. Theory therefore becomes practice.

The political space of poststructuralism is not that of exclusion; it is the political space of postmodernity, a dichotomous one, where one thing always signifies at least one thing and another (Finlayson and Valentine, 2002: 14). Poststructuralism thus gives primacy to the political, since it acts on us, while we act in its name, and leads us to identify and differentiate ourselves from others. This political act is never complete and celebrates undecidability, whereas decisions, when taken, express the political moment. It is a critical attitude which encourages dissidence from traditional approaches (Ashley and Walker, 1990a and 1990b). It does not represent one single philosophical approach or perspective, nor is it an alternative paradigm (Tvathail, 1996: 172). It is a nonplace, a border line falling between international and domestic politics (Ashley, 1989). The poststructuralist analyst questions the borderlines and dichotomies of modernist discourses, such as inside/outside, the constitution of the Self/Other, and so on. In the act of definition, difference – thereby the discourse of otherness – is highlighted, since one always defines an object with regard to what it is not (Knafo, 2004). As Simon Dalby asserts, "It involves the social construction of some other person, group, culture, race, nationality or political system as different from 'our' person, group, etc. Specifying difference is a linguistic, epistemological and, most importantly, a political act; it constructs a space for the other

distanced and inferior from the vantage point of the person specifying the difference" (Dalby, cited in Tvathail, 1996: 179). Indeed, poststructuralism offers no definitive answers, but leads to new questions and new unexplored grounds. This makes the commitment to the incomplete nature of the political and of political analysis so central to poststructuralism (Finlayson and Valentine, 2002: 15). As Jim George writes,

> "It is postmodern resistance in the sense that while it is directly (and sometimes violently) engaged with modernity, it seeks to go beyond the repressive, closed aspects of modernist global existence. It is, therefore, not a resistance of traditional grand-scale emancipation or conventional radicalism imbued with authority of one or another sovereign presence. Rather, in opposing the large-scale brutality and inequity in human society, it is a resistance active also at the everyday, community, neighbourhood, and interpersonal levels, where it confronts those processes that systematically exclude people from making decisions about who they are and what they can be" (George, 1994: 215, emphasis in original).

In this light, poststructural practices are used critically to investigate how the subject of international relations is constituted *in* and *through* the discourses and texts of global politics. Treating theory as discourse opens up the possibility of historicizing it. It is a myth that theory can be abstracted from its socio-historical context, from reality, so to speak, as neorealists and neoclassical realists believe. It is a political practice which needs to be contextualized and stripped of its purportedly neutral status. It must be understood with respect to its role in preserving and reproducing the structures and power relations present in all language forms. Dominant theories are, in this view, dominant discourses that shape our view of the world (the "subject") and our ways of understanding it.

Given my poststructuralist inclinations, I do not subscribe to the positivistic social scientific enterprise which aspires to test hypotheses against the "real world". I therefore reject epistemological empiricism. Since epistemology is closely intertwined with methodology, especially with positivism, I eschew naturalism as a methodology. I study discourses and discursive practices that take shape in texts. This does not mean that there is no material world as such, only that it must be understood as mediated by language, which in the end means that it is always interpreted once framed by discourse (through the spoken word or in written form).[2] "A discourse, then, is not a way of learning 'about' something out there in the 'real world'; it is rather a way of producing that something as real, as identifiable, classifiable, knowable, and therefore, meaningful. Discourse creates the conditions of knowing" (Klein quoted in George, 1994: 30). We consider

2. As Torbjørn Knutsen writes, "The relativists dismiss the notion of an external reality which is accessible to the human mind. [...] He (Foucault) would advise them (social scientists) to turn their attention away from the world and focus instead on human perceptions of the world. He would tell them that to observe the observers and interpret the interpreters. For, when push comes to shove, the only things a social scientist can really investigate are the various 'rhetorical renderings' which human impose upon the world. A moderate and quite common interpretation of Foucault's position holds that a scholar cannot say everything: that for every claim made there are several other possible claims that are silenced (and many of these may be important)" (Knutsen, 1997: 280).

"real" what we consider significant: a discourse is always an interpretation, a narrative of multiple realities inscribed in a specific social or symbolic order. Discursive representation is therefore not neutral; individuals in power are those who are "authorized" to produce "reality", and therefore, knowledge. In this context, power is knowledge and the ability to produce that which is considered "true". A realist discourse will produce the socio-linguistic conditions that will allow it to correspond, in theory as in practice, to "reality". Evidently, this "reality" will be nothing but the "realist discourse" that one has constituted oneself. This is why, from a poststructuralist perspective, discourse may be considered as ontology[3].

Language is an autonomous system in which intertextuality makes many interpretations possible. Intertextuality, as Roland Barthes explains it, celebrates the "death of the author": it is not the author who speaks, but the text, by referring to other texts, through the reader's mind.[4] The meaning of a text is thus enacted by the reader instead of being articulated passively in the text. Intertextuality assumes that a text can be read only in relation to other texts, as an "intertext". The reader will read the text by virtually reinterpreting texts he already read in light of this new text. Such an intertextual approach thus allows endless interpretations and readings: "[…] as relevant as sources are, the list of unknowable sources that inform a reader's interpretation of a text is what makes intertextuality a powerful social and personal experience" (Porcel, 2002: 150).

