

## Human Values and Security Technologies

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### Values: Human and Technological

Technology and human values are deeply inter-linked. Yet, through educational traditions, scientific paradigms and institutional inertia, they tend to be systematically isolated from each other. The conceptual bridge between them is *value*. Both technologies, on the one hand, and human society and life, on the other, are dependent upon their own understandings of value. *Value* is thus the starting point of our analysis. What, then, is value?

There are a wide range of theories of value. For our purposes, we wish to simply differentiate between a *technical economics-based* and a *culturally or socially based* notion of value.

According to neoclassical economics, the *value* of a thing is identical to the *price* it would fetch in an open market. It is the worth of something relative to other things. Historically, the debate on economic value has revolved around the degree to which things have *intrinsic* value, as well as the degree to which such value can be *added* or *transformed*.

According to more *culturally* or *socially* based conceptions of value, the 'value' of a thing is based on the particular *quality of property* of the thing that makes it valuable. Such properties are most often either principles or standards that are socially accepted, or moral ideas about what is good and right.

Thus, in social terms, it is not the *materiality* of a technical installation or structure that determines its value to society: it is rather the socially, culturally determined *ideas* of value that are attached to it, the historically, geographically, environmentally and also economically determined standards and measures that give it meaning in our lives. It is

therefore not sufficient to refer solely to material or economic measures of value when considering technological objects. This is true for at least three reasons:

- First, the *market value* of commodities produced, converted or transported by technical infrastructures varies as a function of a number of *non-objective variables*, such as confidence, trust, fear, political climate and current events. The variation in oil prices is a significant example of this, but not the only one.
- Second, the cost of *financing* or refinancing (and, not least, *insuring*) infrastructures also varies as a function of non-rational or non-material factors, with fear, mistrust and insecurity at the forefront.
- Third, threat is in part *created* – or, at the very least, *supported* – by the existence of the object under threat. The creation of the object entails the creation of threat. Therefore, the *value* of an object is in part determined by the potential danger of its destruction.

There is thus a need for a kind of return to conceptual basics, to the basic ideas, concepts and definitions surrounding both human and technological values in Europe, in order to adequately bring safety and security to Europe.

The central principle is that *threat* involves an *assessment of value*, and value is a fundamentally social, cultural and ethical term. To determine a threat is to situate a thing – in this case, European infrastructure – in a system of values that is structured and determined by the sphere of European society and culture.

In order to move a step closer to this aim, let us look more closely at the nature of *threat*.

### Threat and Social Value

In this sense, a threat is not simply an *unknown* danger lying in wait, ready to be launched upon us in some unknown way at some unspecified time. Threat is not *incidental* or *accidental*, or at least not entirely so. Nor is the *effect* of a threat independent of those targeted by it. Threat is not determined by *others* alone. It is codetermined by *those who are under threat*. This is why one can say that it is the existence of objects of value that creates *threat* by virtue of creating *value*.

Threat is implicitly linked to what has *value* for us. It is linked to the *possibility* that what we hold as valuable could disappear, be removed or destroyed. Objects of no value cannot be threatened in the same sense as those that have value. The key to understanding threat therefore lies in understanding the systems that link human *interests*, *values* and *things*, such as infrastructures.

What, then, is the threat of *terrorist* attack? Terrorism goes well beyond ordinary threat by aiming at the *fear* of loss of what has value, and by aiming to produce a *signal effect* of meanings from the very insecurities we *already* possess, insecurities that are *already* within us. These insecurities often have their origins from other contexts, from other times. They breed and mature in the hearts and minds of us all. They have their roots in both *past events* and *current vulnerabilities*. Insecurities are caused both by the *real*, *objective* presence of threat and by the very efforts of our authorities to protect us from threat. The disconcerting experience of security control and the presence of heavily armed security forces at international airports is only one illustration of this.

How are value, threat and fear linked? The ideal terrorist, if such a thing exists, tries to find the fit between *what we value*, the *fear* of its loss implicit in that value, and the *political interests* sought by those who carry out the act, though this link is never perfect or ideal.

