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From Threats to Tasks: Making and Implementing National Security Policy

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Introduction

Security Policy is the name we give to the government-wide, coordinated policy of a nation to define and pursue its wider security-related objectives. It is a policy which is made at the *strategic* level, and implemented at the *operational* level. From it are deduced a number of other policies, notably (but by no means exclusively) that for defence. This article is concerned with how such policy is made (both intellectually and practically) and then how it is then implemented.

Three preliminary remarks are worth making. First, much writing about national security policy is western-centric, assuming large, powerful states with sophisticated government systems and a wide and varied security agenda. Such studies are of doubtful utility outside a narrow range of countries, and this article is therefore deliberately focused primarily on the making of security policy in small and medium-sized nations, whose concerns will be regional rather than global. Second, much other writing is concerned with issues of transparency, oversight, parliamentary involvement etc, which, although worthy, are secondary. Not only do you have something to oversee before oversight is of any value, but a welldesigned and well-functioning security policy system means that such issues are of lesser significance, and a bad system is not usually remediable by oversight anyway. Finally, this article limits itself, for simplicity, to the traditional list of security sector elements – military, police, intelligence services, as well as diplomacy and the central coordination of security. This means that I do not really touch on the Human Security argument. To do so would not simply make this article very long and complex; it would also introduce a whole range of other issues which sit uncomfortably with thinking about traditional security questions. In effect, a Human Security thesis argues that practically *everything* is part of the security sector, and therefore writing about the security sector is equivalent to writing about the coordination of government itself.

The Background

Before a national security policy can be put in place, a series of fundamental intellectual and political decisions need to be taken. Unlike, say, education, national security is not an intuitively obvious subject, and the expression is often used to mean very different things. Traditionally, the concept (though the term itself was seldom if ever employed) referred to the need to protect the physical integrity of a nation from outside attack. In the period between the rise of the nation state and about the middle of the twentieth century, the threat was usually conceived of as foreign invasion, and the solution was normally military preparations and the search for allies and protectors. But even by the First World War, the consequences of the spread of modern political and economic ideas caused national leaders much anguish: could their own populations even be relied upon? What happened if socialists and trades unionists, with their internationalist orientations, refused to fight? In the event, they fought anyway, but that did not prevent the French government, for example, maintaining a secret list of thousands of political and intellectual figures, to be arrested if necessary to safeguard the war effort. The coming of the Bolshevik régime in Russia, with its strident modernism and internationalism, and the subsequent spread of Communist parties around the world, produced for the first time the fear that ideas rather than physical invasion could be the main threat to the integrity of a state. Thus from the 1920s on, various political figures seized power in different countries around the world to "save" them from communism (or democracy; they were often unclear about such distinctions).

This is the background to the first formal adoption of the term, in the United States in 1947. The concepts and structures then introduced remain by far the dominant model even today, and are thus worth a moment's attention. The National Security Act of that year, and the National Security Council which it established, became models around the world. They were followed by National Security Council document 68 (NSC 68), whose direct influence was limited, since it was highly classified, but whose indirect influence was enormous. The document did not attempt to argue that the United States faced a conventional military threat - or any direct threat at all - but rather that the Soviet Union represented "the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin." It was animated by "a new fanatic faith" and "seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world." In such a context, every development in every society in the world was of interest to the security of the United States, and all possible measures had to be employed to counter Soviet designs.[1]. Thus, a 1953 document directed that the US should covertly stimulate acts of resistance in Eastern Europe, with the aim of discrediting the local political authorities and provoking Soviet intervention.[2] So far as can be judged, the Soviet Union had much the same fears, and responded in much the same way, although its example was less influential.

Collectively, these developments, and their domestic equivalents - the spy scares and loyalty investigations - produced what one historian has described as a "national security state."[3] Yet this kind of thinking was by no means confined to the super-powers. It reached its acme, perhaps, in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. Convinced that the apartheid régime faced a "total onslaught" directed from Moscow, and including diplomatic, military, ideological and cultural elements, a highly sophisticated and complex "total strategy" was implemented under the Presidency of PW Botha (1984-89). The strategy – which took its inspiration from French counter-insurgency thinkers such as André Beaufre - was overseen by a State Security Council, and supported within the country by a National Security Management System, which brought together all parts of the security sector.[4] It was also influential in Latin America, where, in an interesting complete reversal of traditional national security thinking, various right-wing régimes cooperated in what was called *Plan Condor*, sharing information, carrying out joint operations and even cooperatively assassinating each other's political dissidents.[5]

If the immediate ideological stress and paranoia of the Cold War have now receded, the fact remains that generations of this kind of thinking, all over the world, have fundamentally influenced how those who make and write about national security conceive it. In addition, Cold war paranoia was both inspired by, and in turn further influenced, two other mental habits, which still have a major effect on security policy as it is made in different countries.

Firstly, it can be argued that the Cold War paranoia described above is only an extreme case of the application of Realist and Neo-Realist interpretations of international relations generally. These paradigms, easily-grasped, if actually rather useless at explaining actual state behaviour, appear, in their popular form, to depict a world of endlessly clashing interests, where states continually seek to maximize their gains at the expense of others, and conflict is therefore normal and even welcome. The perception that the world *is* like this (as Realists claim) naturally leads to a concept of a competitive security policy based on response to threats, since other nations are also bound to act according to the same criteria. This paradigm remains extremely influential, especially if economic considerations are included under the heading of national security. Thus, the currently-influential neo-mercantilist doctrine of "competitiveness" assumes that the wealth of the world is essentially fixed (or increasing very slowly) and that it is for each state to grab as much as it can. (In fact, of course, in economic relations, as in international relations themselves, cooperation is more the norm).

