

Societal Security Definitions and Scope for the Norwegian Setting¹

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Of the many new security challenges that have emerged since the end of the Cold War **societal security** has enjoyed the most attention and been the object of the most debate. This policy brief highlights a number of definitional issues related to the scope and range of this concept in the Norwegian setting in general, and relative to the conventional challenges of national security, in particular.

The main axis of the analysis is **globalization**. It is now generally affirmed that, as a consequence of the globalization of threats in Western societies, the line between societal and state security has gradually become blurred. Threats traditionally associated with national defence and the purview of national defence authorities tend more and more to have sub-national roots, consequences and solutions. Simultaneously, threats traditionally considered to be limited to the purview of civil authorities tend to require more international perspectives and approaches.

What are the origins of this conceptual evolution and what particular form does it take in the Norwegian societal framework?

The paradigm shift in security thinking

The Cold War steered the evolution of the concept of security into a rather narrow understanding in which the East-West axis channelled thinking and protecting the sovereignty of nation-states along a bi-polar axis, and where the threat of military force was a primary tool. The end of the Cold War opened up an opportunity to re-examine the scope of security and thus the 1990s were marked by a vigorous debate on the broadening of the concept.

As early as 1983, scholars argued that the scope of security should be widened to contain among other things **environmental** issues, **migration**, **health** and **development**. This shift corresponds in an important way to the external political developments as these issues are well represented in contemporary security policies on national as well as international levels in the EU and the UN.

The dilemma of societal security

Classical security theory often evokes a dilemma. The secondary effects of efforts to ensure security often overshadow the primary positive effects. In the process of securitizing society, side effects or unintended consequences also arise. By ensuring the security of a given sector of society, other groups in society may be targeted for surveillance or particular focus which causes a sense of insecurity for that group. In return identification of such occurrences or "risk-groups" may also increase a sense of insecurity in society in general. This may generate a vicious circle of insecurity and distrust among community groups as well as among certain groups and the state. Furthermore, liberal democracies more than authoritarian states have not only the obligation to secure its citizens but also the need to ensure certain civil liberties. Such liberties may be contradictory to securitization and may lead to a **new security dilemma**.

Defining societal security in terms of values

Security scholars often hold that two questions must be answered in order to define security. First, 'what is the object of security?' and second 'for whom is security?'

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What does it mean to say that society is the object of security? What does it mean to say that society is threatened? Society is clearly not an ordinary thing like any other. It is not a concrete object that can be isolated in any common sense. **Prophylactic measures** such as walls and fences cannot protect it. What is more it cannot be secured through ordinary forms of **military activities**. Society is more than a certain set of things. Indeed it is even more than the people that form its basis.

The protection of society is implicitly linked to the protection of the values that shape and determine that society. Security on the societal level can be understood as the absence of threats to what society holds as dear. The starting point of the analysis is a straight forward question: what is that a society values?

Material and immaterial risk to society

Things often have quantifiable, concrete **material value**. Infrastructure, for example, plays a distinct role in the well-being of society. It has certain costs and benefits for a certain social way of life that members of society wish to maintain. These can to some degree be measured by way of economic or market models. However the value of any given thing is at the very least codetermined by its setting in society and a culture. Thus to the material value of a thing must be added its **immaterial social value**. This value is defined as that which is vital for the survival of the community, or more accurately, what is vital for identifying cultural markers such as norms, traditions, and language.

Societal values are not the same as **individual** values. Though society is obviously made up of individuals, it is the socially shared values that engage the society in collective actions of a variety of different kinds, among others, self-preservation. Society protects its shared values through its institutions. Most social institutions play this role in a more or less direct way. Others are more indirectly involved in the protection of social values. Others again are hardly aware that central among their functions is the maintenance of values. This simple insight links institutions as diverse as the welfare office and the defence intelligence services. Both are involved in a common project: the protection of societal security.

