

# Epistemic Communities in Security Studies and the interpretation of World Order

Gabriel A. Orozco

**Abstract**—The purpose of this article is to make an approach to the Security Studies, exposing their theories and concepts to understand the role that have had in the interpretation of the changes and continuities of the world order and their impact on policies or decision-making facing the problems of the 21st century. The aim is to build a bridge between the security studies as a subfield and the meaning that has been given to the world order. The idea of epistemic communities serves as a methodological proposal about the different programs of research in security studies, showing their influence in the realities of States, intergovernmental organizations and transnational forces, moving to implement, perpetuate and project a vision of the world order.

**Keywords**— *Security studies, epistemic communities, international relations*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, there was an exponential growth of security studies literature that focused on analyzing current circumstances and possibilities in this field, establishing new research focuses with the end of the Cold War (Buzan 1991, Haftendorn 1991, Walt 1991). Over twenty years have passed since this explosion of research, and an assessment of these studies is now warranted to summarize their results, examine their role in interpreting events that have transpired (the end of the Cold War and the start of the new millennium), and analyze policies and decisions that validate these concepts. Both the reconceptualization and implementation of new security policies have varied in recent years. From the beginning of the XXI century, the field has entered a phase of higher productivity and analytic tool and operative action generation in efforts to improve validity. Various theories have examined International Relations variables, and the ways in which states face threats and new risks have been re-examined. This paper describes the state of the security studies debate based on recent theoretical progress and the application of new policies. We finally present possible interpretation methods to be applied in studies focused on these issues

## II. GLOBAL ORDERS AND SECURITY AS HERMENEUTICS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### A. *The starting point*

We agree with Peñas when we assume that all essential components of normative discussions in International Relations begin with the nature of the international order (Peñas 2003,

19). Likewise, we state that while security is a controversial concept given its multiple definitions, references and policies (Baylis 2008, 229), it also serves as a guideline for the interpretation of international realities (Baylis 2008, 210-211). Thus, when conducting an assessment of security studies, based on different trends mentioned by various authors that transpired after the end of the Cold War, we can also state that research programs promoted by different epistemic communities are based on a certain vision of the international order and on a quest to legitimize its scientific practice by continuing its assumptions and propositions in providing a precise concept of order and in creating platforms, advice, guides or criticisms of decisions maker actions in the context of security. Therefore, it is necessary to more acutely consider concepts of the international order presented by these schools while using security as a hermeneutical guide. Hermeneutics can be considered a “general theory of ‘understanding’ (of thoughts and actions, and even of ‘interpretable’ ‘objects’ of a different nature), which I consider to be central to any hermeneutical context or construct (which is different from the creationist concept of explanation, description, and verification).” In this context, hermeneutics – like Hermes – allows for clarification by connecting realities and unconnected issues (Páez 2013, 10)

### B. *From 1914 to 2014: the illusion of order under global security government?*

One hundred years following the breakout of the First World War and the creation of the first academic communities that were specifically focused on investigating and diffusing all things international (García Picazo 2003, 38), multiple visions and interpretations of order have been created, and wide-ranging debates continue to focus on how theories and corresponding epistemic communities have framed postulates of reality. Various scholars have drawn parallels between the years preceding the first World War and the current situation, stating that at present, interdependence, economic development and the positions of great powers have led to notions of an additional global war as an improbable illusion (Krugman 2012). Once a certain level of development and rationalization in international policy has been reached, a new catastrophe is considered impossible. Intellectuals coin this phenomenon as the Grand Illusion. However, international events have shown that war was not only possible, but that it may return repeatedly and that it is an inherent problem of the international order.

