

Thinking Ahead on Security: What's Different This Time?

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Can prolonged drought explain the origin of war against the Syrian regime of Assad? Can agrarian reforms and the local security dynamics between different ethnic groups help us understand the conflict in Mali? How can the construction of one of Africa's largest dams explain the complex security developments in the Horn of Africa? And how can the rapid development of technology facilitate more accurate security analysis? The increasingly complex contemporary conflict panoramas accentuate the need for thinking about security holistically. This brief is one of a series that explains a concept of integrated security, as developed by an interdisciplinary team of scientists at FOI, the Swedish Defence Research Agency.

Whose Security?

Does it make sense to maintain an emphasis on the security of the state at the expense of the well-being of its citizens? In today's world of rapidly increasing population growth, globalism and impacts from climate change, most observers would agree that maintaining a balance between the sustainability of the nation-state structure and the security of the individual people who live within its boundaries is an important challenge. However, understanding how different systems hang together, especially from a security perspective, is a delicate task. To encounter this challenge, i.e. on how to better understand the interaction between local and global security from a different set of interdisciplinary traditions, we propose the need to think "*integrated security*". This brief, and others in this series, highlight how this can be done.

Thinking Integrated Security

In 2013 a group of analysts at FOI began to consider the need to think more carefully about how conventional approaches to the study of security were linked. The puzzle emanated out of a shared sense that the practice of security studies in many respects had become specialised to such a degree that different sub-disciplines had stopped engaging each other. Especially at critical moments when there was a joint need to understand a situation of security, there was a general sense that there was a "mosaic" approach to it. More precisely, there was a sense that there were different disciplinary practices in the area of defence and security that had their own ways of collecting information, operationalising concepts, disaggregating data and analysing information. While the group recognised the existence of multiple traditions within defence and security studies, there was less appreciation of the absence of communication between the various disciplines.

Thinking more broadly about this trend of specialisation of defence and security studies, the group went on to ask what

the advantages would be of taking a more interdisciplinary approach to studying security (to bridge gaps). More precisely, what added value would a more integrated approach among FOI's various sectors of expertise yield? While taking holistic approaches to deal with contemporary security challenges is not new per se, the task is not commonly taken to a more practical level. FOI's research environment is unique in this perspective as it brings various competences and security disciplines into a joint research environment. Realising the increasingly complex nature of contemporary security issues, FOI gave the team a mandate to explore how an interdisciplinary approach could be developed to help decision-makers to be better informed and thereby better grapple with contemporary security challenges. This mandate has been both challenging and an opportunity. Even if the work is not yet finished, some unexpected results have already emerged. In essence the team found a number of limitations in the ways in which practitioners and researchers conventionally address security challenges. For example, as found, conventional models for analysing "conflicts" and "crisis" challenges have a tendency to focus solely on short- or long-term perspectives. Often there seems to exist an "either-or" approach, i.e. attention is given to dealing with short-term challenges without considering the long-term impact, and vice versa. Second, the group found that often knowledge was not transmitted between social scientists dealing with security analysis and those scientists working with technical means to tackle security challenges. Based on these observations the team quickly realised that there were a number of gaps to be filled by taking a more integrated approach to security. By identifying means to better bridge short-term security challenges with long-term security challenges, as well as by widening the notion of security for whom (i.e. to embrace individual, societal and state security) into a single analytical approach, the team anticipated that the management of these was likely to become more durable. Furthermore, the team also began



to look into how scientists working on more specialised and technical sides of security, such as space and laser engineers, could bring added value into the analysis.

What's Different?