Intertextuality and deconstruction are used in a complementary way. "Deconstruction 'is' a way of reading a particular text, in which it is demonstrated that the 'author' fails to produce the logical, rational, construction of thought that was intended" (Brown, 1994: 1665). It is not a testable theory, nor a standard method; it is an ongoing 'project' (Butler, 2002: 28). It produces "stories", not "theories". In effect, in deconstruction, binary oppositions encoded in language and hierarchical antinomies hidden in discourse are revealed. It is thus assumed that the meaning of a concept can be revealed only in relation to at least one other term.

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3. Discourses […] are amenable to such a reading because they stand as codifications of social practices and linguistically mediated understandings. But because all social practices necessarily rely upon a documented record as well as on repertoires of meaning and interpretation that are always made available through the medium of language, they are also susceptible to critical methods of inquiry that explore the construction of truths. The point of such an extension, from the narrowly textual to the explicitly practical, is to explore how webs of signification, representation and interpretation are spun and put to work (Klein, 1994: 9-10).
4. Readerly texts (*lisibles*) presuppose a passive reading, with a single meaning to be discovered. In contrast, writerly texts (*scriptibles*) ask readers to write the meaning of the text virtually for themselves.

Deconstructing American Hegemonic Realist Discourses[5]

> *[S]ecurity studies can be understood as a series of discursive practices that provided the policy coordination that went with incorporation into the U.S. political sphere* (Dalby, 1997: 19).

In explaining national security conduct, realist discourses serve the violent[6] purposes of the state, as well as legitimizing its actions and reinforcing its hegemony. This is why we must historicize the practice of the analyst and question the "regimes of truth" constructed by realist discourses. When studying a given discourse, one must also study the socio-historical conditions in which it was produced. Realist analysts are part of the subfield of Strategic Studies associated with the Cold War era. Even though it faced numerous criticisms after the Cold War, especially since it proved irrelevant in predicting its end, this subfield retains a significant influence in International Relations – as evidenced, for instance, by the vitality of the journal *International Security*. Theoretically speaking, Strategic Studies is the field *par excellence* of realist analyses: it is a way of interpreting the world, which is inscribed in the language of violence, organized in strategy, in military planning, in a military order, and which seek to shape and preserve world order (Klein, 1994: 14). Since they are interested in issues of international order, realist discourses study the balancing and bandwagoning behavior of great powers.

Realist analysts believe they can separate object from subject: on this view, it would be possible to abstract oneself from the world in which one lives and studies and to use value-free discourse to produce a non-normative analysis. As Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth assert, "[s]uch arguments [about American moderation and international benevolence that stress the constraints on American power] are unpersuasive, however, because they fail to acknowledge the true nature of the current international system" (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002: 31). Thus it would seem that Brooks and Wohlforth have the ability to "know" essential "truths", as they "know" the "true" nature of the international system. From this vantage point it would even be possible "to set aside

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5. In this part of the essay, I rely on one neorealist article and one neoclassical realist article for illustrative purposes. Both were written after September 11, 2001, and both seek to neutrally "explain" American hegemony. The texts I have chosen are Barry Posen's "Command of the Commons," published in the Summer 2003 issue of *International Security*, and William Wohlforth's and Stephen Brooks's "American Primacy in Perspective", published in the Summer 2002 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. I am employing these two specific articles strictly as examples of two dominant schools of thought falling under the auspices of (American) "Realist" discourses of International Relations. I use these texts to account for the political role of analysts in (re)constituting a particular reality and a particular U.S. national identity, one defined by national security. I want to stress that my emphasis here is not on the two texts *per se* but on the realist discourse of International Relations. I want to illustrate how political practices that claim to be "scientific" and "neutral" in fact serve – sometimes unwittingly – United States' hegemony.
6. Needless to say, this does not mean that all state actions are violent. As V. Spike Peterson asserts regarding state practices with respect to women: "When the state does intervene, it typically does so from within a patriarchal ideology that at best 'protects' women while simultaneously reproducing masculinist givens that ensure women's 'need for protection' (Peterson, 1992: 45-46).

one's own subjective biases and values and to confront the world on its own terms, with the hope of gaining mastery of that world through a clear understanding that transcends the limits of such personal determinants as one's own values, class, gender, race, or emotions" (Klein, 1994: 16). However, it is impossible to speak or write from a neutral or transcendental ground: "there are only interpretations – some stronger and some weaker, to be sure – based on argument and evidence, which seems from the standpoint of the interpreter and his or her interlocutor to be 'right' or 'accurate' or 'useful' at the moment of interpretation" (Medhurst, 2000: 10). It is in such realist discourse that Strategic Studies become a technocratic approach determining the foundations of security policies that are disguised as an academic approach above all critical reflection (Klein, 1994: 27-28).

Committed to an explanatory logic, realist analysts are less interested in the constitutive processes of states and state systems than in their functional existence, which they take as given. They are more attentive to regulation, through the military uses of force and strategic practices that establish the internal and external boundaries of the states system. Their main argument is that matters of security are the immutable driving forces of global politics. Indeed, most realists see some strategic lessons as being eternal, such as balance of power politics and the quest for national security. For Brooks and Wohlforth, balance of power politics (which was synonymous with Cold War politics in realist discourses) is the norm: "The result — balancing that is rhetorically grand but substantively weak — is politics as usual in a unipolar world" (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002: 29).