This is undoubtedly what has given rise to the (neo) realist objective to uphold a vision of International Relations from a perspective of security in terms of power and deterrent capability, i.e., *national*, as the logic of order is considered unchanging regardless of internal dynamics within the system, which is to say that war does not depend on specific conditions, but that it is an element of the struggle for power that characterizes International Relations (Waltz 2007, 15). The problem of community order since the outbreak of the First World War does not refer to its eradication, but to the capability to manage such issues according to a set of frameworks and principles that allow for their rationalization. Without a doubt, from the perspective of early XX century idealists and contemporary cosmopolitan theorists (Held 1997, 322), it is desirable to establish a completely institutionalized order that would eliminate the possibility of any war. However, given the impossibility of reaching such a state, these scholars do contemplate the necessity of humanitarian interventions or just wars if and when required to uphold universal values such as human rights (Walzer 2004, 16).

In this context, the development of *collective security* has shifted from its original goal to provide mere reciprocal assistance in cases of armed attacks on one member of a system to a goal of protecting and promoting *human security* as the very core of the concept (The Secretary General's High-level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004). Therefore, we have seen an evolution in understandings of order by epistemic individuals, including idealists, cosmopolitans and high-ranking officials in international organizations. In turn, a new revitalization of the concept of collective security that focuses on responsibilities to protect, promote stability and ensure human safety has occurred, and this new conceptualization includes a wide range of dimensions focused on basic individual rights (Kaldor 2010, 280).

Based on this perspective of order, events over the last hundred years do not suggest the impossibility of achieving global government, but instead suggest a search for global governance, which does not necessarily correspond to the scheme of central state government, but to authority that takes the form of regulations that establish behavior patterns and principles which lead agents to adjust policies to correspond with a universal and cosmopolitan constitution (Querejazu 2011, 54). Several factors have contributed to this shift towards a focus on global governance, which has come of age and which goes beyond the original idea of global government in the Kantian sense, as Security Council actions through the peacemaking operations department that assist in situations of endangered human security are a significant development compared to original concepts of collective security (Zanotti 2011, 3-5). Likewise, the development of the Common Security and Defense Policy ((CSDP), previously European Policy of Security and Defense, (EPSD)), which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of the European Union to react to new threats beyond its borders, directly refers to the responsibility to protect. Even the Petersber missions for crisis management, which include a significant civil component, seek to deactivate conflict in efforts to stabilize and guarantee human security (National Defense Studies Center 2002). In fact, one author clearly states that that the European Union has

under the new model of human security focused on XXI central threats become an alternative that can be used to deactivate conflicts and manage crises at the international level (National Defense Studies Center 2002, 302).

Notions of order according to this perspective are closely linked to security development from the collective to the human sphere, allowing for a revitalization of theoretical postulates and the implementation of certain multilateral, international organizations and even government agencies that have based foreign policy actions on the human component of security (this has been the case for Canada, see: Ortiz 2002-2003).

### C. *The next 100 years: non-polar anarchy in the global risk society*

While several scholars have reflected on past trends and presented a current order in understanding changes and continuities in security policies, other scholars have proposed future paths to be followed and have interpreted security policies in the context of the current and future order (Friedman 2012, 33). This trend is not new, as a number of authors have wrote in the beginning of the 1990s on the world order after the Cold War, calling for a set of policies and strategies for facing new threats (Kaplan 2002).

This concept of order assumes that in the next 100 years, the world will be characterized by the emergence of new powers or forces, which, due to their capacity to exert pressure and mobilize motivations, will be very difficult to control in the interest of state security interests. While these scholars consider new agents, the majority still view the State as the axis of legitimacy and as representing the interests of *citizens*. While the order will continue to be anarchic and wars and power struggles will persist, maintenance will become impossible, leading to the system's degradation (Naim 2013, 15). This order is most appropriately defined as negative, i.e., as a scenario of *non-polarity*. According to Haass, "*the current non-polar world is not just the result of the emergence of other states and organizations or the failures or blunders of American policy; it is also the inevitable consequence of globalization. Globalization has increased the volume, speed and importance of cross-border flows of nearly everything, from drugs, emails, greenhouse gasses, manufactured goods and people, through radio and television signals, viruses (both virtual and real) and weapons*" (Haas 2008, 72).