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[1] A copy of NSC-68 can be found at http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm. The ideas were not, of course, new; they had been common currency on the political right since the 1920s. They did not represent a consensus in Washington at the time, but became dominant with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1953.

[2] See http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-7/01-01.htm

[3] Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State*, new edition, London, Penguin Books, 1980.

[4] See Kenneth W Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986.

[5] A large online archive of documents and analyses of Plan Condor, in English and Spanish, is at http://larc.sdsu.edu/humanrights/rr/Latin%20America/PLA.html

Second, is the concept of "threat" itself. This is so much part of our intellectual furniture that we forget that it is an idea actually quite limited in time and place. With the increasing sophistication of states, developments in transport infrastructure and taxes provided from an economic surplus, it became possible, in the 19th century, to field and deploy large conscript armies on a permanent basis. With the boundaries between the new nations states and the overlap of ethnic groups providing something to fight about, and existing military technology limiting the likely damage to tolerable levels, it became possible to talk about "threats," inasmuch as a neighbour could plausibly threaten to invade some, or all, of your territory and derive benefit from it. After 1945, nobody contemplating the ruins of Europe could believe that war for territorial gain was an option anymore, and even the most fervent believers in a Soviet Threat usually accepted that, were a war to *actually* break out, it would probably be through accident or miscalculation. Threatism has nonetheless triumphed, all over the world, even though (as in Africa) the idea of territorial conquest has no place in the history of many regions. All countries now have Defence Forces to defend against the Defence Forces of others. At its worse, as in the Cold War examples reviewed above, this type of thinking induces a kind of paranoia which encourages the search for a Threat – any threat – to fill an existential void. And of course the prophecy can be self-fulfilling; treating a state or an entity as a threat is a good way to turn them into one. But even when the temptation to paranoia is resisted, the mental habits of Threat remain powerful, and lead to conceptions of the functions of armed forces which are at variance with reality, and sometimes with common sense. So to take an example more or less at random, the Namibian Constitution (Article 119) establishes a Defence Force "in order to defend the territory and national interests of Namibia." But against whom? South Africa? Angola? What would be the point? And why would those countries wish to invade Namibia anyway? If the constitutional provisions were an accurate description of reality, one would expect to see regular exercises in which the NDF deployed to the border to practice defeating an invasion. In fact, of course, nothing of the kind ever happens.

Here, perhaps, we can see the confusion of two related but distinct issues. There is the symbolic (and to some degree practical) role of guarding frontiers and demonstrating independence, described in more detail below, and there is the old fashioned idea of physical defence of territory against attack. The first is a reasonable component of any defence policy, but is often confused with the second, which generally is not. As a result, whilst most countries' *actual* defence and security policies emphasise such things as regional security, peacekeeping, internal security and regional or local status, they are still rhetorically committed to defence against Threats, and therefore they are tempted to earnestly seek them. Changing this mental habit, from the search for threats to the identification of tasks, is perhaps the most important conceptual step that a state can take in the development of a satisfactory security policy.

To some degree, also, defence bureaucracies are caught in a trap of their own making. Foreign threats have historically been a good way of justifying military expenditure. In the Cold War, western governments were careful to explain to their populations that really they themselves would love to cut defence spending radically, but could not do so as long as the Soviet Threat remained. The rhetorical devices available to justify defence spending at a similar level over the last 15-20 years have not been very numerous, and so our old friend Threat has been retained as an advisor in many new and unexpected guises. (After all, we can scarcely have Ministries of War these days.) Indeed, it is just *easier* to convince publics and parliaments, never mind finance ministries, to fund defence forces if you can give them something to be frightened of, or at least worried about A sophisticated government may not literally try to scare its population any more with tales of foreigners coming to eat their children, but they will take refuge in vague formulations about "risks", the dangers and uncertainties of the modern world, and our old friends like "terrorism". None of this means anything concrete of course, and the actual structure and missions of the defence forces may have little to do with these "risks" – indeed, their major use may be in regional peacekeeping – but it all provides a comforting and reassuring discourse in which everyone can participate. By contrast, a debate about the contribution of the military to the government's foreign and interior policies, although more realistic, is much more complex intellectually as well as more difficult to sell politically. Most electorates have a fairly atavistic conception of the role of the military – it's to defend them from threats. Political support for, or even tolerance of, foreign deployments, is therefore often limited, even though such deployments may be the most valuable roles for the military to undertake. But it is really time now to start thinking these difficult questions through.

Yet a discourse of Threat is not without its management problems either. Not only can circumstances change rapidly, with yesterday's enemies becoming today's friends, and vice versa, but a Threatist paradigm encourages a rigidity of thinking and planning, and an inflexibility of force structure, that means that changes in the security environment can quickly make governments look foolish, and leave them without the capability to address real problems when they arise unexpectedly (as nearly all security problems do).

None of this, of course, means that national security policies cannot ever, or should not ever, be constructed on the basis of threats. There are regions in the world which are unstable, and there are certainly countries (Syria and Iran come to mind) which have some genuine reason to fear military attack, and cannot be criticised for pursuing a threat-based security policy.