Institutional consequences of the new security landscape

The changing security landscape is accompanied by increasing institutional pressures. Several of the newly identified threats and risks target not the military but rather the **health, safety, and well-being**

of civilians. Traditional forms of military force are obviously not always best suited for meeting these challenges. By the same token, increasing importance is being ascribed to the cooperation of **civil protection** programmes led by **health departments** and other civilian operators. The **national judiciaries** have increased their international profile in the fight against international crime and terrorism. Responses to globalised threats vary in kind, including the rise of civil actors operating internationally and the use of local citizens where possible for 'international' operations.

This implies that the line between national and society's **responsibility** for ensuring security has become increasingly blurred. There is a mounting pressure on the **capacity-building** of national and civilian institutions and on the successful **cooperation** between the civilian and military spheres in (a) coordinating areas of responsibility and (b) coordinating the internal with the external dimensions of their work.

Perceived threats to national security located outside of a country's borders is one axis of globalization of security. On a second axis one finds international bodies such as EU and UN developing programs for international cooperation on societal security issues. The shift from security as a question of sovereignty through military means to one of societal concerns that cross borders has penetrated international agencies and bodies. The UN, for example, has a considerable focus on the joint responsibility and cooperation for response to threats. The EU aims to develop a standardisation on security in addition to its programs for security cooperation.

Through these efforts to coordinate, create cooperation and develop standardisations, the politics of globalization are impacting on national security policies. Standardisation on airport security and border security is one example that comes to mind easily. The same rules and regulations apply across the Schengen zone, for example, regardless of the risk assessments of individual states. The increased focus on **non-geographically restricted issues** such as environment, development, and health, opens up for international response coordination and responsibilities and thereby engender demands for international standardisations.

Communicating security risk

Integral to handling security challenges is communicating information between the different agencies involved and the public at large. Yet the **communication of security issues** can often increase inse-

curity among other social groups who may feel stigmatized by security policies designed to protect the community. The increased securitization of society is not at all times compatible with the security of individuals. **Fear** can therefore be the result of security policies even when they are actually designed to dampen it. In this way fear, the target of security measures circulates back and forth between social groups and the state. This disequilibrium can affect the general experience of safety and security among the community in general.

This leads us to an understanding of two intersecting parts of societal security. On the one hand we can speak of threats to tangible and intangible objects. On the other hand, communication of threats often focus on fear and concern threats to the **viability and cohesion of social identity** itself. The latter is more elusive to identify or quantify, yet is importantly linked to the communication of insecurity. It can have decisive influence on political decisions and security policy-making. In many cases the perceived threats to constructed or imagined identities have far greater consequences than threats to concrete objects.

Societal security in Norway

Parliamentary Communication 17 defines societal security in such a way that it comprises all those categories of actions intended to hinder unwanted events or conditions and to reduce the consequences should these occur². The concept thus has two sides: limit the causal factors, and impact reduction. As presented here the definition is extremely broad and makes perhaps no conscious differentiation between safety and security or between natural disasters beyond human control and conscious destructive acts. This is on the one hand inclusive and yet it excludes the security dilemma and the accompanying debate. Nor does it address the problem of communicating security risk and potential negative effects on perceptions of safety.

Furthermore, **PC 17** states that since the end of the Cold War, the concept of national security has an expanded content not necessarily as dominated by the military dimension. The Communication goes on to mention the environment, international crime, and resources management as areas where civilian security measures are important. In this manner the Communication is quite close to voices in the academic debate on this topic. It also demonstrates

how the abovementioned borders between internal and external security are diffused. International crime is a national policing concern, likewise are wars fought in Afghanistan and in Iraq signalled to be of direct importance to national political security.

There is an identification of increased international intervention as consequential for national security. Norway as allied with NATO, EU (Schengen) is identified as part of specific policies or interventions undertaken by these bodies. Norway also contributes materially in some international operations. PC 17 states that interventions on behalf of bringing democracy is positive for long term world security and thereby also Norwegian security. However PC 17 limits the role given international events, stating that the organization of security should not be in response to external shocks, but to long term security evaluations. This however does not mean that external single events are not evaluated as having impact on Norwegian security situation at points in time.

