

A Presentation of the state of Societal Security in Norway

J. Peter Burgess & Naima Mouhle^{*}

Norwegian society and 'total defence'

A new global landscape of threat has presented itself since the end of the Cold War and the increased focus on threats from non-state actors and international terrorism. The focus on societal security has increased and is a key part of the 'total defence' concept that has been in place in Norway since 1946, and recently updated. While conceptualizations of security have undergone changes to match the evolving challenges, organizational models have been slower to change. The particular civil-military relationship has been further developed, yet suggested restricted in a recent Defence Study (FS-07). One of the results of the review has been an increased focus on international issues and their impact on national security. As argued in PRIO Policy Brief no. 3/2007, national security has become closely integrated with societal security. This has result, among other things, in the establishment of a coordinating directory, DSB in 2003. At the same time, evolutions in both national and societal security have given them reaches beyond territorial borders.

In Norway societal security comprises in particular critical infrastructure, information technology, communication, health, food, and climate. Society's dependence on technology and the fear of appropriation of advanced technology by terrorist actors links these areas to current risk analyses. Societal security also has a dimension where global and international events may affect locally. From an analytical perspective these categories can provide an important analytical measuring stick. Societal vulnerability can in practice be measured through the level of risk or threat posed to any of the prioritized areas.

^{*} J. Peter Burgess is Research Professor and Leader of PRIO's Security Programme, and Naima Mouhle is Researcher in the Programme. This policy brief was written with the support of the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Defense for the project *Threats beyond Borders: Assessing Societal Security in a Global Environment*.

A fresh look at security

There is considerable diversity within the understanding of security. In some cases defining what is and what is not a security issue reflects a political programme. Attaching the security label to any given event becomes a way of putting issues on the agenda. At the same time, it is essential to keep in mind that different agencies also operate with differing time perspective, some with longer political momentum, and others with shorter. This variation in security intensity brings a constant challenge for the need of the security sector to balance **political requirements** with **executive demands**.

Another challenge is the increasing importance placed on civil-military cooperation. The limits of the civilian with the more military-related areas are often in flux. To a certain extent this relationship is such in order to meet the need for diversity that characterizes today's security landscape. However, this requires more from the parties involved. This is particularly evident with terrorism. In Norway as in other parts of Europe, terrorism is defined as a criminal act and the responsibility of the Justice Department. Still, the Defence Ministry reserves the right to interfere in questions of national security and securitypolitical crises, in which they place acts of terrorism. In Norway, the three principles of **responsibility, equality and proximity** deal with some of these issues, but as demonstrated also leaves room for ambiguity in areas of responsibility and in particular abrogating circumstances. The question of communication and cooperation becomes essential for effective response.

While the securitization of **material values** is prominent in societal security, there is also a stated wish to protect the **cultural values** of society.

Lastly, there lies an inherent tension in the concept of **societal security** itself. While the concept of societal security aims to cover both material and cultural values, the tendency to generalize societal security across a broad scope of social values

excludes, to a certain degree, the value of the **individual** and of individual or isolated societal groups.

Invisible values

Norwegian social values are often articulated in terms of democratic culture. Democracy is often expressed as the ultimate security referent to be protected. Paradoxically, the protection of individuals in society or groups within society is not directly a part of societal security strategy despite the obvious fact that it is individuals who make up society, and that individualism is often praised as a democratic value. This paradox forms the tacit background for much policy making in security affairs. This is so despite the fact that most scholarly literature points to this problem as underlying and sustaining a wide variety of social groups and their democratic identities. One can easily ask whether societal security is indeed adequately assured when there are groups that feel threatened by the establishment that is intended as the provider of security. Such groups can be political, ethnic, religious or generational, depending on the circumstances and events in a specific time. National and global events can affect these groups, as with communist groups during the Cold War or Muslim groups after the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001. The exclusive and exclusionary potential of societal security must be considered in policy-making.

Empirical and ideational components

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact empirical and ideational components of Norwegian societal security as the governmental briefs tend to be broad and the Defence Ministry tend to operate with narrow understandings. There are some elements though that are repeated and that may present an outline. The oil and gas resource revenue forms the basis for the Norwegian standard of living beyond today and gives the state room for manoeuvre internationally. This is one empirical aspect that is critical. In terms of ideational components, there are two aspects that are visible across different conceptualizations. First is the sovereignty of the Norwegian state. The impact of Norway's colonial past and delicate position during the Cold War is visible in the careful attention given to international diplomatic and strategic positioning. Second is a national image of an inherent Norwegian social democratic culture with principles that are understood as, if not unique then highly concentrated. Values often pointed to are egalitarianism, individualism, and pacifism.