Given this situation, in surrendering the possibility of effective security based on national goals that seek to guarantee state capacities to face threats in the internal sphere, we have transitioned from a phase of *national security* to one of *global security*. In other words, we have promoted the emergence of a national security doctrine that is predicated on maintaining global security. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the doctrine of Preventive Realism and its quest for globalized security opened to door to a new level of global security that concerns control over individual, organization, and state minds and bodies at the global level. In the words of Palomares: "*The priority that security issues have*

taken on linked to some of the points in the «negative agenda» characterizes the current stage of globalization as the search for absolute international security with a profound connection with American foreign policy for this xxi century” (Palomares 2004, 39).

Revelations from Julian Assange’s Wikileaks, together with the leaks from the National Security Agency (NSA) by Edward Snowden, undoubtedly show that the search for security is no longer limited to the national or military sphere, and it is thus necessary for the quest for global security to employ all possible methods to prevent and attack possible threats to states that may impact vital interests across beyond borders (Steinmetz 2012, 18). Technological progress, a revolution in the military sphere with the emergence of new technologies, has enabled the development of increasingly sophisticated devices aimed at expanding control at the global level. Such technologies have increased the importance of intelligence agencies, and this has resulted in increased budgets and resources made available to such agencies in proportion to rising levels of uncertainty provoked through anarchy (Kaplan 2014).

Several parallels can thus be drawn between perspectives of order and sociological propositions that examine societies of global risk, given that the late modernity transition to technological progress from mere industrial society has created a set of uncertainties caused by modernity itself through its longing for security, i.e., societal risk is the product of modern scientific and technological progress and has produced new levels of uncertainty due to capacities and incapacities to control and predict new problems derived from this progress. Nuclear development, new diseases and possible violations of human rights such as privacy have led to lower levels of control under paradoxical conditions of excessive desire for control (López 2007). The theme of late modernity involves the impossibility of providing security coupled with constant striving with every new obstacle encountered, making total access impossible (Beck 2008, 165).

The idea of order represents for governments, corporations and citizens both an opportunity and a threat, as it is difficult to control, predict and interpret trends of order. This has thus led to a focus on global strategies. The clear intention of this trend has been a search for *globalized security*, which was first initiated by the Bush administration and by followers of neo-conservatism who aimed to use preventive action to stop the emergence or crystallization of threats from outside US territory that could compromise state interests. Although this school of decision makers has not survived in the Obama administration, the strengthening of the NSA and the global espionage program show that concerns over new threats are still present and that the quest for globalized security is still valid.

### III. EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES, WORLD ORDER AND THE SECURITY STUDIES

An assessment of security studies and the impact of new research perspectives can be performed by characterizing

three major trends, which, according to David Baldwin (1995), have defined security studies focuses following the end of the Cold War. These three trends have been characterized by programs that different epistemic communities of International Relations have adopted in the post-war era. However, before illustrating how these three trends have evolved, it is necessary to demonstrate the appropriateness of the epistemic communities approach so that we can correctly carry out our assessment.

The beginning of the 1990s also witnessed the development of an epistemic discussion that would become known in the field of International Relations as the ‘third debate.’ This debate proposed that there is a need to end stagnation caused by the Kuhnian notion of incommensurable paradigms that had mired the discipline by exacerbating the atomization of theories that were not only contradictory, but which also lacked communication between them. Wæver stated that this problem paralyzed research efforts and that this paralysis must be overcome by denouncing the Kuhnian notion of paradigm incommensurability. While this reflection was pertinent to obtaining a solution to radical pluralism that prevented agreement within the debate, a more methodologically developed response with more Lakatonian content gave new life to International Relations theory (Salomon 2001-2002, 10). In this context, the reflectivist approach of Adler and Haas (1992) invited International Relations scholars to initiate research programs that would later drive decision making and establish patterns by generating dialectic relationships between theory and reality, i.e., the correlation between visions of the world proposed by schools of thought and their capacity to generate realities based on diffusion, permanence and adaptation to changing environments facing decision makers.