But a security policy does not *have* to be based on this way of thinking, although it remains the norm even in countries in stable regions of the world. There is almost an infinite mix of scenarios, and one of the functions of security policy should be to analyse the security environment of a country, and recommend the type of policies to pursue. As will be seen below, military forces often serve security-related objectives, and are therefore worth retaining even when they do not face a credible threat.

This multiplicity of scenarios around the world makes it difficult to define what National Security objectives might be at any useful level of detail. (There are differences between the strategic situations of Canada and Cambodia, for example). Beyond bromides about peace and security, objectives are going to differ radically between states.[6] Even within a state, definitions are often contested; a sizeable minority of British people have always replied, when asked, that nuclear weapons add nothing to the security of their country. Clearly, such questions have no objective answer. However, an alternative and better approach is to look at National Security not as a product or an objective, but as a series of processes. Thus, we can say that

> National security strategy is the process of maintaining, coordinating and employing the assets of the security sector so that they contribute optimally to the nation's strategic goals.

Why National Security Issues are Complex

The above formulation suggests that strategic issues (not necessarily crises) which typically arise are sufficiently complex that they cannot be addressed by one part of the nation's security apparatus alone, but need to be looked at on a government-wide basis. That is what security policy is for. A couple of reasonably realistic examples may make this clearer.

1) For several years there has been unrest and violence in a traditionally unstable neighbour. One faction appears to have seized power. Refugees and combatants of other factions are alleged to be crossing the border. The new government demands that any armed opponents be returned. A whole series of questions arise. What exactly is going on? How secure is the new government? Are armed opponents actually in our country or are they just refugees? Should we recognise the new government? What are other states in the region doing? Do we try to intercept armed opponents of the regime, or stop them entering? Do we support the regime or would we like to see it replaced by another? What do we do about immigration? What about associated health and crime risks? What will the economic consequences be? Should we launch a regional initiative or join somebody else's? Should we involve the regional security apparatus? The UN? Are there already initiatives at that level? And so on.

2) In an unstable region where conflict is always a possibility, a well-meaning western power proposes an arms control and confidence building

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[6] I am implicitly adopting here a definition of security, and thus the security sector, which is “narrow” and traditional. Anything else would make this article much to long and complex.

regime, supported by threats and promises. How does a government decide whether the likely benefits of such a regime outweigh the likely risks, especially since its success depends on something – the goodwill of other states – over which it has no control? Left to themselves, individual departments may take rigid positions which make a compromise difficult. The Foreign Ministry will be professionally in favour of negotiations. The President or Prime Minister may be keen on a regional and international success. The Defence Ministry will be worried about the time that it would take to regenerate capability if things go wrong. The Finance Ministry will be hungrily anticipating savings. The intelligence services will be interested in what they can find out about others, but less keen to give their own secrets away.

In each case, there is a need for a clear, government-wide policy which tries to balance conflicting interests and to get the best result overall. A security policy approach can achieve this, provided it is correctly organised and structured, in the way which is described below. The alternative is either paralysis, or a series of inconsistent policies, or a policy which reflects what can be agreed by consensus, and is likely to be drained of all meaning.

As the above examples demonstrate, national security issues have implications at all sorts of different levels, both foreign and domestic. Even issues which appear completely parochial – an increase in one's defence budget, procurement of new systems, a reorganisation of the intelligence services – may spark comment and even criticism from abroad. Thus, every initiative taken by the Japanese government on defence issues will be greeted with pre-programmed criticism and spontaneous organised riots in other Asian countries. The trick, for the Japanese, is to allow for such reactions without being mesmerised by them.

How, intellectually, do we go about creating a security policy which pursues strategic objectives and enables a sensible response to crises? There are two components: first analysis and then capabilities and structures

Strategic Analysis

If we can escape intellectually from the Threatist paradigm, our first activity is to look at what constraining factors there are on security policy, and what degree of flexibility we have. It is useful to divide influences on security policy into three types; permanent, contingent and voluntary, accepting that there are overlaps between them.

Permanent factors, as the name implies, are factors which change very slowly, if at all, over time, and are effectively fixed for the fairly limited horizons of security planning. Thus, a nation may be large or small, an island or landlocked, have large neighbours, small neighbours or no neighbours at all, have natural resources or not, be in certain climatic areas, have a certain ethnic mix, and so forth. Moreover, some changes in these variables may be beyond easy influence; an aging population, changes in ethnic balances, climate change, exhaustion of natural resources, and so forth.

But even if these factors are effectively constant during the planning period, our reaction to them is not pre-determined, but usually *contingent*. For example, maritime and littoral states often have naval traditions, but (like Japan) they do not always do so. Island states like Britain may go through phases of involvement with, and then isolation from, their local continent. Likewise, states with no appreciable maritime tradition, like Germany a century ago or Korea today, may decide to invest in a Navy. A wealthy state may choose (like America after 1945) to use a large part of that wealth for military purposes, or (like Germany) it may prefer a lower profile. Thus, the South African government after 1994 made a conscious decision not to seek a military and security role on the continent, although it could easily have done so. It was forced eventually to alter this policy, but even now chooses to act with discretion. The new Russia could have retired into itself to try to heal the economic damage caused by the abandonment of the Communist system, but chose instead to continue to play the role of a super-power, and to use its gas and oil deposits as strategic weapons.