National security discourses constitute the "observed realities" that are the grist of neorealist and neoclassical realist theories. These theories rely upon U.S. material power (the perception of U.S. relative material power for neoclassical realists), balance of power, and the global distribution of power to explain and legitimate American national security conduct. Their argument is circular since they depict a reality that is constituted by their own discourse, in addition to legitimizing American strategic behavior. Realists often disagree about the use of force – on military restraint versus military intervention, for example – but the differences pertain to strategies of power, that is, means as opposed to ends. Realist discourses will not challenge the United States' position as a prominent military power. As Barry Posen maintains, "[o]ne pillar of U.S. hegemony is the vast military power of the United States. […] Observers of the actual capabilities that this effort produces can focus on a favorite aspect of U.S. superiority to make the point that the United States sits comfortably atop the military food chain, and is likely to remain there" (Posen, 2003: 7).

Realist analysts "observe" that the U.S. is *the* world hegemonic power and that no other state can balance that power. In their analyses, they seek to explain how the United States was able to build and lead coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq with no other power capable of offering military resistance. Barry Posen "neutrally" explains this by emphasizing the United States' permanent preparation for war:

> I argue that the United States enjoys command of the commons—command of the sea, space, and air. I discuss how command of the commons supports a hegemonic grand strategy. […] Command means that the United States gets vastly more military use out of the sea, space, and air than do others; that it can credibly threaten to deny their use to others; and that others would lose a military contest for the commons if they attempted to deny them to the United States. Command of the commons is the key military enabler of the U.S. global power position. It allows the United States to exploit more fully other sources of power, including its own economic and military might as well as the economic and military might of its allies. Command of the commons has permitted the United States to wage war on short notice even where it has had little permanent military presence. This was true of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the 1993 intervention in Somalia, and the 2001 action in Afghanistan (Posen, 2003: 7-9).

Moreover, in realist theoretical discourses, transnational non-state actors such as terrorist networks are not yet taken into account. According to Brooks and Wohlforth, they need not be: "Today there is one pole in a system in which the population has trebled to nearly 200" (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002: 29). In their system, only states are relevant. And what of the Al-Qaida terrorist network? At best, realist discourses accommodate an interstate framework, a "reality" depicted in their writings as an oversimplification of the complex world in which we now live (Kratochwil, 2000).[7]

In their theoretical constructs, these analysts do not address national or state identity in any substantive way. Moreover, they do not pay attention to the security culture in which they as individuals are embedded[8]. They rarely if ever acknowledge their subjectivity as analysts, and they proceed as if they were able to separate themselves from their cultural environment. From a poststructuralist perspective, however, it is impossible to recognize all the ways in which we have been shaped by the culture and environment in which we were raised. We can only think or experience the world through a cultural

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7. A contrasting view is that of prominent neorealist Kenneth Waltz. In his view of the international system, the logic of self-help is the rule that governs all entities and causes them to behave alike. It is due to anarchy that the system comprises (functionally) similar units (albeit differing in their capabilities). See Kenneth Waltz, 1979, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, p. 106 and 106. For him, economic interdependence and global democratization have not changed the anarchic character of the international system. Thus, as a discourse, neorealism remains as valid today as it was in 1979. International politics as we know it is still, for Waltz, international politics, not "global politics" or "world politics". Kenneth Waltz, 2002, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, edited by G. John Ikenberry, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 30.

8. Some neoclassical realists, such as Colin Gray, will consider strategic culture as a context, but he seems to be the exception that proves the rule. Colin S. Gray, 1999, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 49-69. Others, including many of the mainstream constructivists we find in the seminal work edited by Peter Katzenstein, *Cultures of National Security*, consider culture as a given causal factor, not as a constitutive framework of analysis, nor as a relational site of identity politics. Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), 1996, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press.

prism: it is impossible to abstract oneself from one's interpretive cultural context and experience and describe "the world as it is". There is always an interpretive dimension to knowledge, an inevitable mediation between the "real world" and its representation. This is why American realist analysts have trouble shedding the Cold War mentality in which they were immersed. Yet some scholars, like Brooks and Wohlforth, consciously want to perpetuate it: "Today the costs and dangers of the Cold War have faded into history, but they need to be kept in mind in order to assess unipolarity accurately" (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002: 30).

The Language of Realism(s)

> *What is at issue is how to deal appropriately with always already being part of a reality that cannot be described or grasped other than through interpretations and in relation to our practices, which are at the same time constituting it* (Maja Zehfuss, 2002: 255).

Neorealist and neoclassical realism offer themselves up as a narrative of the world institutional order. Critical approaches must therefore seek to countermemorialize "those whose lives and voices have been variously silenced in the process of strategic practices" (Klein, 1994: 28). The problem, as revealed in the debate between gatekeepers of the subfield of Strategic Studies (Walt, 1991), is that those analyses that contravene the dominant discourse are deemed insignificant by virtue of their differing ontological and epistemological foundations.

