Resilience as a Policy Response to Non-Traditional Security Threats

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Abstract. This paper examines non-traditional security threats and resilience as part of the security policy response by nation-states. Today's unpredictable global future includes a range of non-traditional security threats. Some of these threats are environmental some are economic while others relate to human security, health, bio-security and cyber security. These threats, arising from non-state actors and non-human sources, are complex and bring with them a challenging set of issues which have significant impact on the defence and security of nation-states, their economies, their people and their well-being. The challenge for decision-makers is to identify the correct policy response as part of today's security architecture. The paper examines a number of policy documents in which resilience has been incorporated into a nation-state's security architecture. Resilience has been adopted by a number of nation-states as offering a practical approach when traditional reactive measures prove inadequate to deal with these threats. The paper concludes that the concept of security and the way in which nation-states respond has forever changed. Part of the response measures include applied resilience but the term remains ambiguous and requires further research to guide future policy decisions and structural elements which are integral to a society's core values, human security and sovereign integrity.

Keywords: Non-traditional security, Threats, Resilience transnational security threats, Policy.

1. Introduction

The decades since the end of the Cold War have been marked by a number of issues which were previously not considered part of the security agenda and today we face a new class of threat. Traditional responses by nation-states are often ineffective against non-traditional security threats, particularly threats by non-state actors and threats arising from non-human sources. Such issues have led nation-states to consider different ways to deal with and address non-traditional security issues. One approach has been development of the concept of resilience. This paper considers some of the issues facing nation-states regarding non-traditional security threats, policy frameworks and national resilience.

2. Policy Framework

Public policy forms part of a nation-state's political response system to social, economic and environmental demands. Policy making is a dynamic ongoing process analogous to complex systems with feedback loops and clear goals.

For the purposes of this paper, policy comprises three characteristics: problems, participants, and a way forward. The problem is the issue that needs to be addressed. In this paper it can be described as those situations or factors which are not traditionally identified as being security issues but which could present a security threat and the way in which non-traditional security issues are framed in the policy debate. The participants are the individuals or groups that are influential in forming a plan to address the problem. In this context, participants refer to structural elements of nation-states and the implicit and explicit links between them, as well as how they contribute to the development of national resilience. The third element of the trilogy of components is the way forward which is the course of action decided upon by government. The way forward for non-traditional security threats relates to the broader policy context in which security has evolved and changed since these threats are now part of the security agenda. Policy relating to non-traditional security threats also impacts on subsequent development of strategies and responses associated with national resilience.

A brief review of the changing security environment is necessary to set the problem of non-traditional security issues in perspective. Security policy is influenced by internal domestic as well as external factors,

and the degree of influence depends on the issue. National security policy development has changed partly because the nature of conflict has changed.

The Cold War period from 1946 to 1991 was known for its political discord and military tension. There were enemy states, infamous leaders and proxy wars. It was a period in which games theory, brinkmanship and nuclear strategy were at the forefront of much decision-making. Most of the armed conflicts during the Cold War were between states; by contrast since 1989 the majority of conflicts have been internal[1]. The changed nature of conflict has influenced evolving theoretical approaches and understandings of security, as well as practical responses[2]. Over time, a number of new issues have been securitized and gradually included on the security agenda. In 1994, just after the end of the Cold War, the United Nations Human Development Report[3] stated that the concept of security had, 'for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy'.

National security was previously almost the exclusive domain of the military and focused on traditional defence of territorial integrity and the nation-state. But security issues are no longer limited by territoriality and political boundaries and today we are presented with a new class of threat and an expanded view of national security. It can now be defined as freedom from the threats that put in danger the survival and the development of the society organised in a form of state[4]. Increasingly, states are required to adopt a broader stance to protect their economic independence and societal well being from a different range of perceived threats. The range of those potential threats has changed over time and they have a much broader focus and now include non-traditional security threats arising from actions by non-state actors, failed or failing states, and extremist ideologies. Such threats also include those generated by non-humans sources such as infectious diseases and pandemics. This change holds challenges for public policy development and it has implications for how nation-states balance the requirements of the realist view of security focussing on sovereignty and territoriality, with the requirement of meeting non-traditional security challenges.