These scholars thus called for an approach to international policy that does not perpetuate traditional divisions between theory and reality and between scientists and politicians, but which examines the influence of academics, politicians, functionaries and supporters that have followed a certain world view and who have mobilized to create, perpetuate and disseminate this view in everyday practice.

While it is true that the reflectivist proposition by Adler and Haas did not provide a solution to methodological problems of paradigm incommensurability and discipline stagnation, it did spur the development of new areas of progress, as it claimed that incompatibility is not caused by a lack of communication, but by rivalries between epistemic communities while adapting to surroundings and implementing their world views. A distinctly new path was created in the field of International Relations in which research is not only concerned with the state perspective and the roles of epistemic communities, but with international institutions and local environments. From this proposition, we examine security studies based on these three trends described by Baldwin to study the roles of epistemic communities and their functions within international realities.

### A. *Do not panic, nothing has changed here*

The first trend in security studies following the end of the Cold War involved a period during which no changes were made International Relations theories. Various authors from this community publicly stated that basic concepts of International Relations interpretation should not be changed, as the international structure in itself had not changed, i.e., while changes had taken place *within* the system, *systemic* changes had not occurred, meaning that fundamental variables of analysis would remain the same and that the end of the Cold War would not necessitate examining the international system in a different way (Waltz 2000, 9).

Concepts such as self-reliance, deterrence, hegemonic stability and the balance of power remained valid, and some well-intentioned ideas based on certain trends in international systems such as democratic peace, complex interdependence and international regimes remained as variables that depended on the former. States also continued to act based on independent variables, as they had done previously.

In other words, anarchy had not stopped representing the central element of the international system, as an international governmental body had not been established as a result of the rise of democracy, the fall of communism, the proliferation of commercial agreements or the integration of treaties. All of these processes following the Cold War were internal processes that did not change the anarchic nature of International Relations.

Recent efforts to uphold the unchanging nature of premises and principles in security studies are illustrated in a 2012 article that generated much discussion about the position towards the Iranian crisis provoked by the country's nuclear ambitions. In an article entitled "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb," Waltz praises the balance of power concept and the need to achieve such a state in regional settings as in the case of the Middle East (Waltz 2012). The central concept – as sustained by members of this community during golden years (1955-1965) of security studies throughout the Cold War – involves using weapons of mass destruction as tools of foreign policy without needing to resort to conventional confrontation. In fact, this community holds that weapons of mass destruction are weapons of peace if they serve as deterrents between great powers, preventing intervention and the execution of offensive actions. Mershaimer argues that a lack of balance of power dynamics in the Middle East has caused Israel and the United States to intervene in states that have no nuclear capabilities and that this system should be established to guarantee balance and stability (Mershaimer 2012).

Such ideas have many implications for the field of security studies. First, as mentioned by Bull (cited in Buzan and Hansen 2009, 90), security studies will remain subordinate to strategic studies, as this approach remains focused on capabilities and on establishing balance of power dynamics in unstable regions that require regional counterpowers with nuclear capabilities. These ideas also create a close relationship between decision makers that can wield deterrence power and the role of the epistemic community in communicating the field's importance in guaranteeing survival and security. In this context, this community would not primarily act as promoters and adopters

of a proactive attitude towards compliance with international treaties for disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation or towards an uncompromising defense of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Strategic analysis generated by this community instead involves studying how hegemonic or global powers reach can either enable or restrict impulses towards nuclear proliferation in the interest of establishing stability and balance in conflict regions.