It is not disruptions to the train service or to oil production, nor even the poisoning of local water supplies *in themselves* that are significant for the terrorist. Rather, it is the *loss of confidence* in rail services, oil production, the water supply and infrastructural services in general. It is not the *reality* of a computer virus in itself that we have to fear and that a terrorist might use as a tool, but rather the *fear* of the release of a virus, the presence of a kind

of *symbolic virus* – if you will permit me the metaphor – the *contagion* of insecurity, that disseminates distrust and fear, both in the world of private commercial services around which the European society is organized, and in terms of international trust and faith in a globalized market system.

We must therefore not fall back into a logic of the *military fortress*, in which the protection of *material* supplies is a key to victory. We must remain aware of the socially and culturally determined systems of *meaning* that are the central concern of terrorist threat. It is less our physical security that must be assured, as our *moral* security.

### The Value of Destruction

In the disconcerting logic of terrorism, *destruction* is of course a central *value*. Nothing is worth protecting or even saving if it does not have value. Nothing that serves or unites what we hold to be important can be separated from a certain kind of value. The valued thing is indispensable precisely because there is a cost associated with its loss. Perhaps more crucially in regard to possible response to terrorist threat, one can say that nothing is worth attacking if it has no value.

As absurd or uncivilized as terrorism might seem to us, it has a distinct function and logic. Indeed, it is this logic that assures the force of its name. If we know something to be terrorism – and all the signs of our public discourse would indicate that we do – then there is a distinct structure or form to it, and thereby a distinct predictability.

By the same token, terrorism respects a certain logic of threat. Terrorism formulates a relatively clear and instrumental aim – that of causing fear, weakening social and political solidarity, disrupting the institutional function of society and interrupting the exercise of the casually expected freedoms of liberal society. No part of the terror project has the destruction of infrastructure as its final goal: it is only a means to another goal, the disruption of a cultural and socially determined way of life. Terrorism is a means to a *non-technical end*. Judge as one must both its ends and means, it obeys, more or less efficiently, an instrumental, goal-oriented rationality, which is in the big picture little interested in the technical values of Europe.

Terrorism thus chooses its targets and its means of attack in a manner that lends itself to predictability. The central axis of this logic – for the terrorist as for civil society – is a certain notion of value. Terrorism is without effect if it does not affect what has value for others. Both the ability of terrorism

to successfully *weaken* society by attacking its infrastructure and *our* ability to *protect* society by protecting its infrastructure depend on a certain calculus of value, both human and technical.

Unfortunately, the technical–economic–material view of value is particularly inept at seizing the value of *spectacle* implicit in today's terrorism. Through the virtues of global communication and our media-saturated society, the new generation of terrorism creates the spectre of a new kind of destruction, namely, the *spectacular*. While terrorism has a long prehistory prior to 11 September 2001, one of the great innovations of the attacks on New York and Washington was that they were orchestrated to take place before the eyes of millions. The menace is based on a carefully orchestrated spectacle.

Can the concept of *war* help us to understand the relation between security and values?

### Classical War and the Logic of Terrorism

The function of *conventional* war and warfare is instrumental. The function of *terrorism* is psychological and symbolic. Its logic must therefore be understood differently. It is clear that European infrastructure is under threat. But, the logic of this threat is entirely different from that of the kind of threat produced and expected in wartime settings:

- First, the primary *value* of the target for the terrorist is *symbolic*, not material.
- Second, the primary *value* of the target is not determined by its use-value. The material, economic, strategic consequences of destroying or not destroying the target cannot be directly correlated or calculated in correlation with any particular geopolitical aim.
- Third, the value of the target has political and social consequences in fields and domains *not associated with* the target. The consequences of terrorist threat are not military, but *social* and *cultural*. Terrorist threat is both affected by and causes changes in social and cultural values.
- Fourth, the *value* of the target is not stable or fixed. The determination of value of a target cannot be transferred or repeated from one target to another. The risk and the value-basis of that risk, the danger and the value consequences that the threat implies, vary from one *social* setting to another.

other. Like value itself, risk cannot be determined objectively and consistently.