3. Non-traditional Security Issues

Non-traditional security issues constitute the problem within the context of this paper. The working definition of non-traditional security adopted by the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia located in Singapore is: 'Non-traditional security threats are defined as challenges to the survival and well-being of peoples and states that arise primarily from non-military sources, such as climate change, cross-border environmental degradation and resource depletion, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages and transnational crimes such as people smuggling and drug trafficking'[5]. These dangers are transnational in scope, defy unilateral remedies and require comprehensive, that is, political, economic and social responses, as well as the humanitarian use of military intervention.

There is growing recognition within the public policy arena across the globe that such new security challenges are proving to be more severe and more likely to inflict harm to a greater number of people than conventional threats of interstate wars and conflicts[6]. In the past, the United Kingdom like many other countries, was of the view that the nation-state was the traditional focus of foreign, defence and security policies, and national security was understood as dealing with the protection of the state and its vital interests from attacks by other states. Over recent decades, however, the United Kingdom view of national security has broadened to include, 'threats to individual citizens and to our way of life, as well as to the integrity and interests of the state'[7]. In its report on national security and resilience in 2009, the British House of Commons Defence Committee noted that the definition of national security and resilience now encompasses, 'a wide range of threats, from traditional state-on-state aggression through terrorist groups to civil emergencies such as flooding or pandemics'. The report went on to note that, 'It also encompasses a spectrum of capabilities and responses—not merely preventing or dealing with attacks or natural disasters ('security'), but also ensuring that vital services are maintained and life can continue as close to normal as possible ('resilience')'[8].

This broader awareness and changing view has also been reflected in the United States in a number of policy documents and statements. In 2009 former US Director of National Intelligence, Admiral Dennis Blair noted: 'Climate change, energy, global health and environmental security are often intertwined, and while not traditionally viewed as threats to US national security, they will affect Americans in major

ways ...such a complex and unprecedented syndrome of problems could cause outright state failure, or weaken pivotal states counted on to act as anchors of regional stability'[9]. As demonstrated by the above examples, disruptions which were not previously viewed as threats are now seen in a different light and incorporated onto the security agenda of nation-states and included as part of their policy responses. The increased awareness of non-traditional security issues presents new challenges for governments as they seek to provide the necessary leadership and to develop the appropriate security architecture and attendant policies. These challenges include identifying which traditional and non-traditional issues can, and should, be considered true security concerns to be included in such a policy framework. They also have implications for the way in which security professionals and analysts as well as the military, deal with and adapt strategies and doctrine for non-traditional security threats.

4. Resilience as a Policy Response

The concept of resilience has been adopted and operationalised as a strategy by a number of nation-states to counter non-traditional security threats. Researchers and theorists have studied the concept and application of resilience in a number of disciplines with strong roots in ecology, engineering[10] and psychology. The adaptive characteristic of resilience in the behavioural sciences is described as a 'dynamic process indicating the adaptive functioning of individuals at risk'[11], whereas in the material sciences it is described as the ability of a material to return to its original state after it has been altered. More recently, the concept of resilience has been adopted within other areas including disaster management, public policy and organisational management. The nature and meaning of resilience has been debated over recent years in the other disciplines with each subject area offering its own variation and context-specific working definition.

As an applied concept by nation-states, resilience offers an over-arching framework linking principles, policy, practices and structures to build capacity and readiness to deal with non-traditional security threats by non-state actors[12]. It also helps to facilitate a better understanding of the changing operational environment, of a nation-state's own capabilities, vulnerabilities and the relationship between risks. Resilience can have a direct impact on a nation-state, its security and the well-being of its people.