Consequently, according to this epistemic community, in which neorealism has entered the agenda by maintaining validity in the post Cold War era, security remains tied to military spending and the use of weapons of mass destruction as foreign policy tools with deterrent capabilities for creating stability based on the balance of power. We can hardly imagine that this epistemic community has achieved widespread acceptance in upper circles of international policy not only due to political costs associated with opposing international treaties such as Nuclear Non-Proliferation but also in the case of regional powers that tangentially oppose the redistribution of capabilities and the justification of deliberate policies on nuclear proliferation. We argue that changes within the system have to a great extent also generated changes in the system and that while consubstantial behavior variables of units such as self-reliance and deterrence still exist, one must recognize that these processes formed, constructed and endowed with meanings that may be re-evaluated. Based on this conclusion, a new perspective has been put forward in the field of security studies

### B. *How to do things with words, or post-modern security gibberish*

Without a doubt, radical reforms in the field of security studies have not exclusively originated from North American schools or from strategic traditions of military academies. Rather, the reforms were likely proposed from the development of new international policies and sociological approaches that are more sympathetic to new analysis trends of language and hermeneutics that have filled university halls and philosophical discussion venues both in Europe and in a number of Anglo-Saxon academies. The influence of constructivism, the English school and the German tradition of critique together with French philosophy have created what is known as the Copenhagen School and its impact on radical reforms in the security studies discipline.

Though the contribution of the Copenhagen School to security studies is already recognized in academic and social circles (Orozco 2006), we briefly summarize the evolution this school of thought over recent years and its impact on policies and programs that have been undertaken based on its central concepts, categorizations and propositions. Two noteworthy aspects of the Copenhagen School have been analyzed over the past twenty years and have shaped research programs. The first is concerned with security levels and objects the other concerns securitization/desecuritization theory; we will develop both features and examine their impact in establishing balance.

When Buzan, De Wild and Wæver published *Security: A New Framework for analysis* in 1998, the publication was well received and quickly developed a new research focus in security studies. One of the authors' central arguments

contended that with the end of the Cold War and the reconfiguration of world power, it had become impossible to refer to security through traditional perspectives, i.e., perspectives that remain exclusively within the military sphere. It thus became necessary to broaden the concept, as new threats began to involve not only interstate affairs but also a range of processes that needed to be addressed with a new classification (Buzan 1991, 432). The authors thus address the need to rate security issues on different levels depending on various reference objects arising through the use of security (Orozco 2005-2006). Work in this line of research continued thereafter, and its most important categorization was realized several years later in 2003 with the proposal of Regional Security Complex Theory, which seeks to describe the configuration of international order from a regional perspective (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The notion behind bringing together various theories in an eclectic manner to interpret international realities resulted in the development of research programs that mainly focused on the regional level. Without ignoring the obvious importance of global powers in the generation of regional complexities and with searching for a typology for different forms of complexity, this perspective presents an agenda that has been well-received in academia and in different schools concerned with understanding regional tensions, power balances, problems linked to new threats and global dynamics configured through regional strategies.

The program initiated by the Copenhagen School did not play out only in regional power dynamics. Rather, securitization theory and its legacy aimed at exhausting levels of analysis, resulting in a significant contribution (Taureck 2006, 9). In this context, scholars not only created innovative ways to incorporate language analysis into security policies (as security requires an audience and seeks to mobilize the will to achieve specific goals, and securitization is the most effective speech act in this context) by establishing limits of policy actions concerning security (Williams 2003). Rather, they also sought to establish conditions that would generate a global policy of consensus on common responses to global threats. This concept has been referred to as macro-securitization in recent years (Buzan 2006). While progress in this line of research is still ephemeral and fairly inconclusive, the discipline has shaped a number of policies.

Perhaps the most important application of this discipline is what various analysts have called 'democratization as desecuritization' (Cebeci 2007, 247), which claims that while expanding and instating new members, the European Union has become, thanks to conditions of entry such as respect for human rights and democratizing measures within candidate states, a desecuritization organization. Rather, states that have sought accession have typically shared common values held within the Union, and thus political issues, the democratic game, and associated tensions and conflicts do not require take extraordinary measures to be accomplished, thus promoting securitization.