Approaches that deconstruct theoretical practices in order to disclose what is hidden in the use of concepts such as "national security" have something valuable to say. Their more reflexive and critically-inclined view illustrates how terms used in realist discourses, such as state, anarchy, world order, revolution in military affairs, and security dilemmas, are produced by a specific historical, geographical and socio-political context as well as historical forces and social relations of power (Klein, 1994: 22). Since realist analysts do not question their ontology and yet purport to provide a neutral and objective analysis of a given world order based on military power and interactions between the most important political units, namely states, realist discourses constitute a political act in defense of the state. Indeed, "[…] it is important to recognize that to employ a textualizing approach to social policy involving conflict and war is not to attempt to reduce social phenomena to various concrete manifestations of language. Rather, it is an attempt to analyze the interpretations governing policy thinking. And it is important to recognize that policy thinking is not unsituated" (Shapiro, 1989a: 71). Policy thinking is practical thinking since it imposes an analytic order on the "real world", a world that only exists in the analysts' own narratives. In this light, Barry Posen's political role in legitimizing American hegemonic power and national security conduct seems obvious:

> U.S. command of the commons provides an impressive foundation for selective engagement. It is not adequate for a policy of primacy. […] Command of the commons gives the United States a tremendous capability to harm others. Marrying that capability to a conservative policy of selective engagement helps make U.S. military power appear less threatening and more tolerable. Command of the commons creates additional collective goods for U.S. allies. These collective goods help connect U.S. military power to seemingly prosaic welfare concerns. U.S. military power underwrites world trade, travel, global telecommunications, and commercial remote sensing, which all depend on peace and order in the commons" (Posen, 2003: 44 and 46).

Adopting a more critical stance, David Campbell points out that "[d]anger is not an objective condition. It (sic) is not a thing which exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat. […] Nothing is a risk in itself; [...] it all depends on how one analyses the danger, considers the event" (Campbell, 1998: 1-2). In the same vein, national security discourse does not evaluate objective threats; rather, it is itself a product of historical processes and structures in the state and society that produces it. Whoever has the power to define security is then the one who has the authority to write legitimate security discourses and conduct the policies that legitimize them. The realist analysts and state leaders who invoke national security and act in its name are the same individuals who hold the power to securitize threats by inserting them in a discourse that frames national identity and freezes it.[9]

Like many concepts, realism is essentially contested. In a critical reinterpretation of realism, James Der Derian offers a genealogy of realism that deconstructs the uniform realism represented in IR: he reveals many other versions of realism that are never mentioned in International Relations texts (Der Derian, 1995: 367). I am aware that there are many realist discourses in International Relations, but they all share a set of assumptions, such as "the state is a rational unitary actor", "the state is the main actor in international relations", "states pursue power defined as a national interest", and so on. I want to show that realism is one way of representing reality, not *the* reflection of reality. While my aim here is not to rehearse Der Derian's genealogy of realism, I do want to spell out the problems with a positivist theory of realism and a correspondence philosophy of language. Such a philosophy accepts nominalism, wherein language as neutral description corresponds to reality. This is precisely the problem of epistemic realism and of the realism characteristic of American realist theoretical discourses. And since for poststructuralists language constitutes reality, a reinterpretation of realism as

9. The very act of stressing the need for security for an issue or a matter – the securitizing move that may lead to securitization – helps establish and reproduce the very conditions that make security necessary. Security speech acts, such as securitization, are thus discursive actions and practices of security that serve to reproduce the historical structures and subjects of the state (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998: 26).

constructed in these discourses is called for.[10] These scholars cannot refer to the "essentially contested nature of realism" and then use "realism as the best language to reflect a self-same phenomenon" (Der Derian, 1995: 374). Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that the many neorealist and neoclassical realist discourses in International Relations are not useful. Rather, I want to argue that these technicist and scientist forms of realism serve political purposes, used as they are in many think tanks and foreign policy bureaucracies to inform American political leaders. This is the relevance of deconstructing the uniform realism (as used in International Relations): it brings to light its locatedness in a hermeneutic circle in which it is unwittingly trapped (Der Derian, 1995: 371). And as Friedrich Kratochwil argues, "[…] the rejection of a correspondence theory of truth does not condemn us, as it is often maintained, to mere 'relativism' and/or to endless "deconstruction" in which anything goes but it leaves us with criteria that allows us to distinguish and evaluate competing theoretical creations" (Kratochwil, 2000 : 52).

Given that political language is not a neutral medium that gives expression to ideas formed independently of structures of signification that sustain political action and thought, American realist discourses belonging to the neorealist or neoclassical realist traditions cannot be taken as mere descriptions of reality. We are trapped in the production of discourses in which national leaders and security speech acts emanating from realist discourses develop and reinforce a notion of national identity as synonymous with national security. U.S. national security conduct should thus be understood through the prism of the theoretical discourses of American political leaders and realist scholars that co-constitute it. Realist discourses depict American political leaders acting in defense of national security, and political leaders act in the name of national security. In the end, what distinguishes realist discourses is that they depict the United States as having behaved like a national security state since World War II, while legitimating the idea that the United States should continue to do so. Political scientists and historians "are engaged in making (*poesis*), not merely recording or reporting" (Medhurst, 2000: 17). Precisely in this sense, rhetoric is not the description of national security conduct; it constitutes it.

10. As David Campbell states, "Contrary to the claims of epistemic realism, I argue that as understanding involves rendering the unfamiliar in the terms of the familiar, there is always an ineluctable debt to interpretation such that there is nothing outside of discourse. […] And contrary to the logic of explanation, I embrace a logic of interpretation that acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the 'real causes,' and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another" (Campbell, 1998: 4).

Writing the National Security State

> *[F]rom the giddy days of the first and through the most morbid moments of the Second Cold War, the popular culture, journalism, and academic study of international intrigue has been an important intertext of power and play in world politics. This intertext represents a field of ideological contestation where national security strategies, with their endgames of impossibly real wars of mass annihilation can be played and replayed for mass consumption as a simulation of war in which states compete, interests clash, and spy counters spy, all in significant fun* (Der Derian, 1992: 41).

