

The world is changing – security is changing too

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What is security? Security can be viewed from at least three perspectives.

First, security is about risks, and identifying and managing risks. Our current era of the coronavirus pandemic serves as a perfect example: an uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus is a significant risk that would have an enormous impact on societies and their capability. In Finland too, we have been making risk management decisions throughout the past year, from high-level decision-makers to individual actors.

Second, security is about monitoring and responding to disturbances: crimes, fires, accidents. Poisonings, suicides, data breaches. Security and insecurity that can be measured; incidents that no one would want to happen. Downward graphs are welcomed as a positive change, while with upward graphs, specific measures are deemed necessary.

Third, security is about emotions, feelings of safety, and a sense of security – or a lack of such. We know that a sense of security is often irrational: like elsewhere, Finnish security surveys suggest that people are afraid of events that are extremely unlikely to happen to them. International armed conflicts and acts of terrorism are high on their list of fears. Far behind these or not even mentioned in people's survey answers are accidents at home, like falling from a kitchen stool, and traffic accidents.

When discussing security, the first challenge is the tangle of concepts: internal security, external security, cyber security, everyday security, comprehensive security, overall security... It is generally acknowledged that the line between internal and external security at least has become blurred. This may derive from the idea that internal security is security that is maintained within the borders of a country, which also makes security threats mainly domestic. This idea is linked to a notion that external security is related to external threats, as well as to foreign and defence policy. However, people, goods, capital, information, and epidemics move freely across borders. Global phenomena affect the security situation within our society, and, on the other hand, domestic organised crime, for example, involves networks that are international.

Due to Finland's geopolitical position and history, we hold fairly uniform ideas about our nation's external security. If compared internationally, Finns' attitudes towards national defence are very positive – which is probably all well and good. Our ideas about internal security, on the other hand, and the factors behind it and the measures required are very unclear. Still, we have tried to create a discourse of comprehensive security: for more than ten years, public debate has featured the concept of *comprehensive security*. This concept was developed based on the former concept of total national defence by the so-called Hallberg committee in its 2010 report on preparedness and comprehensive

security. The committee applied a very broad approach on security thinking: ‘... broad-based threats include intentional human activities (e.g., the use of military force, terrorism, and disruption of information networks), accidents (e.g., failures in electricity networks, and infectious diseases and other biohazards) or extreme natural phenomena. . . . In addition, Finland must prepare for international organised crime, drugs and people trafficking, and infectious diseases.’ The last-mentioned threat is one of which we have had unique experiences over the last year.

As stated above, historical and geographical factors have ensured that in relation to external security, Finnish political decision-making has been based on regularly updated and strategically oriented information. For decades already, the Government has provided Parliament with defence policy reports. The government period 2014–2018 was the first time that such a thorough evaluation of internal security was prepared by the Government. Within around one year, it presented an internal security report, a foreign and security policy report and a defence policy report to Parliament. It thus seems that the comprehensive security approach, which has also received a lot of criticism, has at least extended the idea of security at the political level and gradually resulted in a more comprehensive evaluation of security threats.

At the moment, we are tangibly experiencing the fact that even internal security is not merely a domestically generated phenomenon. We are also witnessing how, in this modern day and age, a pandemic can bring our society to its knees and have a dramatic impact on political decision-making, public authorities, business life, public finances, and citizens’ sense of security. This is despite the fact that in a society like Finland, the coronavirus pandemic has not turned into an unmanageable crisis. In a realistic and risk-informed approach, it is acknowledged that a highly digitalised society with complex infrastructures and information networks is both internally and externally vulnerable, even prone to crises. It is also realistic to recognise that 2020s’ Finland is no longer a Winter War nation; the pandemic has increased the number of mental health problems and raises concern about people’s resilience in exceptional circumstances.

Certainly, 2020s’ Finland is part of European and global interdependence, and as such a society that requires a new, more complex overall idea of its security. Hopefully, in the future too, each Government will continue to prepare the security reports mentioned above. At the same time, we must learn to see absolutely clearly that responding to security threats is a responsibility that lies with many more actors than what we have traditionally thought. These actors must have the necessary competences to analyse threats, take correct reactive measures to realised threats, and take action in exceptional circumstances.

In a complex world, security challenges are also complex, and they can be managed best through networked cooperation. While safety authorities have their responsibilities clearly defined by legislation, collaboration between authorities, and with businesses and the third sector provides many new opportunities to strengthen the resilience of our society.