A model that more closely reflects these broad tendencies of radical security reform was also adopted in Canada's foreign security policies and through the emergence of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine followed by the Security Council of the United Nations. In following the notion of

individual protection while overcoming the notion of the security subject as the principle of sovereignty, these concepts have held an operative focus on both humanitarian operations and cooperation policies that favor other levels and which seek to desecuritize scenarios through multilateral action, correct purpose and legitimacy.

Much criticism has been directed at this approach's desire for radical reform and the broadening of security studies because for many, the gibberish of postmodernist discourse has generated more confusion than clarity in policy discussions and decision making. The apparent benevolence of desecuritization has also been criticized through the expansion of bodies such as the European Union and in humanitarian interventions based on the responsibility to protect. One cannot deny that these bodies have and will continue to have a very political approach and that intervention will ultimately shift the balance to the direction desired by the initiating party. In this context, it is very difficult to generate aseptic and fully objective criteria in the quest for desecuritization during situations and crises in International Relations.

*C. Contraptions and stratagems for predicting the future: (not so) moderate reform in security studies.*

Various international analysts following the end of the Cold War were greatly concerned with substantiating, reinforcing and protecting the field of International Relations by characterizing the discipline as a science and by applying a series of highly complex methods for predicting international system unit behavior and for guiding decision maker policies. The level of scientific rigor in the field was of great concern and drove efforts to obtain clear and distinct conclusions using methods that substantiate truths without acknowledging that similar conclusions had already been obtained through other means (Peñas 2005, 1). Consequently, these methods would later be considered as scientifically valid in the field of International Relations.

Rational Choice Theory became quickly popularized as an analysis trend in security studies starting with the work of Walt, who claimed that security studies represents a form in which the use of force affects individuals, states and societies and specific policies adopted by states to prepare, prevent or intervene in conflict situations (Walt 1991). Therefore, this work was based on calculations of probabilities based on new game theory, which focuses on the use of force and on the behavior of units presented with such forces (Walt 1999, 7). After game theory was introduced, microeconomic analysis behaviorists (as they are known in international policy theory) have sought to study ways in which leaders are limited in their capacities to process information and face risks, as leaders that are concerned about losses seek tools that prevent them from believing illusions or from being trapped by external aggressive forces (Kegley and Blanton 2009-2010, 61). According to Richard Little, this theory focuses on mathematical calculations in which no zero-sum games exist, i.e., games in which there are absolute winners and losers, to understand strategic interactions between rational agents that may adopt either collaborative or confrontational strategies. This interaction produces very complex situations that should

be analyzed using probabilistic calculations, as in the case of results obtained through game theory (Little 2008, 303).

A frequently used source in this field was published by an analyst and consultant for security agencies in the United States who has employed mathematical models for predicting the behaviors of specific units. When Bruce Bueno de Mesquita stated that “*International Relations are a process through which foreign policy officials balance their personal ambitions of obtaining political goals with the need of avoiding internal and external threats to political survival*” (Bueno de Mesquita 2010), security studies was transformed by this approach into a quest for survival based on *rational* proof, which allows the politician or decision maker to make necessary calculations in balancing his or her needs to remain in power, taking into account national expectations and the state of the international environment. The contributions of these authors to the diffusion of this approach are well known (see the TED conference talk provided by this author in 2009 on the Iranian nuclear program (Bueno de Mesquita 2012)) and have demonstrated the behaviors of units within the system and policies that can impact international security. In this context, the authors have sought to predict behaviors in determining optimal ways to win a game or to retain elements needed to compensate for possible defeat.