It is difficult to trace the exact origins of the concept of "national security". It seems however that its currency in policymaking circles corresponds to the American experience of the Second World War and of the early years of what came to be known as the "Cold War". In this light, it is fair to say that the meaning of the American national security state is bound up with the Cold War context.

If one is engaged in deciphering the meaning of the Cold War prism for American leaders, what matters is not uncovering the "reality" of the Cold War as such, but how, it conferred meaning and led people to act upon it as "reality". The Cold War can thus be seen as a rhetorical construction, in which its rhetorical dimensions gave meaning to its material manifestations, such as the national security state apparatus. This is not to say that the Cold War never existed per se, nor does it "make [it] any less real or less significant for being rhetorical" (Medhurst, 2000: 6). As Lynn Boyd Hinds and Theodore Otto Windt, Jr. stress, "political rhetoric creates political reality, structures belief systems, and provides the fundamental bases for decisions" (Hinds and Windt, cited in Medhurst, 2000: 6). In this sense, the Cold War ceases to be a historical period which meaning can be written permanently and becomes instead a struggle that is not context-specific and not geared towards one specific enemy. It is "an orientation towards difference in which those acting on behalf of an assumed but never fixed identity are tempted by the lure of otherness to interpret all dangers as fundamental threats which require the mobilization of a population" (Campbell, 2000: 227).

Indeed, if the meaning of the Cold War is not context-specific, the concept of national security cannot be disconnected from what is known as the Cold War, since its very meaning(s) emerged within it (Rosenberg, 1993 : 277).[11] If the American

11. If the concept of national security helped construct the Cold War rhetorically and discursively, it must be used critically, contextually, and with extreme care, as its general use in academia, policymaking circles, and the media has made it a "semiotic black hole, sucking in all meanings" (Rosenberg, 1993 : 283-84).

national security state is a given for realist analysts,[12] it is important to ask whether we can conceive the United States during the Cold War as anything other than a national security state.[13] To be clear, I am not suggesting that there is any such essentialized entity as a "national security state".[14] When I refer to the American national security state, I mean the representation of the American state in the early years of the Cold War, the spirit of which is embodied in the *National Security Act* of 1947 (Der Derian, 1992: 76). The term "national security state" designates both an institutionalization of a new governmental architecture designed to prepare the United States politically and militarily to face any foreign threat *and* the ideology – the discourse – that gave rise to as well as symbolized it. In other words, to understand the idea of a national security state, one needs to grasp the discursive power of national security in shaping the reality of the Cold War in both language and institutions (Rosenberg, 1993 : 281). A national security state feeds on threats as it channels all its efforts into meeting current and future military or security threats. The creation of the CIA, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Security Council at the onset of the Cold War gave impetus to a state mentality geared to permanent preparedness for war. The construction of threats is thus essential to its well-being, making intelligence agencies privileged tools in accomplishing this task.

As American historian of U.S. foreign relations Michael Hogan observes in his study on the rise of the national security state during the Truman administration, "the national security ideology framed the Cold War discourse in a system of symbolic representation that defined America's national identity by reference to the un-American 'other,' usually the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, or some other totalitarian power" (Hogan, 1998: 17).

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12. As Amy Zegart observes, "Though political scientists have focused on many empirical aspects of the Cold War, the American national security apparatus has not been one of them" (Zegart, 1999: 3).
13. Putting forth the Cold War prism, David Campbell asserts that "[a]lthough the global inscription of danger in United States foreign policy was something that long preceded the Cold War (e.g. the strategies of 'manifest destiny' in the nineteenth century), it was in the post-WWII period, when numerous overseas obligations were constructed, that the identity of the United States became even more deeply implicated in the military capacity and external reach of the state. In this sense, the Cold War needs to be understood as a disciplinary strategy that was global in scope but national in design. As a result, the Cold War can be understood as an ensemble of political practices and interpretative dispositions associated with the (re)production of political identity" (Campbell, 2000: 227).
14. Following a growing historical sociology literature in security studies, we may speak of a "security state" when we refer to the Western model of the security state that developed through and after the period of total war in the 20th century (Mabee, 2003: 143). The very notion of state security as it is used in this literature is concerned with the "relationship between state and society where the state provides insurance against the impact of 'external' contingencies" (Mabee, 2003: 143). However, as Bryan Mabee rightfully notes, this research area "overlaps with the idea of the 'national security state', as conceptualized in the literature on the history of US security policy, with particular reference to the early Cold War years, and the founding of the National Security Act in 1947" (Mabee, 2003: 148, note 15). In addition, a feminist literature on national security studies has emphasized how states, and not only the American state, act as security states. For example, for Iris Marion Young, security states designate Hobbes' Leviathan; they are authoritarian governments acting as protector states asking total obedience from their society. The state grounds its patriarchal role of the masculine protector "in fear of threat and in the apparent desire for protection such fear generates" (Young, 2003: 2). In light of these different literatures, when using the concept of national security state, it is necessary to specify the context and the meaning with which it is associated.

