

Unified Theory of the Security Dilemma: Geography, MAD and Democracy

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Abstract : The security dilemma is one of the key concepts in International Relations (IR), and the numerous engagements with it have created a great deal of confusion regarding its essence. That is why this article seeks to dissect the security dilemma and rebuild it from its foundational core. In doing so, the present study highlights that the security dilemma requires interaction among actors that seek to protect themselves from other's capacity for harm under the condition of uncertainty to operate. In this constellation, actors are confronted with the dilemma of motives, power, and action, which they seek to resolve by acquiring information regarding their opponents. The relationship between the parties is shaped by the harm-uncertainty index (HUI) consisting of geographical distance, MAD, and joint democracy that determines the intensity of the security dilemma. These elements define the unified theory of the security dilemma (UTSD) developed here. UTSD challenges the prevailing view that the security dilemma is a unidimensional paradoxical concept, regulated by the offense-defense balance and differentiation that only occurs in anarchic settings with tragic outcomes and is equivalent to the spiral model.

Keywords : security dilemma, revisionism, status quo, anarchy, uncertainty, tragedy, spiral, deterrence

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