Chapter Nine

Traditional Security Issues

Fulvio Attinà

Traditional security issues are about the threats against the essential values of the state, territorial integrity, and political sovereignty. Means, which are also important in defining traditional security, consist of weapons, armaments systems, and the military, but diplomatic means like pacts and alliances aimed at building special relations between states for security purposes are also means of traditional security. All such means, as well as the essence of traditional security, are constantly changing under the impact of technological innovation, new ideas, and political evolution. Today, change in three areas shapes the security agenda of states like China and international organizations like the European Union (EU). First, the security of the states is within the competence of the primary institution of the world, the United Nations (UN), which promotes multilateralism as a form of collective security protection. In the past 30 years, recourse to multilateral peace operations has been increasing, and, major states like China, and the most important international organizations, like the EU, have been directly involved in the advancement of the principles, rules, and mechanisms of multilateralism. Second, a new form of cooperation is gaining momentum at the regional level, complementing and gradually overcoming the tried and tested form of military alliances. Regional security cooperation has been growing in Europe over the past three decades, and is presently growing in Asia. Third, weapons and armaments as a means of traditional security are incomparably more advanced today than in past times. In particular, nuclear armaments are the most destructive and important weapons providing an effective umbrella to the security of the states. Nuclear technology needs important capital investment in research and production. Consequently, a few countries, including China, are in the group of the potential military superpowers of the future world. Allocating huge financial resources to weapons of mass destruction, which have unknown effects,
is a controversial and hard choice to make for actors like the EU, which strive to invest financial resources in security means of a different kind.

The present chapter examines the China and EU position toward such changes in traditional security issues. First, it shows the transformation of security into one of the public goods of the world under the UN umbrella, and the rise of multilateralism in contemporary security. It analyzes the Chinese and European approach toward such a transformation. Then it looks at regional security cooperation in general, and in Europe and Asia in particular to assess how the EU and China engage in such security building in current times. Last, the problem of nuclear armaments is examined as a clue to understanding the strategy of the two actors toward the expected new phase of world politics.

**The Rise of Multilateral Security**

In past international systems, wars of annexation of one state by another and for the partition of one state’s territory by others were considered legitimate for ensuring a balance of power as the superior interest of the system. Today, such a condition is no longer accepted, and the security of all states is affirmed, with no exceptions. Should any other form of defense against aggression fail, the security of the aggressed state is protected as a public good by the UN’s acting with military measures as means of last resort under a resolution of the Security Council (SC). The right of all states to survive against aggression was enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 10. Lacking an appropriate means of response, however, the Covenant norm proved to be ineffective. In 1945, the UN Charter, Article 2.4, reinstated the prohibition on the use and threat of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of all states, whether members of the UN or not, and Chapter VII ruled on the means. However, the defense of territorial integrity was achieved only through the UN’s practice of peace operations, initially known as peacekeeping missions. Thanks to this practice, today the probability of a country’s surviving a potentially fatal act of aggression is the highest it has been ever. Evidence of this is provided by the very small number of successful attempts at crushing sovereign states since the end of the World War II. The very small number of such cases and the fact that the Western coalition made the largest political and military contribution to the UN operations, support the theory that in the contemporary world the security of states as political-territorial entities is, like a public good, guaranteed in the last instance by the institutions of the world system through the practice of multilateral intervention. Based on this premise, attention is drawn to multilateralism in security protection, and the role China and the EU play in it.