Such a binary system made it difficult for any domestic dissent from U.S. policy to emerge – it would have "amounted to an act of disloyalty" (Hogan, 1998: 18).[15] While Hogan distinguishes advocates from critics of the American national security state, his view takes for granted that there is a given and fixed American political culture that differs from the "new" national security ideology. It posits an "American way", produced by its cultural, political, and historical experience. Although he stresses that differences between the two sides of the discourse are superficial, pertaining solely to the means, rather than the ends of the national security state, Hogan sees the national security state as a finished and legitimate state: an American state suited to the Cold War context of permanent war, while stopping short of a garrison state:

> Although government would grow larger, taxes would go up, and budget deficits would become a matter of routine, none of these and other transformations would add up to the crushing regime symbolized in the metaphor of the garrison state. The outcome instead would be an American national security state that was shaped as much by the country's democratic political culture as it was by the perceived military imperatives of the Cold War (Hogan, 1998: 22).

I disagree with this essentialist view of the state identity of the United States. The United States does not need to be a national security state. If it was and is still constructed as such by many realist discourses, it is because these discourses serve some political purpose. Moreover, in keeping with my poststructuralist inclinations, I maintain that identity need not be, and indeed never is, fixed. In a scheme in which "to say is to do", that is, from a perspective that accepts the performativity of language, culture becomes a relational site where identity politics happens rather than being a substantive phenomenon. In this sense, culture is not simply a social context framing foreign policy decision-making. Culture is "a signifying part of the conditions of possibility for social being, […] the way in which culturalist arguments themselves secure the identity of subjects in whose name they speak" (Campbell, 1998: 221).

The Cold War national security culture represented in realist discourses was constitutive of the American national security state. There was certainly a conflation of theory and policy in the Cold War military-intellectual complex, which "were observers of, and active participants in, defining the meaning of the Cold War. They contributed to portray the enemy that both reflected and fueled predominant ideological strains within the American body politic. As scholarly partners in the national security state, they were instrumental in defining and disseminating a Cold War culture" (Rubin, 2001: 15). This national security culture was "a complex space where various representations and

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15. This recalls McCarthyism, which illustrated the domestic downside of the national security state, as state officials and suspicious citizens took it upon themselves to identify and denounce enemies of the state. Some citizens were labelled Soviet agents or puppets and, in keeping with the dichotomous logic of the national security discourse, were characterized as Un-American. In the wake of 9/11, an analogous rhetoric has been used with regard to terrorism and Arab and Muslim Americans. See the American Civil Liberties webpage on discrimination against these groups: <http://www.aclu.org/SafeandFree/SafeandFree.cfm?ID=12955&c=207>.

representatives of the national security state compete to draw the boundaries and dominate the murkier margins of international relations" (Der Derian, 1992: 41). The same Cold War security culture has been maintained by political practice (on the part of realist analysts and political leaders) through realist discourses in the post-9/11 era and once again reproduces the idea of a national security state.

This (implicit) state identification is neither accidental nor inconsequential. From a poststructuralist vantage point, the identification process of the state and the nation is always a negative process for it is achieved by exclusion, violence, and marginalization. Thus, a deconstruction of practices that constitute and consolidate state identity is necessary: the writing of the state must be revealed through the analysis of the discourses that constitute it. The state and the discourses that (re)constitute it thus frame its very identity and impose a fictitious "national unity" on society; it is from this fictive and arbitrary creation of the modernist dichotomous discourses of inside/outside that the discourses (re)constructing the state emerge. It is in the creation of a Self and an Other in which the state uses it monopolistic power of legitimate violence – a power socially constructed, following Max Weber's work on the ethic of responsibility – to construct a threatening Other differentiated from the "unified" Self, the national society (the nation).[16] It is through this very practice of normative statecraft,[17] which produces threatening Others, that the international sphere comes into being. David Campbell adds that it is by constantly articulating danger through foreign policy that the state's very conditions of existence are generated[18].

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16. The use of the borrowed concept of an ethic of responsibility, which refers to the rational choice of means (ethical or other) to attain desired ends, is problematic. For Weber, the ethic of responsibility corresponds to rationalization and disenchantment associated with his sociology of modern culture, which involves the decline of the ideal of public life. While this ethic encompassed a willingness to use violence to achieve desired ends (which is at the heart of realist theory), it also sought to assure the central role of ethical and cultural values in the decision-making process. The classical realist Hans Morgenthau neglected this dimension of Weber's thought, retaining only the conception of policies aimed at maintaining or buttressing a state's position of power (relative power). As Tarak Barkawi notes, "In the language of realist defence intellectuals, or 'strategists', policies were to be assessed in terms of the degree to which they maintained or furthered national security." National security discourse thus became the first point of reference for government in efforts to explain foreign policy decisions on a "scientific" basis. Tarak Barkawi, "Strategy as a Vocation: Weber, Morgenthau and Modern Strategic Studies," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1998), p. 159-60.
17. This entails interpreting what Cynthia Weber has described as "normative statecraft" (Weber in Hobson, 2000: 159). It consists in the writing process of a national or an internal political community that is presented under the sign of unification and harmony. This "imagined community", to use Benedict Anderson's expression, does not exist in either a complete or a unified state. It is *necessarily* an abstraction, a political practice of exclusion, since it is impossible for all individuals composing this "nation" to know one another and share a collective will to live together.
18. According to David Campbell, "the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state's identity or existence; it is its condition of possibility" (Campbell, 1998: 12). Such a view seems to imply that the United States' identity could not but reproduce a Cold War-like behaviour and scheme. Campbell does not endorse this attitude, as one of his more recent statement indicates, "[I]n the temporal rupture of the event, we need to resist a return to the strategies of a different time. Options dredged up from the past to meet new challenges will produce perverse outcomes unrelated to the concern at hand" (Campbell, 2001). However, his analysis in *Writing Security* seems to support such a criticism

Rewriting the National Security State

> *If realists are now easily caricatured, they have only themselves to blame. They had become caricatures by their own self-description. Realism, and particularly its offshoot, strategic studies, helped make and was made by the Cold War* (Booth, 1997: 92).

