

Why has the concept of national security undergone so many changes in recent years?

***“Survival is the imperative of every nation.
But there cannot be survival without security”.¹***

Security is fundamentally about people. According to Barry Buzan, “Security is primarily about the fate of human collectives, about the pursuit of freedom from threat. The bottom line is about survival, but it also includes a substantial range of concerns about the existence. Security is affected by factors in 5 major sectors: military, political, economic, societal & environmental”².

The state is hence responsible for its national security. State is the dominant form of political organization. It defines and protects the life, liberty and property of individual and groups through the creation of political and socio-economic order. It also protects the rights of its citizens from the harmful actions of other states and non-state entities. As long as the state remains the primary political actor and community, it will also be the primary agent and provider of and the referent of security.

The object of security is the nation. The nation is defined as a large group of people sharing the same cultural and possibly the same ethnic or racial heritage. The idea of

¹ Ministry of Defence, *Defence of Singapore*, MINDEF Public Affairs, 1994 p. 5

² Muthiah Alagappa, “*Rethinking Security : A Critical Review and Appraisal of the Debate*”, in Muthiah Alagappa (ed); *Asian Security Practice : Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford, California : Stanford University Press, 1998, p.27

national security is thus about the ability of states to maintain their independent identity and fundamental integrity.

Military threats

Strong states fear the use of force because it threatens to overthrow a self-created rule by replacing it with an imposed rule by coercion. A defeated society is therefore vulnerable to the conqueror's power that can be used to restructure the government, to the massacre of the population and resettlement of the land. This use of force breaches normal peaceful relations and disrupts diplomatic ties. Examples would be the European colonization of the Americas, Africa and Australia and the Nazi occupation of Poland.

The termination of the Cold War in 1990 has had the positive impact (though not uniform) on the traditional security concerns of the major powers. Military threats no longer occupy the heart of national security. From the United States' perspective, unless there is a reversal in Russia, no country in the world can pose a credible military threat to its survival.³ Physical and political security is no longer at risk. However, one could not omit the fact that a nuclear Third World War could break up in the future. Military threats now vary from threats to allies, shipping lanes and the Western concern over the security of oil supplies. But the concept of national security has undergone many changes due higher densities of human activities and interaction as well as the general awareness of events worldwide.⁴ Now, the concept of national security has changed from being one of military threats only to threats of political, societal, economic and ecological/environmental nature. Nevertheless, military threats still pose a problem to countries like Bosnia Herzegovina as well as new states like East Timor.

³ Muthiah Alagappa, "Systematic Change, Security and Governance in the Asia-Pacific, in the Chan Heng Chee (ed) *The New Asia Pacific Order*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p. 65

Political threats

Political issues aimed at the organizational threats of the state. It ranged from pressurizing the govt. on a particular policy to through overthrowing the government to disrupting the political fabric of the state to weaken it prior to military.⁵ Since states are essentially a political entity, political threats are feared as much as military threats. Political threats stemmed from diversity in ideas and ideologies. An example would be Americans' anti-communism stand towards Soviet Union and Soviet's anti-imperialism towards the United States. Denial of diplomatic ties such as that suffered by Taiwan can be seen as a form of intentional political threat. Successes and achievements of one state could erode the political structure of another leading to more intentional forms of political threats. India and Pakistan are examples of how political threats fused both internal politics and national security. Pakistan fears absorption by omnivorous India and India fears the breakup of the Indian Union into a number of independent successor states with their own single-religion. Both claimed Kashmir to be theirs on the basis of national integrity.

Another threat to national security could be propaganda support for political groups of similar ideologies and interests. This will eventually lead to the quasi-military activities of arms aid to rebels and political assassination.

Societal threats

Matters of language, culture and religion could influence the political stability of the state. If the culture of a particular state is weak, then the effects could be politically disruptive. Societal threats are linked to military and political threats. Examples would be those

⁴ Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, Brighton : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983 p. 133

⁵ Ibid, p. 119

faced by the Slavic countries and the threats faced by the Israel from the Arabs. Even strong nations like France are currently threatened by the incorporation of English words into their language as well as the impact of American fast food on their culinary heritage.⁶ Therefore societal security equates to sustainability of the local culture. Internal societal threats are signs of weak states. However we cannot generalise that the societal threats occur within the states such as how the Bulgarians suppress the Turkish identity and Indonesian transmigration issue as national security issues. They cannot be termed as national security issues unless they precipitate conflicts between states.

Economic threat

With the collapse of communism and centrally planned economy, the market-based economy is the dominant model for economic practice. Economic threats do not fall within fierce competitions from foreign imports, restrictions against exports, price or default on debts. Instead, it is the linkage between economic threats and military capability that national security issues would emerge. Economic capability is the crucial foundation on which the status of super powers in the international system rests. In times of intense power rivalry, economic performance might be a national security issue. An example would be Germany's rapid expansion in the 1930s – 40s. It was seen as a threat to Britain & France. Also the United States feared that Soviet Union might gain enormous economic success that it might overawe American's influence. Another example of economic threat would be the industrial establishment capable of manufacturing "a wide spectrum of up-to-date weapons". The decline of the steel industries, electronics and ship-building industries to more efficient foreign produce highlight the

⁶ Ibid, p. 123

ability of the state to support a range of military production. Therefore the desire to maintain military-related industries can be classified as a national security issue.

Ecological threats

Traditionally, economic threats were considered a part of life - an issue of fate instead of an issue of national security. The traditional concept of national security evolved during the Cold War viewed security as “a function of the successful pursuit of interstate competition”.⁷ It took the sovereign state as the exclusive unit of analysis and was concerned only with military threats or those related to an “enemy”. Proponents of environmental security would argue that increasing stresses on the earth’s life-support systems and renewable natural resources have profound effects for human health and welfare. This is as serious as traditional military threats.

However, the ecological factor is now no longer a background factor. CFCs, greenhouse gases, acid rain now put the environmental issues more into the political arena. The United States has moved to redefine national security. A 1991 presidential document defined its national security objectives to include “assuring the sustainability and environmental security of the planet....”⁸

Global warming is slowly altering the rainfall distribution and is wiping out the highly productive agricultural area of the mid-west of the United States. This will raise the productive potentials of Canada and the Soviet Union. Another example would be the Rwanda genocide in 1994. Although the direct cause was a desperate regime exploiting ethnic fears in order to cling to power, the crisis has a significant environmental dimension. Rwanda with one of the highest growth rates in the world – about 3.7 percent annually, has a severe soil degradation that reduced

⁷ Gareth Porter, “*Environmental Security as a National Security Issue*”, *Current History* (May 1985) p. 218

⁸ Ibid. p, 221

agricultural production and food availability. It is also against this backdrop of environmental and agricultural decline that both the Hutu and the Tutsi farmers were against the Hutu regime of President Juvénal Habyarimana in 1990s.

In conclusion, military threats still remain a theoretical primacy in national security issue. Nuclear paralysis has come into the forefront as the next major threat to national security. Nevertheless other issues such as political, economic, societal and environmental matters are now sharing equal importance with respect to the state's national security.

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