Organizational challenges in Norway

Since the end of World War II, Norwegian preparedness has been built on a horizontal structure with a heavy civilian support network for

the military. With the increased reliance on societal security concepts a number of security responsibilities have been referred to the civil administration. Decisions are to be taken at low-levels when possible and action shall be initiated as close to the event as possible. This model represents the three main principles of Norwegian security based on **responsibility, equality and proximity**. However, as mentioned above the ambiguity in the conceptualizations of civil-military boundaries offer challenges to the executive of these principles.

In matters of security political crises the principle of proximity is annulled and referred to military control. Due to the primacy of the military in national defense this is understandable, but the military may be facing a potential communication problem as it accepts the concept of societal security yet maintains a military operationalization that is not necessarily in line with civil administrative security views.

The most recent Defence Study, FS-07, goes far in proposing a more professional rather than conscript-based military. It suggests reforms that would revise the concept of total defence where the military is not as dependent upon civil support as previously. This can be read as a process of distancing the military from the civilian. The defence ministry's understanding of societal security seem closer to the NATO and UN definitions that heavily focus on natural disaster relief and international terrorism, than to the broader and more inclusive definition provided in PC 17.

The Total Defence

In 2000 the Willoch Commission set out to determine the need for a reorganization of the Total Defence system at a time when a number of voices argued for a more hierarchical and centralized system. The end report *A Vulnerable Society* resulted in no such drastic change yet there were some efforts to centralize the work of civil crisis management, without taking away local responsibility. DSB (Directorate 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 ranging from terrorism to various local societal concerns.

According to the ambitions of the Total Defence concept the two complimenting parts of Norwegian security organization, the civil and the military, should cooperate more, for instance between the Military Intelligence and between police intelligence. In 2006, authorities organized a large scale crisis

management rehearsal comprising responses from all responsible parties involved. This was in order to test local responses and responsibilities in addition to communication between both civilian and military responders, horizontally and vertically. The concluding report, *Øvelse Oslo 2006. Evaluering*, revealed, among other things, a certain lack of communication between responding groups. This weak communication link demonstrates one of the challenges in the approach of shared responsibilities between the civilian and the military dimensions, in addition to those between sectors.

Likewise, while PC17 focuses on societal issues, they rely heavily on one **particular source**, FFI (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment) to provide information, threat assessments and evaluations. Their main work has been on the BAS-projects that being technical in nature have attributed to a technical and “biological” understanding of risk and (in)security as objects in society. By the move to civilian and humanitarian operations, the military is also coming close to a militarization of the operational side of national societal security.

The result is that civil security and risk is understood in a language close to the military establishment, yet keeping to a civil context that is non-military and often non-technical in its worldview. An alternative structuring, based in institutions linked to softer ends of societal security can be envisaged.

However, one might ask: where do the limits go? Societal security as framed in PC 17 and by DSB encompasses a wide variety of issues with at times little in common. DSB issues warnings on issues as diverse as terror and material flaws in household products. The differentiation of tasks among Norwegian institutions corresponds to a significant differentiation in the understanding of security in Norway. Gathering the threads of the concept of security in a new age of insecurity has become one of the central challenges of the new defence concept.

Norway at risk

Norway does not see itself as being at high risk. Yet the discourse on security in Norway enjoys a high profile. The closer the vicinity to Norway either geographically or culturally of an event elevates the intensity of the discourse in Norway. In other words risk events need not take place in Norway in order for them to become visible and relevant in Norway. International security risks impact on security policy and activities in a variety of states with a variety of proximity to the risk. So while Norway is admittedly at a perceived low risk it

prepares itself for scenarios. DSB performs a multitude of rehearsals (response to potential scenarios and incidents), supervisions and evaluations of what may be said to be internationally recognized risk areas within the field of societal security. These include evaluation of critical infrastructure; infrastructure that society is heavily reliant on in order to maintain itself and function. Some of DSB’s recent activities have included evaluating the national electrical systems, organizing a terrorist attack response rehearsal, and testing of crisis communication systems. On the other side of the security executive, the military participates in international interventions and operations that are politically connected to societal security, if not directly. The military establishment may therefore also experience risk differently than the civil administration.

A hub for new security knowledge

DSB publishes continuously its reports on and evaluations of different societal concerns. The publishing is part of the political will for a more open security dialogue. One consequence may be the identifications of risk areas, but also the communication of the state as a constant evaluating body of security, risk and threat. PC 17 and the communications from DSB state clearly that the low level of risk provides opportunity to test and evaluate identifiable security scenarios.