Over the years, different notions of security have been appearing. For example, since the mid-1970s the notion of comprehensive security has been very popular. The concept offered an approach that favoured a more holistic understanding of security as opposed to more fragmented and specialised ones. Other definitions appeared more frequently after the end of the Cold War as security concerns such as the environment, the economy, food, energy and sustainable development increasingly filled the conceptual space that opened up in the 1990s. Especially the so-called human security tradition emerged as a buzz word in international affairs, providing a vital stimulus to rethinking security in innovative terms. As theoretical work gathered those various concerns into several broad notions of security—hard and soft security, human security, and so on—comprehensive security lost its explanatory edge. Indeed, if “everything” is security then nothing is security. Following the trajectory in security studies, the FOI team has further observed that lately there has been a re-emergence of more traditional, state-focused definitions of security. The question this raises is what to do with the coexistence of state-centric and human-centric, or individual-centric, notions of security. The team quickly realised the need for renewed effort to think about security in a more holistic and integrated way. However, rather than just a tidy theory of comprehensive security that brings conventional and modern approaches to security together, we asked how such security can actually be better implemented. What are the methods and techniques that contribute to achieving a better understanding of security in an integrated way? However, we claim that by being able to combine analyses of traditional state-centric security, human security and other forms of security, and enhancing that with in-house technological capabilities and an integrative focus, much can be achieved analytically, not least by bringing quality assurance and control measures into the responses that practitioners need when facing contemporary security challenges.

The Offer

Given that ecological, financial and political systems are under increasing pressure from human activities, and given that there are a number of complex and growing threats that go beyond hard security challenges (e.g. related to natural resources constraints, climate change and environmental degradation), it is important to understand not only how these trends affect

security, but also how they may interact with one another. Further to this, there is also a need to bring conventional hard security approaches into such analysis. An integrated approach is therefore key. How then will this integrated approach look and how can it function in practice?

The team suggests that the integrated approach, at its core, is an analytical platform in which different competences and expertise, working with different elements of security, meet to address a specific challenge.

More precisely, such an analytical platform offers a critical reading of how security challenges could be addressed, and with what means. Clearly, such a platform cannot address all challenges to security, but it can provide a stress test for how a particular security challenge can be analysed and operationalised. The analytical platform also provides a means for assembling information (data) for a specific security challenge. Again the desired end-state is to bring quality into decision-makers' and practitioners' responses to upcoming security challenges of a complex nature.

Is There More?

In the series of briefs produced by the project, the FOI proposed concept of integrated security is explained from several perspectives, including some of the technological, analytical and organisational aspects that have been developed. Here, the main point has been that, even though the notion of comprehensive security is not new, and indeed has even been promoted in a number of different guises, attempts to apply it have been few. The result is that walking the talk of integrated security remains largely undeveloped. Even though its fundamental premises are credible—i.e. that it “make sense”—its methodology is thin. There has been little full-scale commitment to learning how to work with it concretely. Scientifically, there has been little of the iterative dialogue between theory and praxis and back to theory and yet more praxis that might otherwise lead to empirical robustness and policy-wise credibility.

FOI's study builds a platform that begins to address those failings. As other briefs in this series explain, it is a good beginning, but more remains to be achieved. We explain some of the technologies and assessment tools that are useful, describe the approaches to integrated security that some other organisations have developed, and consider a



number of practical applications. In subsequent briefs we go more deeply into various concrete cases of how the concept of integrated security could be applied. The briefs are based on ongoing research projects at FOI, and include research relating to environmental vulnerability and impact assessment approaches, earth observations, satellite images and human security approaches. The idea is to give examples of how security could be dealt with in an integrated way.

This brief was written by an interdisciplinary team of scientists at FOI, the Swedish Defence Research Agency. It could be read as a stand-alone document but can also be read in the context of connected briefs on integrated security of which this particular topic is a cohesive part.

The project leader was Mikael Eriksson (Defence Analysis) and lead scientists included Annica Waleij (CBRN Defence and Security), Birgitta Liljedahl (CBRN Defence and Security), Louise Simonsson (CBRN Defence and Security), Christer Andersson (Defence and Security, Systems and Technology), Richard Langlais (Defence Analysis), Michael Tulldahl (Sensor and EW Systems) and Ulf Söderman (Sensor and EW Systems). Many other members of FOI provided support.

For further information on related activities of this project please consult www.foi.se