Much of the Cold War state apparatus and military infrastructure remained in place to meet the challenges and threats of the post-Cold War era. If the attack on Pearl Harbor was the driving force of the postwar national security state apparatus (Stuart, 2003: 303), the 9/11 events have been used as a motive for resurrecting the national security discourse as a justification against a new 'infamy', global terrorism.[19]

Although in this study I am calling into question the political practices that legitimized the very idea of a national security state during the Cold War era, I find even more problematic the reproduction of a similar logic in the post-9/11 era – a rather different historical and socio-political context. As Simon Dalby highlights,

> Coupling fears of Soviet ambitions, of a repeat of Pearl Harbor, and of nuclear war, these institutions formed the heart of a semipermanent military mobilization to support the policies of containment militarism. If this context is no longer applicable, the case that the national security state is not an appropriate mode for social organization in the future is in many ways compelling. If security is premised on violence, as security-dilemma and national-security literatures suggest (albeit often reluctantly), perhaps the necessity of rethinking global politics requires abandoning the term and the conceptual strictures that go with it (Dalby, 1997: 21).

A recent article by David Jablonsky in the U.S. Army War College's journal *Parameters* illustrates such an un-problematized view of a Cold War-like attitude of casting for new enemies and threats, such as global terrorism, that can justify a state of permanent war (Luke, 2002: 10):

> In those early years of the Cold War, American leaders fashioned a grand strategic vision of the US role in the world, which while innovative in terms of changing concept of national security, did not outrun the experiences of the American people as the Soviet threat unfolded. US leaders face a similar challenge today as they seek to

19. As Neal Milner, Sankaran Krishna, and Kathy E. Ferguson write, "the Pearl Harbor analogies that were so popular after the initial September 11 attack pull our mental maps toward the reassuring promise of a clear enemy, a workable military solution, and, best of all, a total victory. The Bush administration's unwillingness to negotiate, to accept anything less than total victory, suggests that the World War II model of universal triumph vs. complete surrender still operates in U.S. policy" (Milner, Krishna, and Ferguson, 2001).

> educate the public that the domestic terrorist threat to physical security should not be allowed to skew the American grand strategy of global engagement designed to further that core interest as well as those of economic prosperity and value promotion. [...] The new threat assures the continued existence if not growth of the national security state and will certainly cause increased centralization and intrusiveness of the US government. Nevertheless, the Cold War demonstrates that all this need not cause the rise of a garrison state or the diminishment of civil liberties (Jablonsky, 2003: 18).

What puzzles me is that this viewpoint reflects an unquestioned normative statecraft practice that might be seen not only as possible but "wise", since "we" all know that, in the end, the Cold War led to an "American triumph"... From a critical standpoint, national security discourse is constitutive of "social reality": it is not neutral and it often serves to outfit state actions as objective responses to socio-political problems. U.S. state leaders now use this same discourse – the national security discourse – to wage a global war on terrorism. As Keith Shimko aptly points out,

> Times of war are no normal times. In addition to being periods of focused effort and all-out expenditure, 'wartime' might also be viewed as a period when some of the normal luxuries of life (e.g., material comfort or political liberties) are 'sacrificed' to the war effort. As a result, framing an issue as a war could lead to calls for restrictions on behavior and rights that are typically protected but come to be viewed as unaffordable luxuries during wartime (Shimko, 1995:79).

The U.S. response to 9/11 is encapsulated as an armed struggle against a phantom enemy who replicates the tactics used in guerrilla wars in its capacity to strike any time, anywhere. The enemy is thus constructed as being both everywhere and nowhere, which allows state leaders to enact a security discourse of an Other against whom the U.S. must be protected as a legitimate and necessary one at the expense of some civil rights (e.g., colour tags for travellers and fingerprint biometric sensors in passports). A "state of war" is indeed incorporated into American political life : "For a society committed to armed struggle, there is little distinction between military and civilian life. 'The cause' becomes everything, justifying extraordinary measures, demanding larger-than-life sacrifices. Ordinary life is recruited into the ruthless binary that frames the struggle […]. There is no room for a loyal opposition; to question is to betray" (Milner, Krishna, and Ferguson, 2001).

In the context of a global war on terrorism, every citizen may become a "terrorist". As Ronnie Lipschutz argues in *After Authority: War, Peace, and Global Politics in the 21st Century*, "[a]ll individuals, whether citizen or permanent resident, whether legal or illegal, become potential threats to state security" (Lipschtuz, 2000: 51). Surprisingly, not many American citizens contested or protested such undemocratic limitations on civil liberties. Why is that so? One possible answer is that a great many are convinced that such measures will not be applied to them and that their own rights and freedoms will not be threatened. They seem to believe that since they are not doing anything wrong, they are protected. Accordingly, they think that those whose privacy and rights are being violated have done