Finally, there are aspects of security policy which are entirely, or almost entirely, *voluntary*. An obvious example is participation in UN peacekeeping missions far from home. Countries may do this for financial reasons, for reasons of political profile, to feel good about themselves, or for other purposes. But it is fundamentally a voluntary activity. Defence relations are another case; some sort of relations with your neighbours are required, obviously, but much is a result of specific decisions. Thus, South Africa has privileged relations with countries such as Brazil, India and Australia, more than with Angola. Venezuela has cultivated links with Iran, as the two countries have identified common interests.

How might this work in practice? A state, let us say, has a long coast-line, substantial offshore mineral and fishing assets, a sizeable population, and is enjoying strong economic growth. It has few ethnic problems and its neighbours are generally stable, although piracy and smuggling are general problems. A plausible security policy in such a situation would give emphasis to naval forces and cooperation between the military, the police and coastguard services, to safeguard the economic assets which will produce further economic development. It might also promote regional maritime cooperation. In due course, the state might decide to increase its profile in the region by naval deployments (following the example of Malaysia and Korea, for example) and by contributing to multinational forces. Or it may decide quite the reverse; to concentrate on economic growth, and to retain the minimum military forces it needs to protect its coastline and economic interests.

National Strategic Objectives

These security policy orientations will be influenced mainly by the national strategic objectives of the government. Not all strategic objectives will have a security component: becoming a major manufacturing nation, for example, or developing a modern transport infrastructure, have relatively little to do with security, although security forces will in the end benefit from both.

But many strategic objectives do have a security implication. Developing economic resources, as we have seen, may well require military assets for their protection. Joining a regional security organisation, taking part in peacekeeping missions, helping, to stabilise a fragile neighbour, seeking security of supply for fuels and national resources – all these have an obvious security component. But some objectives have a less obvious link with the security sector. Imagine that, against substantial competition, a state intends to try for non-permanent membership of the Security Council. A whole variety of factors will be involved, including its ability to lobby for support by other nations. But finally, a state which wants to play a positive role in the Security Council, rather than just look smug, has to be able to take part in debates on an informed basis, talk knowledgeably when there is discussion of the use of military forces and, ultimately, be prepared to offer forces if the situation demands.

Like it or not, Great (or even Medium) Power status is intimately bound up with serious military capability, and the willingness to use it. As anyone who has ever taken part in international negotiation knows, there is an absolute and unbridgeable gap between nuclear and non-nuclear powers, in terms of influence and political status. Likewise, possession of biological or chemical weapons gives a state special *political* status, in spite of the military ineffectiveness of such weapons. But beyond that, the difference between a state which has influence in security issues, and one which is merely listened to politely, is that the former knows what it is talking about, and is ready and able to act if needs be.

Obviously, capable military forces are an important component of a strategy of influence of this kind. But by themselves they are inadequate. Some nations (Germany for example) hedge the use of their armed forces around with so many caveats, and so many layers of decision-making, that it is often not clear whether they will actually be available when needed. The United States, with its endless warfare between parliament and government, has many of the same problems. The influence of each is correspondingly reduced, since even the firmest declaration by its government can only be treated as a statement of intent. By contrast, a state with peacekeeping experience and qualified and experienced commanders, a state with a good intelligence capability, a state which is well-organised and well-prepared to talk about complex strategic issues, may well have a capability in advance of its actual size. More will be said about these issues in a moment.

However, an effective national security strategy is not only intellectually and managerially difficult, but depends also on the resolution of a whole series of issues, seldom articulated, about how a nation's security interests are defined, who has the power to define them, and what happens when different concepts of national interest compete with each other.

Traditionally, the security interests of a state were defined by its dominant political and economic forces, and did not necessarily reflect the interests of ordinary people. This will always be partly true, even today, in the absence of a perfect democratic system. As a result, one element of national security became the preservation of the interests, and the political dominance, of groups which had the power to define it. From the French Revolution onwards, therefore, there was a tendency to identify the preservation of the political and economic system of the country as an element of national security, and to seek to defend it militarily (or of course to attack it, depending on one's point of view). In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, George Orwell speculated that the successful defence of Britain against a German invasion would require a domestic political revolution first. [7] He had in mind, perhaps, that much of the French political, military and business classes actually welcomed defeat and invasion in 1940, because it enabled them to get rid of the hated Republic, which they saw as inimical to the security interests of the nation. (This defeat, indeed, was an outcome which they had for years been trying to bring about).[8]

In modern times, this kind of politico-economic conflict over definitions of national security is somewhat muted; lip service, at least, is paid to democratic principles. But there are areas where it cannot easily be ignored; international economic agreements, for example, are most unlikely to have consequences which affect all economic groups in the country in exactly the same way. But the major political problem in defining national security objectives today is really the social, ethnic and religious distinctions which exist in most societies.

