

The Security Governance Approach

Written by Isabela Leao, Alberto Contaretti

Managing today's volatile and uncertain international security environment has become an increasingly important and complicated challenge. This new and radically different international security environment means that, in addition to traditional threats to States, there are new and more insidious ones, brought by non-State actors, that pose real dangers to an increasingly interlinked and interdependent society. National governments and international organisations are urgently examining the significance of this new situation.

They recognise that no State can stand alone to face these challenges. What is required are collective strategies, collective institutions, and a collective responsibility. Of equal importance, security now directly involves a broad cross-section of civil society, the private sector, economic development and human freedom.

In order to comply with the necessities of this new international security environment and provide security prospects against new challenges and emerging threats, UNICRI launched its Security Governance/Counter-Terrorism Laboratory. The Security Governance Laboratory develops and implements initiatives with the aim of promoting broader collaboration and participation among different security stakeholders. Its main objective is to make a credible contribution to the development of a sustainable platform for information exchange and effective policies in the fields of security and counter-terrorism.

Starting from the following assumptions, the Security Governance Laboratory elaborated a flexible and interdisciplinary approach that applies the concept of governance into the security area.

Security requires variety of expertise, and engages many different entities. In particular, security and development are strongly interconnected both nationally and globally.

The assessment of threats and the development of strategic responses should involve policymakers from both traditional security and development-oriented disciplines, including diplomacy, criminal justice, socio-economic development, police law enforcement, and post-conflict and peace-building.

Policymakers from these areas should share responsibilities by identifying common strategic objectives. They should also share the allocation of resources to achieve such objectives, while ensuring a fair return on their institutional investments.

In this regard, it has to be noted that a conscious adoption of the Security Governance approach by relevant security stakeholders faces some cross-cultural barriers, which require a degree of cultural sensitivity and flexibility, to develop a strategy of collective leadership and translate global consensus into collective action. Therefore, the Laboratory has identified three primary areas of concern which are interconnected with governance norms and organizational learning concepts:

Identification of Common Goals: Security is often conceived as a 'black box,' which security policy-makers tend to view as the exclusive domain of, from case to case, intelligence services, the military, law enforcement, or other related agencies. This paradigm makes it difficult to

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understand the respective commonalities of action and objectives of the different security actors. It also engenders resistance to include the private sector and civil society when traditional and new security strategies have to be designed and implemented in tandem with holistic aspirations. Finally, it creates barriers to understanding connections between threats posed by non-state actors and the conditions that might foster the spread of social pathologies and threats, such as poverty, political exclusion, lack of good governance, environmental degradation, intra-State conflicts, etc.

Synchronisation of Resources: different security stakeholders might duplicate their efforts towards a common objective and not benefit enough from past experience or from the skills and resources already developed within the broad security sector. As a consequence, it might be problematic to strategically perceive the entire picture and understand the short and long-term impact of certain actions and decisions. In addition to this, effective information sharing and exchange is often problematic, not only between two States but also among national agencies within States. The allocation of responsibilities can be fragmented, thus compromising the learning process within agencies, States, and between States resulting in a hectic process of policy-entrepreneurship.

Establishment of a Common Language: Strategic policy-makers and security stakeholders with varying expertise and cultural backgrounds might find it difficult to effectively communicate, especially when they engage in technical dialogue. Very often, their attempts to manage ever more complex challenges are hampered by the lack of a common language. The Security Governance approach engages complex governing mechanisms and applies them to a common zone, which is characterized by a multitude of actors, who are facing identical problems while operating autonomously, thus engendering a minimal level of effective interaction. The application of the Security Governance approach into a common zone provides a credible solution to the above-mentioned areas of concern: through it, strategic security policy-makers can identify common goals and establish mutual support networks, through learning and dialogue – facilitated by multimedia technological systems. Furthermore, innovative methodologies to synchronize available resources are brought forward and a concrete effort is made to facilitate the elaboration of a common language, on the basis of the preliminary acknowledgement of the shared interest toward the highest possible security level.

Therefore, the primary goal of the Matrix is to encourage strategic security policy-makers and experts from different sectors and countries to acknowledge the existence of a common zone where they can identify, as mentioned before, common strategic goals and effectively allocate and coordinate resources to achieve the identified goals. These objectives might be accomplished through the use of instruments and dynamics typical of international relations, including common working and technical languages, common expertise, a permanent and structured dialogue, and an interdisciplinary and innovative methodology.

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Finally it is worth noting that, embedded in the Security Governance approach, there is the need to maintain a vision of security, ethical issues and respect for human rights. This is fully consistent with the United Nations mandate and fundamental principles in conjunction with recent attempts to strengthen the participation of the civil society organisations and actors in the UN activities. As stated by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, “today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another. What begins with the failure to uphold the dignity of one life all too often ends with a calamity for entire nations”.

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