Security studies from this perspective go beyond a uniquely state-centric focus that employs classical variables of national interest and self-reliance capacity. Rather, they instead consider a set of agents that are seen as variables of an equation that should lead the decision maker or the person in control of resources to adopt strategies that will best enable him or her to retain power. Due to the above considerations, this approach introduced fairly considerable reforms as it uses different methods and focuses on different levels and agents in determining security policies. Efforts to achieve scientific accuracy in providing decision makers with tools for implementing the most adequate policies based on expectations jeopardizes the legitimacy of contributions from this epistemic community. While this community will use all necessary resources required in perpetuating itself and in establishing its propositions as doctrine, it also runs the risk of justifying foreign policies without critical aspirations or distance from power. This issue was qualified by Baldwin as one of the greatest criticisms aimed at security studies conducted during the golden age and which led to disqualify the field during the late 1970s

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In our assessment of security studies, we find numerous developments that have influenced research focuses after the end of the Cold War and during the early 1990s. We found a set of epistemic communities that have substantiated these trends with ontological bases and methodological deployments of security scientific programs. Based on this, we provide a vision of International Relations and therefore an understanding of the discipline. Our assessment is not focused on evaluating a subsection of International Relations or on validating the discipline in itself. Rather, we attempt to break with this very scheme by applying reflectivist ideas of epistemic communities present in International Relations,

which present spheres of action, interpretation and validation. International relations thus represent a form of panopticon through which surrounding phenomena can be interpreted using the notion of security as interpretative guide. We thus take part in the ratification of security as demonstrative of International Relations.

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**Gabriel Orozco Restrepo: Occupations Held:** Full time Research Professor of the Latin America Faculty of Social Science (present time). Full time Professor at Universidad del Norte (2010-2014). Full time Professor at Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano (2007-2009). Academic Coordinator Fundación Norte-Sur (2008.) Solidary Action Office Researcher and Cooperator of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2003-2005). **Relevant degree(s):** Ph.D. in Economics and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma De Madrid, 2003-2009. M.Sc in Diplomacy and International Relations, diplomatic School of Madrid, 2005-2006. **List of relevant publications / research activity / projects:** Orozco, Gabriel & Eliana Sanandres. A culture of risk in vulnerable communities: the case of Barranquilla in the context of globalized (in) security. For coming in the Special Issue on April 2013 in the International Journal of Human and Ecological Risk Assessment, HERA. ISSN: 1080-7039 (Print), 1549-7860 (Online). Orozco, Gabriel. "Risk Culture: a program for analysis and intervention in vulnerable communities" in ChongFu Huang, Jaime Ortiz & Steve Sears. Beyond experiences in Risk analysis and Crisis Response. Atlantis Press. Amsterdam-Paris. 2011. Orozco, Gabriel & Oscar Guevara. "Gestión integrada del riesgo de desastres: pautas metodológicas para la formulación y administración de proyectos en gestión del riesgo" (Integrated Management of disasters' risk: methodological models for the writing and management of risk management projects). Ediciones pregón Ltda. 2011. Risk Culture: a program for analysis and intervention in vulnerable communities" in Beyond Experience in Risk Analysis and Crisis Response. ISBN: 978-94-91216-01-5 ed: Atlantis press, p.332 - 337, 2011. Godoy, Horacio; Roberto Gonzalez & Gabriel Orozco. "Construyendo lo Global: aportes al debate de Relaciones Internacionales" (Building Global: contributions to the debate of International Relations), Uninorte publishing house, Barranquilla. 2011. Orozco Restrepo Gabriel, Gustavo Rodríguez Albor & Carlos Castro López. "Proyección internacional y estabilidad regional el caso de Brasil y el Mercosur en la política internacional" (International Projection and regional stability of the Brazil and Mercosur case in international politics). "Investigación y Desarrollo" (Research and Development), Vol 18, No 2. 2010. "Observatorios sociales: una estrategia para el desarrollo" (Social Observations: a strategy for development") With María de los Ángeles Martínez García, Ana Gamba Romero and Hugo Paternina Espinosa at: III Congreso Universidad y Cooperación al desarrollo por José Antonio Alonso, Rafael Hernández Tristán (coord). Vol. 1, p. 123-144. ISBN 84-8198-641-0. 2006.