The assumption behind the concept of national security is that the nation is sufficiently homogeneous and united that its citizens have common interests to be protected, and common objectives to be pursued. Concretely, this means, for example, that in a country with different ethnic groups, all of those groups are happy to live together within common frontiers, and united in resisting attempts to alter those frontiers, whether from inside or outside. Obviously, this is seldom the case in its purest form; separatism, regionalism, independence movements irredentism, territorial claims and so forth are facts of life in many parts of the world. In extreme cases (Bosnia, Israel, South Africa before 1994) competing groups have irreconcilable ideas about what the nation should be like, or even if it should exist at all. In authoritarian states, this is usually settled by brute force, and a concept of the national interest which emerges is inevitably partial and needs to be enforced by violence. (This dominance is not always of the larger group; the minority Tutsi dominated Rwanda until 1959 and after 1994, and in neighbouring Burundi have only recently agreed to share power).[9] But democracy does not make the resolution of this problem easier; indeed, it may make it more difficult, since elections have a habit of radicalising competing groups, as politicians stake out more extreme positions to get votes from the groups to which they are appealing. (This was the case in both the Bosnian and Rwandan examples)

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[7] George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1941.

[8] See for example Annie Lacroix-Riz, *le Choix de la défaite: les elites françaises dans les années 30.*Paris, Armand Colin, 2006.

[9] The distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi are not, of course, ethnic but socio-economic, rather like the distinction between aristocracy and peasantry in pre-modern Europe. But if anything this made the conflicts more difficult to resolve: an analogy would be a negotiated end to the French Revolution in 1790.

Any modern state has to deal with the consequences of ethnic, religious and social differentiation, and to try to construct a security policy which is generally acceptable. Sometimes this is difficult if not actually impossible. In Northern Ireland, a major national security issue for the British government for a generation, polls suggested that about ten per cent of the Catholic population of that province actively supported the IRA's objectives of uniting it with the Irish Republic, and perhaps several times that number were at least partly persuaded. No security approach to the problem could therefore reflect a complete consensus. The same can be true in reverse, of course; states may deal with internal tensions less firmly than some of their own citizens would like, for fear of exacerbating them further.

The Tools

Against this complicated political and intellectual background, states have to make national security policy as best they can with the tools at their disposal. These tools – collectively the security sector – are discussed individually now, before passing on to the question of their coordination.

The Military and Defence. The military is the heart of any security policy, and it would be very strange indeed to find a security policy which did not include a military component. But the question of the military's role in security policy, and its articulation with other parts of the security sector, is now more complicated than it ever was.

Obviously, the purpose of the military has always been more than to "fight and win wars"[10] At the most basic level, the military, with their pageantry, their flags and the uniforms, have always represented the essence of a nation and an important part of its self-image. The military in most societies began as the extended bodyguard of the ruler, and this is till evident today, when national leaders travel by military aircraft or the military provide ceremonial guards for public buildings. The very visibility of the military makes them a powerful political symbol; the arrival of central government troops in a disputed area, the despatch of even the smallest peacekeeping contingent, joint naval exercises, goodwill visits by ships – all of these can have a powerful symbolic impact. The creation of a new national Army after a conflict has become a cliché, but one that can, nonetheless indicate that an important page has been turned.

Domestically, the primary function of any military force is to enable the state to retain the Weberian monopoly of organised violence, as well as to demonstrate, in even the most peaceful society, that it is in fact doing so. A state which fails to do this not only fails to carry out its duty to protect its people, but also forfeits their respect. History suggests that a government, whether elected or not, which provides safety and security for its people, will generally be regarded as legitimate. By contrast, a government which cannot do this, whatever its other virtues, forfeits the respect of the people, who look for security elsewhere, often at the hands of militia groups, or even organised crime. If there are challenges to this monopoly of legitimate violence, from separatist groups, disgruntled minorities or political opponents, then the military can be used to defeat such groups as part of a wider strategy, accepting, of course, that military victory in such a situation can still lead to political defeat unless the military are used correctly.

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[10] Misunderstood by Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State, The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military relations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1957, p.7.

The international uses of the military will naturally vary with the environment – size and wealth, neighbours, stability of the region etc. But in all cases the symbolic function of the military is important, in underlining the existence of a national identity, and reminding neighbours that a state has the desire to police its borders and defend its sovereignty. The reverse is also true: imbalances of power make neighbours nervous, and states have to recognise that a large and capable military apparatus will have an intimidatory effect on neighbours whether or not that is the effect which they are seeking

Indeed, Machiavelli's dictum that he who goes unarmed also goes un-respected unfortunately remains generally true, even today. Relative military power necessarily affects the relationship between neighbours and states in the same region, although not always in a straightforward fashion.[11] A small state with a good military capability can exert more influence than its size would suggest. Similarly, in international and regional coalitions, no amount of financial assistance and diplomatic influence can secure the kind of influence which the provision of even quite small military forces can bring.[12]

The issue, however, is one of capability of forces and willingness to use them, rather than just size. The armed forces of Israel dominate the Middle East, in spite of their relatively small size. To have the only serious air transport capability in a region, or to be the only operator of submarines or supersonic aircraft, can be a major political advantage. Likewise, even quite a modest capability is sensitive areas – Special Forces, for example – can reap considerable political dividends. More generally, well-trained and competent forces usually result from an infrastructure which can itself be a source of political influence through the training of other nations.

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[11] For some years, I ran a simulation exercise for Southern African students on a course organised in Johannesburg. The exercise was constructed round a fictional, but realistic, scenario involving countries with very different military capabilities. The players – military officers, but also diplomats and civil servants, and parliamentarians and NGO workers - generally reported that they had been greatly affected by the type of country they had played. Players from the largest country, with a powerful military, routinely played in an aggressive and insensitive fashion.