something wrong and that they deserve it. As Iris Marion Young explains, this is where they err, for "[t]he move from a relatively free society to one over which the state exercises authoritarian domination often occurs by means of just this logic: citizens do not realize how easily they may find themselves under suspicion by authorities over whose decisions there is no public scrutiny" (Young, 2003: 12). When societal and individual security is considered, the national security discourse produces more insecurity than security.[20] We must therefore question state practices that threaten individuals, rendering the state a source of insecurity for its citizens : "[I]nsecurity, rather than being external to the object to which it presents a threat is both implicated in and an effect of the very process of establishing and re-establishing the object's identity" (Jutta Weldes, cited in Willey, 2002 : 29). National insecurity is thus revealed as the clear antonym of national security (Rosenberg, 1993 : 281 ; Der Derian, 1992: 75). Linguistically, "national insecurity" corresponds to the female and weak side of Cold War discourses (Tickner, 2001: 52 ; Peterson, 1992: 32). In effect, as Emily Rosenberg correctly observes, the power of national security linguistically comes from this binary opposition, where national security is empowered as representing a "strong emotive and symbolic power" inscribed in the male national security statist discourse (Rosenberg, 1993: 281). The national security state thus functions as a protection racket. Consequently, whether looking inward or outward, it must be rejected for its very discourse necessarily entails the unequal logic of protector-protected (Young, 2003: 14-15, 21).

To understand American hegemonic power then is to understand how the theoretical foundations of U.S. hegemony influence the way U.S. leaders think about international politics generally and U.S. foreign policy in particular. As Marysia Zalewski points out, "[...] events in the world, issues in international politics, are not ontologically prior to our theories about them. This does not mean that people read about, say realism, and act accordingly, but that our (and by 'our' I mean theoriser/global actors) dominant ways of thinking and acting in the world will be (re)produced as 'reality'" (Zalewski, 1996: 350-51). The 9/11 attacks and the presence of a diffuse and transnational terrorist threat has convinced American state leaders that threats may come from within as well as from abroad. In a Cold War-like national security mindset, separating domestic from international politics was "business as usual": it required paying attention to foreign and external threats. With a homeland security focus, the "boundaries" of the national security state are exploding inwardly. The "enemy" is not a foreign Other anymore; he may be American or he may strike on American soil. As Donald Pease puts it, "Overall, 9/11 brought to the light of day the Other to the

20. Stanford University's Philosophy Professor Richard Rorty argues that the Bush administration's war on terrorism may potentially be more dangerous than terrorism. He fears that the bearers of national security – state officials – might "think it necessary to end the rule of law, as well as the responsiveness of governments to public opinion" if it may prevent further terrorist attacks on their soil. Rorty thus believes that national security elites are most likely "to destroy democracy in order to save it" if new attacks occur. This is why "[e]ver since the White House rammed the USA Patriot Act through Congress, [he has] spent more time worrying about what [his] government will do than about what the terrorists will do" (Rorty, 2004: 10-11).

normative representation of the United States. It positioned *unheimlich* dislocatees within the Homeland in place of the citizens who exercised rights and liberties on the basis of these normalizations. When the signifier of the Homeland substituted for the Virgin Land, the national security state was supplanted by the global state of emergency" (Pease, 2003: 17). The Other has become an undefined terrorist, with no specific territorial base. Just as Soviet communists were represented as barbaric, amoral, and inhuman, so is today's terrorist.

Conclusion

> *[B]ecause invoking security is a political act and the discourses that construct dangers and endangered subjects are far from natural or neutral reflections of an independent reality, the larger social and political contexts within such discourses are invoked should also be given analytical attention* (Dalby, 2002: xxi).

In this piece, I have sought to explain how (American) realist theoretical discourses are mainly representative of the American experience of the Cold War. I have treated these historically-based discourses as political practices that frame and reproduce a national security state identity for the United States in the post-9/11 era. It is not the "reality" of the United States as a state that is cast in question by poststructuralists, but rather the way it is written as an unchanging and essentialized entity, as a national security state identity. Indeed, a state is always in the process of (re)construction; its identity is never fixed, nor is its legitimacy uncontested. As Campbell puts it, "with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are (and have to be) always in a process of becoming" (Campbell, 1998: 12). The poststructuralist approach adopted here made it possible to reveal the normative issues arising in such discourses. In sum, to understand how American or American-based realist discourses facilitated the social construction of a Cold War with the USSR after World War II, one must understand the security culture that allowed for the development of political practices that ushered in the institutionalization of a national security state.

On a more metatheoretical level, in International Relations, the poststructuralist/postmodernist turn has made mainstream positivist scholars fear a lapse into complete relativism. As Christopher Butler points out, "Postmodernist relativism needn't meant that *anything goes*. […] What it does mean is that we should be more sceptically aware, more relativist about, more attentive to, the theoretical assumptions which support the narratives produced by all [scholars] (in the original quote, Butler wrote "historians" for he was addressing historians), whether they see themselves as empiricists or deconstructors or as postmodernist 'new historicists'" (Butler, 2002: 35).

It is increasingly clear that realists of all guises in International Relations are more and more reluctant to take an inflexible position with respect to the ontological and

epistemological assumptions underpinning the discipline. However, in viewing theory as practice, we recognize that our choices have a normative and political value which allows us to distinguish the important from the incidental. As a result, what people see as the "real world" is implicitly bound up with the epistemological, methodological and ontological stance they take in theoretical discourse. If the national security discourse that made the Cold War possible – in American realist discourses at least – is (re)applied to our own era, then a similar pattern of legitimizing and constituting a national security state will be reproduced.

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