Organizing security in Norway

Organizationally Norwegian security preparedness has since the end of the Second World War been built on a **horizontal action plan** where decisions are to be taken at low-levels in both civilian and military administration. This concept is based on the notion of **'preparedness where the accident happens'** and means that action shall be initiated as close to the event as possible and without awaiting orders from higher levels of authority.

This concept also lies at the heart of the Norwegian **'total defence' concept**. It ensures a high level of involvement for the civilian sphere in its national security organization. At the same time, it is no secret that a certain awareness of the country's **limited military resources** has resulted in the idea of incorporating military defence in this framework of a total defence.

Civil and military administrations are expected to cooperate within their own areas of responsibility in the event of an incident. While it is the sitting government that is at any given time in charge of total defence, each department has the same responsibility during war-time as it has during peace-time. This is a main principle of the total defence concept (NOU, 1995, 2.3.1). In this manner one may see an organizational difference from larger European powers and the Cold War armament policies. The committee led by former Prime Minister Kåre Willoch in 2000 was to determine the need for a reorganization of the Total Defence system and some voices argued for a more hierarchical and central-

² Original quote: I denne meldingen omfatter sikkerhetsbegrepet alle relevante kategorier av tiltak som har til hensikt å unngå uønskede hendelser eller tilstander og begrense konsekvensene om disse skulle inntreffe (p. 3).

ized system. The end report, *A Vulnerable Society*, resulted in some efforts to centralize the work of civil crisis management, without taking away local responsibility. The **DSB** (Directory for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning) was founded in 2003 as part of the plan to coordinate the civil protection of society. DSB is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and the Police and reports on issues as diverse as international terrorism and societal concerns such as Midsummer Eve's bonfire regulations. Today, in the new security environment, Norway's organizational practice is, according to DSB, attracting interest from abroad. DSB must be understood as interested in exporting the Norwegian model.

Conclusions

Societal security as described in Norway in Parliamentary Communication 17 exemplifies several points current in the more general academic debate on security. The report admits that national security is more than military defence and border control. This finds its outlet in the Norwegian idea of 'total defence', and more recently in its 'new strategic concept'. Nonetheless, the tradition of **managing** security through civil and military ministries at **low-level thresholds** is particular for Norway. In historically more powerful military states such as France and UK, one finds an organization where the prominence of the military over the civilian has been strong throughout the Cold War and before during the colonial era. The horizontal aspect of Norwegian organization reflects the traditionally **strong periphery** in Norwegian politics and the **scarce resources**; human and material that post-war Norway was faced with. Yet, in Norway as elsewhere the military has been the primary security provider. It is the high level of civilian support and the horizontal and low-level decision-making that sets it apart and permits stronger civilian-oriented security policies. The model is interesting in a **multifaceted security environment** such has been as identified internationally today because the system appears suitably flexible to encompass the **diversity of risk areas** from terrorism to health and environment.

It is remarkable that by examining the **pre-Cold War security picture** on the **North Atlantic axis** one can find a wider security picture than what has dominated Cold War Europe. In fact, academic debate suggests that the focus on military security as the main framework is largely a result of the Cold War and the nuclear dilemma. There is no indication in the pre-Cold War literature that security is solely about sovereignty and that the military is the only suitable tool. Yet, the military has been a preferred tool, increasingly so in times of war and violent conflict.

Still, security has also existed within the realm of regular international relations. Pre-Cold War questions on security are almost as broad as today's and merely identifies who security is for and what are the objects of security. Values, both material and cultural are included both in academic debate and in the political. The inclusion of non-military security thinking in Norway since 1946 indicates a possible support for this image rather than a **uniqueness of Norwegian security thinking**. The construction of its concept of total defence can claim to be based on facts on the ground as well as on historic thinking.

It is in this sense that one can speak of a **Norwegian organizational model** capable of identifying insecure situations or crises as they occur in places where the military may not be the best suited or available actor that the model today engenders interest and its added value can be found. In addition, the revised version of total defence recognizes an increased concern with international events and dimensions, and their consequences for national and societal security.

This exemplifies the concept of **societal security as national in practice** and, simultaneously, how **the national no longer stops at the geographical border**. This is perhaps where the new challenges of societal security truly can be found.



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