[12] Japan was for some years the major aid donor in Bosnia, but had limited political influence, and was denied membership of the six-nation Contact Group because it could not supply military forces.

In some cases, the possession of a single capability can have a decisive effect. Both Rhodesia, until 1979, and South Africa for some years thereafter, had the capability to conduct cross-border attacks against their neighbours, without those neighbours being able to respond in kind. This fact fundamentally affected the security of southern Africa. The same can be true in reverse. Although the conventional armed forces of North Korea are effectively useless now, even for defence, their stocks of medium-range conventional missiles mean that the country can inflict damage on the interests of an attacking state out of all proportion to what such a state might hope to gain from an attack. Likewise, chemical and biological weapons can act as a political disincentive to attack even by very powerful forces, in spite of their general military ineffectiveness, because of their effect on public opinion.

Conversely, military forces can also build trust and stability by joint exercises, visits, exchanges of personnel and so forth. Given the powerful symbolism of the military, even quite small initiatives – such as mutual ship visits at the end of the Cold War – can have major political benefits. Joint operations and training of forces are important, if difficult, steps in regional integration: the lack of such of such arrangements in ASEAN, for example, means that that organisation has less influence than it otherwise would, in spite of its economic power.

Finally, and recalling the discussion above of the three levels of the security policy environment, military forces can be used for the wider good, as participants in peacekeeping and similar operations, whether regionally or under the auspices of the UN. Yet two cautionary points need to be made immediately. First, experience suggests that such operations are more difficult than conventional war, and require superior training and discipline and more initiative. They should not be undertaken lightly, in the hope of quick financial or political gains. Secondly, such operations have been shown, in practice to be much more difficult and their results much more equivocal, than was once believed.[13] They are also much easier to get into than to get out of.[14]

Military forces, therefore, can be used in all sorts of ways to implements security policy, from the most aggressive to the most stabilising. But a defence capability is more than the military. Even quite small capabilities in research and development, in political and intelligence analysis, or in regional expertise and awareness, can pay great dividends in dealing with other states. In this kind of area, expertise is not directly proportional to size, and small and organised states – the Netherlands, Australia, Singapore and some Nordic states come to mind – often have influence beyond what one might expect. Likewise with larger neighbours; officials from Canada and New Zealand always claim that they have much more influence with their neighbours than the relative sizes of their countries might suggest.

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[13] See for example Simon Chesterman, *You, The People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration and State-Building*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, and Béatrice Pouligny, *Ils nous avaient promis la paix : Opérations de l'ONU et populations locales*, Paris, Sciences Po, 2004.

[14] The British government agreed, in 1992, to contribute one battalion to the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia, for six months. British forces finally withdrew fifteen years later.

It is probably in the area of sales and procurement that the defence organisation of a state – rather than just the military – makes its greatest contribution to security policy. States often fail to realise how important these issues are. For a supplier state, export of equipment means influence as well as financial benefits, and is often a part of a wider security strategy. Conversely, cutting of the supply of equipment is a powerful political signal. For the majority of states who are purchasers rather than sellers, however, the current buyers' market for defence equipment gives states extraordinary possibilities for achieving security policy goals. Too often states fail to understand this, and a choice becomes a sterile struggle between the military, who want the latest and best in spite of the cost, and the finance ministry, who want the cheapest even if it doesn't work. At the most basic level, intelligent negotiation should enable a state to secure more in economic benefits – not necessarily in the defence area – than it spends on the equipment. But more generally all kinds of political and military concessions can be obtained from competing suppliers – free training being perhaps the most obvious. Equally, there are pitfalls to avoid; military equipment is dependent on spares to work properly, and some states have an unfortunate reputation for playing politics with spares for equipment they supply. A wise purchaser will often be prepared to pay more in order to avoid being politically constrained in this way. Conversely, positive objectives can also be achieved by procurement policies: at its simplest buying equipment from a major military power in the region send one kind of signal, whereas buying from a supplier outside the region sends another. Decisions of this sophistication do, of course, rely on a properly constructed security policy framework as described below.

Intelligence

So much sheer nonsense has been written about intelligence that it is useful to go back to first principles before moving on to talk about the place of intelligence in national security policy.[15] Intelligence is a subset of information – indeed, many languages use the same word for both. Governments need information, as cars need petrol, if they are to do their jobs of reacting to events and trying to imagine what will happen in the future. Some of this information will be available from open sources, some from the normal relations between governments, some from privileged relations between specific governments, some from external sources, and so forth. But there is usually an irreducible minimum of information which cannot be acquired in this way and, if it is regarded as important, has to be acquired by underhand means. Thus, we can say that:

> Intelligence is the process of acquiring information from an entity (not necessarily a state) which that entity does not want you to have, without them realising you have acquired it.

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[15] I have said rather more about this in David Chuter, *Defence Transformation: A Short Guide to the Issues,* Pretoria, Institute for Security Studies, 2000, pp, 73-81.

