

Human values and security technologies

History

September 11 2001 put the notions of ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ on the lips of the Western world.

First in relation to the US led ‘war on terror’, then, after the Madrid bombings of March 11, 2004, and again after the London bombings of July 7 2005, Europe has embraced a new global discourse of security.

Security, however, has not always been a central issue for Europe and for European research.

The idea of security has had a unique history in this part of the world. Like many things European it is bound to a certain set of traditions, a distinct historical experience, and a repertoire of ideas, customs and values.

At the moment of the birth of the European Union the **threats** were of a different kind than those we face today.

The core issues that have marked European construction at its outset was the experience of the World War II

European construction was originally conceived as a **project of peace**.

Robert Schuman, together with Jean Monnet and with the support of German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, formulated in 1951 the basic idea that the only sure way to prevent future armed conflict on European soil—and in particular between France and Germany—was not to shelter the nations from each other, but rather to **integrate** them.

In this sense, Europe’s most clear historical enemy was its **own** historical divisions.

European ‘security’ politics in the early years of the EU’s construction was formed around the ‘insecurity’ caused by Europe’s own internal oppositions, cultural differences and historically shaped animosities.

The quest for peace and security was based on a perceived need for overcoming these divisions.

European particularity

On the one hand, what does this uniquely European institutional evolution imply for the **security** of Europe?

Is there a distinctiveness in European history and culture with implications for how we confront security challenges?

What indeed is 'European security'?

What would it mean to say that Europe is **insecure**?

What does it mean to say that Europe is **threatened**?

Is it the subways, bridges and railways, nuclear plants and other buildings that are under threat? Is it the ships and harbours, the sea lanes from the oil-exporting Middle East that are in danger? Is it the oil and gas installations in the North Sea?

Is it Europe's communications infrastructure that is exposed to attack? Is it Europe's 'borders' or its political leaders who are endangered?

Or do threats concern **something else**, something more fundamental?

The challenge in answering questions lies in our basic understanding of **what threat is**, what it means to predict it, what it means to react to it, and what special challenges are brought by the new era of transnational terrorism.

These difficulties, I want to suggest, are **not merely technical**.

Rather, the challenges emerge from the negotiation of human values that make European life what it is and the security technologies required to secure it.

They challenge for European security research, I will argue, is both to calibrate technological research to **human** needs, aspirations and fears of the citizens of Europe.

Thus **value** is the starting point of our analysis. What then is value?

Theories of value

There are a wide range of theories of value. For our purposes we wish to simply differentiate between a **technical economics-based** notion of value 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 bring in an open market.

It is the worth of something relative to the other things.

Historically the debate on economic value has revolved around the degree to which things have **intrinsic** value, and 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 thing that makes it valuable, i.e. 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 which give it meaning in our lives.

It is not enough 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 price is a significant example of this, but not the only one.

Second, the cost of **financing**, or re-financing (and, not the 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 things that are perceived to be threatened. Society and threats to society constitute each other.

The central principle is that **threat** involves an **assessment of value** and that value is a fundamentally social, cultural and ethical term.

To determine a threat is to situate a thing in a system of values that is socially, culturally and politically structured.

Implications

This implies that 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.

The **effect** of a threat independent of those targeted by it.

Threat is not determined by **others** alone.

It is co-determined by **those who are under threat**.

This is why one can say that it is the existence of critical infrastructures which create **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 do have value. The key to understanding threat therefore lies in understanding the systems which link human **interests, values** and **things**, such as infrastructures.

The threat of 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 is **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 all of us. 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 effort of our authorities to protect us from threat. The disconcerting experience of security control and the presence of heavily armed security forces at all international airports is only one illustration of this.

How are value, threat and fear linked? The ideal terrorist act 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. While infrastructure experts know and understand technical weaknesses in infrastructures, threat analysis must also take into account the human dimensions of loss associated with these infrastructures. This naturally includes the consideration of how our lives would be practically

changed by the destruction of such infrastructures. However it also includes consideration of how our lives would be changed by the fear and insecurity created by such events, and how such fear asserts **control** on our lives and implants **insecurity** into our relation to both other **potential** targets and other aspects of our daily existence.

It is not the disrupted trains service, or oil production, not even the poisoning of a local water supply **in themselves**, which is significant for the terrorist, as horrible as these things may be.

Rather, it is the loss of **confidence** in rail service, oil production, water supply and in infrastructural services in general.

It is not the **reality** of a computer virus in itself that we have to fear and which a terrorist might use as a tool, but rather the **fear** of the release of a virus, the presence of a kind **symbolic** virus that disseminates distrust and fear, both in the world of private commercial services around which the European society is organized, but also in terms of international trust and faith in a globalized market system.

We must therefore not fall back into a prophylactic logic of threat.

The logic of the **military fortress**, in which the assurance of **technical** security is a key to survival.

It is the socially and culturally determined systems of **meaning** that are the heart of threat and insecurity.

They are thus also the central concern of terrorist threat.

It is less our physical security that must be assured, as it is our **ethical** security. Security is in this sense profoundly ethical.