- Fifth, the determination of the value of a terrorist target has a *second-order dimension*. In other words, the determination of a target and means of attack is derived from perceptions of the symbolic significance of both. These vary according to the public mood, the political ambiance, economic conditions, and the sense of freedom, patriotism, etc within the public.
- Sixth, the determination of the *consequences* of an attack – the presupposition of any consequence management – is also second order. The *emotional*, even *moral*, disruption such an attack would cause in a population, the ideological or symbolic effect it may have, will depend upon a number of factors *not objectively present* or even associated with the attack itself. Rather, these are determined by previous experience, previous fears, allusions, associations and meanings. They depend upon already existing fears, on political tendencies. They depend on the social, cultural and moral values of the population. Lastly, they depend on the vision of the future, the scenarios of fear created by the present attack.

### Terrorism and Meaning

The aim of a terrorist attack is to create a certain kind of meaning. The successful terrorist attack is meaningful and projects enduring meaning. Terrorist threat to material infrastructure is *not about infrastructure*: it is about threat. The aim is not to disrupt electrical supply, computer networks, or water and oil supplies: it is to disrupt *confidence* in these things. Threat – or rather *more* threat – will also be the desired result of terrorism. That is what sets it aside from classical war combat.

The notion of European safety and security protection thus clearly grows out of two lines of reflection, more or less at odds with each other. I believe, however, that these two lines of reflection are unifiable. *One* is an extension of the essential economic freedoms embedded in the long-term project of European construction: subsidiarity, autonomy, liberal principles, an understanding of the world and of technology relating to the *real* damage that could potentially be caused by a violent attack of one kind or another. The *other* is a reflection on the notion of threat and the nature of interconnectedness. This is a discourse of the *imaginary*, the *playing field* of terrorism.

For terrorism nourishes a fundamental sense of insecurity that inhabits us all. Even though the attack is over, the target destroyed, damage done, people hurt or killed, the attack is essentially a reference to another, future attack, to an attack that has not yet taken place, but that is living in our imagination, an attack that is brewing in the hearts of every man and woman. The attacks of 11 September 2001 were catastrophic only in part because of what *actually* happened on that day. They were also catastrophic because they fulfilled a *collective fantasy* of fear and destruction. We can see evidence of this fantasy in countless disaster movies of the last decades. In this sense, the terrorist attack of the future is not really in the future at all. It has *already taken place* in our minds. The danger, the fear, the trepidation, and the economic, social and moral costs are already being paid today.

### Conclusion

In summary, the fundamental weakness in our 'defences' against terrorist violence is that they often build purely upon a set of *technological values*. Yet, a terrorist attacker will not seek to disrupt the technical aspects of its target with technical aims. Terrorist attack aims at a different pillar of technical infrastructure: its social, cultural and even ethical value. That value cannot be swept away by deploying more or stronger *fortress* solutions. The symbolic meaning can only be countered with the force of *meaning*.

To understand security and insecurity also presumes that one understands the socially and culturally determined values and motivations of those who would do harm. Sound, meaningful, effective and cost-efficient security research activities requires research aimed at a thorough understanding of the social and cultural forces that (1) shape the values determining what is secure and insecure; (2) motivate harm to what is of value; and (3) provide guidance in determining effective, appropriate and just response to threat. The primary weakness of current thinking a protection and prevention against terrorist attack is that it essentially builds on

an understanding of security as directed toward *things*. It must in addition be concerned with the significance, assumptions and consequences of the security of *people*.

In research on safety and security, human knowledge and human behaviour must not be seen as mere *tools* to be used in order to effect technological solutions to security problems. 'People' must not be seen as a *means* to an *end*, instead of the end itself. Technological 'solutions' to security that do not seek to address the human at the heart of security and insecurity may end up defeating themselves – or even the fundamental aims of the European project.

Human life must therefore be regarded as the *aim* and *end* of security. Technology applied in security research that does not seek its finality in human value will ultimately have no value. Security research that by design or neglect becomes detached from the fundamental humanity of the European project risks becoming a source of insecurity instead. Among the oldest traditions of the European project is the notion that Europe is a project based on a set of shared *values*. These values must thus be the alpha and omega of our security research. If the European Union faces a security challenge, it is related, in one way or another, to its security as a set of values to which all material, technological, industrial and military means must ultimately return.

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