Two logical consequences flow from all this, both extremely important. First, intelligence is, at bottom, no more than information collected in an underhand fashion, and so is not inherently more or less reliable than information found in open sources. National security policy planners have to make use of intelligence without giving it a status it does not deserve. As the *Butler Report* noted sagely:

> Intelligence merely provides techniques for improving the basis of knowledge. As with other techniques, it can be a dangerous tool if its limitations are not recognised by those who seek to use it.[16]

Secondly, intelligence should only be collected when it is both *important and relevant*, and when it *adds significantly* to what is already known. These qualifications are really self-explanatory, but they basically derive from the fact that, by its nature, intelligence tends to be difficult and expensive to collect, and can seldom be collected without political risk of some kind. This risk may be of the traditional kind (a human intelligence source exposed) but it can also be of a subtler nature; Intelligence is a game that everybody plays, but everyone denies; it is a form of organised collective hypocrisy. I spy on you and you spy on me, but we each pretend not to. If it becomes known that I have been monitoring your communications as we both prepare for a goodwill summit, you may have no political alternative to cancelling the summit, even if the leak simply confirms what you had already assumed.

Clearly, therefore, intelligence is the ultimate national security policy subject, where government-level coordination is required, both for reasons of targeting and for reasons of control. The targeting of intelligence services has to reflect strategic information requirements at a *national* level, that is to say the kind of information which the government *as a whole* requires. Thus, the military forces of a neighbour may not be the most important target: indeed, they may not be very important at all, compared to its plans to join a free-trade bloc or to send it leaders on a politically-important visit. There is accordingly a need for a system of central coordination of targeting, and a way of de-conflicting competing priorities, and this has to be done by agreement and negotiation between departments.

It should also be clear that the intelligence services have to be firmly directed and controlled so that they do what the policy-making departments want, rather than collecting what is easy or is interesting to them. The idea of "control" is often – as is normal in discussions of the security sector – rather over-interpreted to imply that intelligence organisations in themselves are dangerous to the public and have political ambitions of their own. In fact, history suggests otherwise; intelligence services tend to be technocratic in nature, working for whoever pays them, and seldom have political agendas as such. Indeed, recent experience (e.g. in Eastern Europe) suggests that the real danger is much more from intelligence services misused by politicians for their own purposes. Nonetheless, as already indicated, "control" by central government is required in two senses. First, intelligence organisations are far more likely than most other institutions to get government into trouble, and so clear rules have to be established about what can and cannot be done, and where approval has to be sought. It is seldom possible to conduct intelligence gathering against external targets without breaking the law somewhere, and this needs to be clearly articulated when operations are being approved. Secondly, there needs to be central direction about who does what, who is allowed to collect which intelligence and so forth, to stop needless competition and expensive duplication. In particular, there need to be a common understanding about which organisations are allowed to work and home, and which overseas.

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[16] *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*: *Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors*, London, The Stationery Office, 2004, p.28. The whole report is well worth reading.

So far, the concentration in this section has been on collection, because it is the most difficult and the most frequently misunderstood. But of course information of any kind is worthless unless it is put to use. If your neighbour is in fact considering high-profile reconciliation with a previous enemy, then it is important to have all of the information that you can obtain, properly organised and evaluated, so that sensible decisions can be taken. The main obstacle is usually rivalry between different analytical organisations – as well, of course, as the inherent difficulty of the exercise. The solution is a mixture of two principles. First, intelligence information should be distributed as widely as possible so that it can be evaluated and commented upon by experts. Secondly, competing analyses should be avoided by having a single assessment binding on all concerned. This is sometimes done by discussion and compromise, sometimes by a single central producer of analysis. The second is more effective, but is more difficult to do. The objective, in security policy terms, is that intelligence information should take its place seamlessly with other types of information so that decision-makers can have a proper picture.

The Police and Justice

The Police and the Justice system are an important part of the Security Sector, although, for obvious reasons, most of their activities are in a defined and separate part of it. They are relevant here, because, in the making of national security policy, there are several overlaps with the military and the intelligence services, as well, frequently, as an international dimension.

The police are, in a settled political order, the guarantors of everyday peace and stability; of the security without which ordinary life, and economic activity, cannot take place. One of the most difficult questions, especially after a conflict or during a crisis, is the relative importance of police and military activities. There is a risk of over-concentrating on the role of the military when in fact ordinary people are more at risk from criminals taking advantage of a chaotic situation. It is obvious, but always worth re-stating, that the two groups have very different skills and cannot be readily substituted for each other. For its part, a poorly performing police service can be very destabilising, since it undermines the credibility of the state and encourages people to put their faith in other entities. Likewise, a deficient justice system encourages vigilantism to make up for its supposed weaknesses, and discourages cooperation with the police.

Establishing roles and demarcation lines is a very important security policy issue, and has to be handled centrally to avoid competition and duplication. It is often necessary – as in the immigration example above – to decide what kind of problem has arisen, and who is going to do what to deal with it. In addition, there are two areas of particular difficulty; violence by armed groups and how to deal with organised crime.

Violence by internal or external non-state actors is in principle the responsibility of the police, since it is fundamentally a problem of law and order. In most countries, the rule of thumb – correctly – is that the police will continue to deal with the problem until the level of violence exceeds their ability to cope with it. The problem, of course, is that the argument is basically circular; the more militarised the police are, the higher the level of violence they can cope with. It comes down essentially to a question of how militarised you want your police to be. Different nations, even in the same area of the world, have thus chosen very different solutions. The Germans have a special police unit (*Grenzschutzgruppe 9*), the Dutch and French use police units with military status (the *Marechaussee* and the *Gendarmerie*), whilst the British, with their historical dislike of armed police forces, use elements of the military. The modalities of coordination and handover between ordinary police, paramilitary police and the military are complex and difficult, and mistakes can lead to disasters, both political and real.