What is essential to underscore is that, in an era where popular, political and strategic perceptions of insecurity in Norway tend toward an intermixing of societal and strategic security questions, the Norwegian DSB represents a hub or meeting place of security knowledge. Despite the fact that DSB is not linked to official Norwegian networks of information such as the Police Security Service (PST) and the National Security Authority (NSM) it possesses the analytical standpoint for a more unified implementation of an increasing hybrid form of security knowledge. It is also important to note that the military are not transparency oriented. The articulation of security can therefore to a large extent come from DSB.

The constant flow of security related information may also contribute to placing security on society’s horizon. This may lead to a perception of society as a secure place or in some cases insecure. The impact of this is not clear or conclusive. DSB does not measure the element of insecurity raised by securitization. The mandate is limited to bringing security and evaluating security.

Globalization and democracy

Norwegian security thinking is presented in PC 17 as a total concept that at any point can respond as close as possible to the level of the threat event and is, in addition, suited to identifying security issues that would be commonly handled by **civilian departments**. An international ideational feature is also stressed, namely, that while international events may impact on security in a specific time, such events must not impact on the organizational structure of security. Yet Norway relies on alliances to help protect its sovereignty rather than the sole use of its own forces, which commits the state to non-national policies. This is particularly important if seen in the light of protection against the encroachment of security activities on **civil liberties**. Norway's traditional policy is one that adheres to the conviction that the **advancement of democracy** has a long-term positive effect on security. At the same time, the lack of democracy elsewhere is not considered a direct threat to Norway.

Preparedness is thus highlighted as much as **response**. In this way **risk** has a means of understanding that future threat comes to play as much a role as planning for responses in real time.

It is essential to keep in mind that '**security stress**' is seen to regard all matters on the security continuum and that overburdening of the very categories of security and insecurity could lead to an eroding of the usefulness of the concept of societal security and, collaterally, of the sharpness of the concept of security in general. Furthermore, the civil emphasis on security organization does not meet the challenge of individual or **group insecurity** faced by certain members of society, especially regarding **religious and ethnic minorities**.

It is important to recall that the main provider of information on risk and threat perceptions to both civil and military administrations is the military research establishment. FFI's primary focus has been to deal with the **national security** of society as a whole and not with potential alienation, fragmentation or insecurity among specific groups or individuals. On the contrary, the emphasis of current research on threats to Norway at best focuses on the reverse cause, the threat of alienated individuals and fragmented groups on society at large. Such groups or individuals become part of a politically recognized problem, yet not something incorporated into security strategies, outside an identification as a potential risk factor.

Pressures on national values

Distinct among the main interests of both traditional and societal security is the protection of social values. Yet when one first begins to identify a set of

national values one quickly finds values that are shared internationally. There is no clear or exclusive Norwegian exception. However, Norway has promoted some values over others based on need, utility and the particularity of Norwegian geography and traditions¹. The colonial history of occupation and suppression bears more mark on Norwegian security thinking than the war-lordism of the Viking era. Yet the same alliances that are meant to keep Norwegian borders safe such as NATO commit Norway to a way of thinking on security that is not necessarily borne from Norwegian perspectives.

International cooperation effects on Norwegian security organization

The increased importance of international cooperation and events commits Norway to engage in forms of security that reflect these events. NOU 2003, *The Security of the Nation* stipulates that it is the core interest of national concern that are to be protected, not the indirect interest through allied parties abroad. However, allied forces or personnel on Norwegian soil are to be protected. This is based on the conclusion that it is the sovereignty of the state and its security that are to be protected. However, in Norway as elsewhere in an increasingly globalized world, there is no sharp delimitation between the inner and outer security of the state. Furthermore, the NOU suggests adding threats stemming from terrorist attacks against critical infrastructures to the traditional targets of espionage, war, occupation and attacks on central government to the penal code section that deals with national security. This is suggested despite the acknowledgement that Norway has little risk of being attacked and may demonstrate how international climate has impact. Hence, the NOU suggests slimming the understanding of 'national interests' to core values with direct national interest but simultaneously recognizes threats against other member states or allies as affecting Norwegian security preparedness.

This brief suggests that Norway will continue to incorporate non-Norwegian security interests in its national agendas, and that due to the principle of equality, responsibility and proximity this has potential effects down to the regional and local level. The ambiguities in the conceptualizations in the civil and military administrations and in executive roles also impact on the operative as well as conceptual state of societal security in Norway.

¹ Norway describes its civilian and socio-democratic features as key national values.