5. National Resilience

The application of resilience as part of the policy response to non-traditional security threats is the least researched aspect of the whole area of resilience. While it is a state to which a number of countries aspire and are keen to achieve, there is relatively little definitional agreement regarding what is meant by national resilience. As such, it is a contested term, similar to that of security. Nonetheless, since the 2001 terrorist attacks, known as 9/11, the concept of resilience has received renewed attention as a means of nation building in a number of countries and at the time, found currency in speeches by former world leaders such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair, US President George Bush and Singapore Prime Minister Goh[13]. This changing application and wider adoption of resilience in widely divergent areas has extended different perspectives on, and interpretations of, the concept of resilience and approaches to its implementation. Resilience has been embraced by governments, communities and organisations and it is now found in public policy statements about national or homeland security, critical infrastructure, disaster management, and organisational management manuals.

An unresolved ambiguity within the literature and in policy documents, is that the term national resilience is often interchangeable with societal resilience. It is not always clear whether national resilience refers to broader structural elements such as governmental policy. Nor it is clear whether societal resilience refers to different communities within a nation's society or to their attributes. Since the terrorist attacks in 2001, the term resilience has been linked to the concept of homeland security particularly in the United States where this is reflected in a range of US policy documents, such as the 2010 National Security Strategy[14] and in the 2010 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR) Report as one of three foundational elements essential to a comprehensive approach to homeland security[15]. The subsequent 2011 Presidential Policy Directive on National Preparedness states that it is, 'aimed at strengthening the security and resilience of the United States through systemic preparation for the threats that pose the greatest risk to the security of the nation'[16].

While there are strong public and policy statements linking resilience to a nation's or society's future well-being, the ambiguity surrounding the term means that national, or societal, resilience could imply a willingness to prefer the national interest over interests of an individual or group, that is, collectivism over individualism. That is, national resilience could be regarded as a component of national strength related to consciousness and behaviour, with the assumption being that national resilience should also be expressed as a willingness to prefer the national interest over interests of an individual or group[17]. Another interpretation could be that national resilience is an aggregation of the resilience of individuals and communities together with that of business and the economy. In turn, this could imply that individual resilience is derived from national resilience. This issue requires further research and discussion to ensure future policy decisions and guidance are not misleading.

The interconnected nature of the complex system that is national resilience implies connectivity of the various structural components as well as broader principles and societal values. There is an implicit assumption in most policy documents that resilience is part of a continuum and one along which nation-states travel towards continuous improvement. National resilience implicitly addresses a society's core values associated with the rule of law, human rights, accountable government and sovereign security. Yet these implicit values are not always explicitly defined or acknowledged in the same policy documents.

6. Specific and General Resilience

In the context of non-traditional security issues and national resilience, applied resilience can be both specific, that is, resilient to a particular type of perturbation or it can be general, meaning resilient to a range of perturbations. Concentrating exclusively on a specific resilience carries the risk of becoming non-resilient in other ways. An example of this could be by not recognising subtle changes in operational circumstances or assessing facts or it could be through over reliance on plans. Generally, planners plan in stable and predictable circumstances about known events and likely threats. This style of planning runs the risk of normalising the abnormal, and of not anticipating or being alert to unforeseen threats and disruptions which are not always known for their predictability.

Resilience is being operationalised to address uncertainty within nation-states, that is, the inability to know what combinations of conditions will occur in the future. If the future were predictable, resilience would lose its importance and plans would simply be designed for a known set of conditions. But because the future is unpredictable, it is necessary to plan for a wide range of possible conditions, including non-traditional security threats some of which may be unlikely, but which could result in significant harm if they are not anticipated.

7. Conclusion

The transition of the global security environment since the end of the Cold War has been shaped by the changing nature of conflict and the inclusion of non-traditional security issues. Consequently, the concept of security has forever been changed and now includes a range of threats generated by non-state actors and arising from non-human sources. These threats have presented new challenges to how national security policy is framed. The way in which nation-states address this new class of threat is ongoing through different public policies found in homeland security, crisis and emergency management, and critical infrastructure and implemented through attendant strategies. Underpinning these strategic policies is the concept of resilience which has been adopted by a number of countries as a means to draw together principles, policies, and practices to build capacity and readiness to counter non-traditional security threats which have the potential to become drivers of instability. To ensure effective implementation, there is a need for greater clarity in the concept and definition of the term 'resilience' and the context of its application, because ambiguity could undermine the real value and benefits of resilience for nation-states, their people and their well-being.

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