Organised crime is important because it is perhaps the major threat to the integrity of smaller and weaker states today. By its very nature, it requires the development of skills – notably criminal intelligence –, which are complex and difficult to acquire, as well skills in managing highly complex prosecutions. It is not unreasonable for intelligence assets to be targeted against organised crime. Although crime-fighting is not a military task as such (and something has gone wrong when the military get routinely drawn into it), it is possible that criminal groups can be so well supplied and armed that military skills are required in certain cases to take them down. This should be the exception however, and the military skills required will be highly specialised.

Finally, there are police- and justice-related international issues in security policy. Regional police cooperation can be an important aspect of security policy, and can lead to more formal structures to combat organised crime, for example. The despatch of police components to international peace missions has lagged behind the military equivalent, for various practical reasons, but it is becoming more and more important. Finally, the emerging field of international criminal law, especially the establishment of tribunals after conflicts, also provides scope for initiatives. The Australian experience of domestic war crimes investigations in the 1980s enabled them to secure important positions in international courts which were set up subsequently.

Diplomacy and Politics

There is a tendency to see diplomacy and the use or threat of force as polar opposites, and even to moralise the difference, preferring one to the other as a matter of principle. In fact, properly managed, the two are complementary. Indeed, it would be true to say that diplomacy and international political activity (which extends, of course, beyond the professional activities of diplomats) is both a way of putting security policy into effect, and a contribution to its formulation in the first place. Clausewitz's argument remains just as valid today; military action has to have a political purpose, and the military, by themselves, can only create conditions for a political settlement, they cannot make it happen. This applies just as much to the defeat of a domestic insurgency, or the stabilisation of a volatile neighbour as it ever did to major wars. Thus, security policy is ultimately a set of strategic objectives, as suggested at the start of this article, and is put into place by a series of initiatives, some of which inescapably have to be political and diplomatic.

In practical terms, this means that foreign ministry staffs, as well as diplomatic advisers to a President or Prime Minister, must be fully involved in security policy making. They will be aware of international reaction, pitfalls and unexpected complications, as well as being able to explain, defend and lobby on the international stage. The practice of having senior diplomats occupying important positions in any security policy apparatus is common and often helpful.

The difficulty, of course, is that diplomatic and political activity is far less easy to calibrate than military force Its effects are much less obvious, and often you have no way of knowing what, if anything, has actually been accomplished. In particular, the rather discouraging experiences of the 1990s suggest that cease-fire arrangements and peace agreements will not necessarily endure, unless there is an underlying agreement among the parties that it is time to stop the fighting, or external actors have the power and determination to enforce a resolution. Agreements extracted from weak states by political and economic pressure to do or not do things, to sign treaties or agreements, are seldom effective in the longer term, and can leave a legacy of anger and resentment. Diplomatic and political agreements are not an objective in themselves. In some cases, as in Rwanda in 1993-94, they can make an already bad situation disastrously worse. Diplomatic activity has to be tightly coordinated with other elements of security policy if it is to be effective.

Organising Security Policy

The point has been made several times that security policy involves the interests of many groups, and requires contributions from these groups if it is to be carried out effectively. By way of a conclusion to this article, it is necessary just to add that such collaboration does not happen easily or automatically, and that structures and processes have to be set up to make it possible. The details will vary greatly between countries, because they will depend greatly upon the overall political culture. A state which is already highly centralised will probably establish a powerful central machinery; a state with a tradition of weak central government, perhaps with a history of coalition government, may introduce a much looser system based on compromise and bargaining. Experience suggests that the most effective solution will be based on the highest degree of centralisation reasonably achievable, given the political system.

In any event, there will usually be some kind of formal structure controlled by the staff of the President or Prime Minister. Whether it functions as a simple clearing-house, as a kind of glorified committee chair, or whether it plays an executive role will depend very much on the political culture of the country. But, as this article has tried to make clear, national security policy is an issue of such importance and complexity that some kind of a central organisation of this kind is inescapable, if confusion and rivalry is to be avoided.

The existence of a degree of central organisation also makes it possible to construct linkages with other elements of policy which are only peripherally related to security proper, but which may also be relevant. Economic policy is both an enabler and a weapon in international relations, although its actual effectiveness is often questionable. Education and health are major elements of the reconstruction of society after a conflict, but neither, of course, is worth pursuing unless a climate of security already exists. Judgements of this kind, as of when, for example, conditions are secure enough to attempt a relaunch of economic activity are fundamentally government-wide strategic ones, not least because they are often part of a multinational approach to a problem, and need to be considered in all their aspects. Finally, development ministries are increasingly being involved in the management of post-conflict situations, thus helping to take the load off the military, who are often pressed into service because they are all that is available. More ambitiously, it might be possible in future to integrate economic aid and security policy in the absence of a conflict. Not even their greatest defenders would claim that international economic assistance policies towards Africa in the last generation have actually increased stability and prevented conflict.

In essence, a state will have a security policy whether it likes it and realises it or not. The twin dangers, however, are that the policy will either be completely uncoordinated, with different organisations doing their own thing, or dominated by one group, often the military and intelligence services. This article is intended as a modest aid to doing things better than that.