

A photograph of a protest at night. In the background, a large fire or explosion illuminates the scene, with smoke rising. The foreground shows several people, some with their arms raised in a gesture of protest or solidarity. The overall tone is dark and dramatic, with a blue color cast.

The **Danger** **Within**

*Societal
divides pose a
major threat
to national
security*

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Anti-government protesters
rally in Belgrade, Serbia.

The global security framework and geopolitics have shifted since the Cold War and, as a result, so has the understanding of security. State security frameworks, once military-centric, now cater to societal and individual security concerns rather than the traditional Westphalian state concept, as noted by Alem Saleh in his 2010 article in *Geopolitics Quarterly*. In this new environment, security is no longer just about protecting states against foreign threats (national security), but also about protecting individuals (human security) and communities (societal security). While the concept of the state, and an understanding of the social contract, should mean that the population is secure in a secure state, this is not the case. In the last century, intrastate armed conflicts claimed more lives than interstate conflicts, according to the Human Security Report 2005. Threats to a country's national security are no longer dominated by conventional military threats, but have become increasingly complex and now include internal attacks on societies to destabilize states from within — a historically successful method often referred to as “divide and conquer.” By targeting societal divides, states can be brought down from within without having to resort to open warfare.

In a globalized world, threats to the state include those aimed at its social cleavages and its people — threats meant to destabilize and undermine its sovereignty, sociologist Carlo Bordoni wrote in his 2013 article on the Social Europe website. The Westphalian system thrived during a time when nationalism was at the forefront of geopolitics, and on into the 19th and 20th centuries, when organizations like the European Union, NATO and the United Nations were created to pursue common security interests and facilitate peace. Nevertheless, Geoffrey Harris wrote in a 2015 paper for the EUSA Biennial Conference, at a time when security threats transcend traditional state borders, targeting societies and individuals, the state-centric perception of security is becoming less relevant. Terrorism is an example of a threat that cuts across borders but also feeds off societal cleavages at the expense of national security.

The modern state is in crisis due to a multitude of factors, including relatively recent historical and cultural changes, according to Bordoni. Economic and political choices affect societal security and the strength of the state, which may negatively affect people's everyday lives, widening already identified social cleavages and distancing the population from state institutions. States that do not deliver security feed even more societal disillusionment, instigating a crisis of state relevance. Consequently, Bordoni argues, state boundaries that once defined and united a nation and its traditions, culture, language, security and defense interests, become less defined, presenting a clear threat to the state as a whole. This highlights the evolution from conventional national security threats to a hybrid mix of threats that start with internal destabilization and end with the state at risk.

This shift in the international order in matters of security shows that “threats are more likely to originate from within, as opposed to between, states,” as noted by James Bingham in a 2013 paper for King's College. In the current environment,



Tourists visit Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey. Economic and individual security affect a state's stability.

a societal breakdown is a greater threat to national security than the threat posed by foreign forces. With globalization, the opening of borders, converging threats and risks, and a challenge to the general concept of the state, societal security — defined by Saleh as the ability to “sustain traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, national identity and customs” — is fundamental to national security. States that are able to foster strong and tight-knit societies are immune to negative influences and destabilization.

Despite this evolution in security threats, academia still focus predominantly on the traditional, dominant realist and neo-realist schools of thought, with the state as primary security agent. In this view, threats primarily relate to sovereignty and are of a military nature. Threats beyond this narrow view are considered irrelevant to national security, Paul Roe writes in his book, *Ethnic Violence and the Societal Security Dilemma*. In light of current events, it is safe to say that the realist and neo-realist views of security are far too narrow for present day challenges.

THREAT EVOLUTION

In contrast to the traditional international security framework, where threats to a state's security qualify as a security issue, the theoretical approach, as defined by the Copenhagen School, views threats identified as existential to the survival of an object as more relevant in today's international relations. The Copenhagen School's security-identity relationship has created a new way to look at security — as societal security.



French police gather outside a police station in Paris after a Molotov cocktail attack. Internal attacks cause people to question whether their state can protect them.

According to Roe, the Copenhagen School views Europe as a continent plagued by threats to group identity, ethnicity and religion, and by an overall lack of societal security.

The Aberystwyth School also contradicts the traditional and realist view of security, but differs from the Copenhagen School. According to the Aberystwyth School, genuine security can never be achieved through order and power, as the realists believe. Furthermore, according to the Human Security Centre, the state is viewed as a source of insecurity rather than security, considering that 90 percent of armed conflicts today are not between states, but within them. The Aberystwyth School teaches that security is achieved through the emancipation of people, rather than through the states. A commonality among people lacking security is the pursuit of basic needs such as food security, personal security, public safety and shelter. People who lack security also have common desires for more than just basic needs, according to Ali Diskaya in a paper for Aberystwyth University. These include freedom from fear and freedom to choose. In light of the hybrid threats to national security, security can be viewed as a combination of both the Copenhagen and Aberystwyth schools.

Lack of societal security is a major disruptor of stability within a state

SOCIETAL SECURITY

A state's approach to societal security and its ability to preserve ethnic, cultural, religious and national identity is crucial to its security as a whole, assert Hynek Melichar and Markéta Židková in their 2015 article for the European Consortium for Political Research. Failure to preserve identities can be viewed as a threat. If a state tries to deprive certain societies of their identity — through cultural cleansing or more drastic measures such as ethnic cleansing — defensive measures are adopted by the threatened society, ranging from nationalism to secession to violence. Identity-preserving countermeasures not only respond to the state's initial threat vertically, they also escalate horizontally by sparking reactions from other societal groups that perceive the first group's countermeasures as weakening their own identities. This escalatory process

starts from a lack of societal security, and a misconceived state response ultimately leads to ethnic conflict and disintegration of the state, according to Melichar and Židková.

Lack of societal security is a major disruptor of stability within a state, but it also has tremendous implications for the state as a whole as exemplified by the former Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Roe points to Yugoslavia's



Demonstrators dressed as zombies in Kyiv, Ukraine, protest media that promotes subversive Russian propaganda. Disinformation divides societies and causes mistrust in the state.

disintegration as a textbook example of a country unraveling not because of external threats, but because of a lack of societal security internally. This entailed discrimination based on ethnicity and cultural and ethnic cleansing. The state's failure to provide for the preservation of all ethno-national groups' identities caused a defensive reaction, which initiated escalatory dynamics; an evolving nationalism that triggered others — including the state itself — to feel threatened, and ultimately resulted in ethnic conflict and the country's disintegration. Yugoslavia is a real-world example of the security dilemma. In trying to improve its security as a state, Roe explains, Yugoslavia further diminished the collective identity, widened already existing societal cleavages and decreased societal security, which in return initiated a vicious cycle that deteriorated the security of the state even further.

Before the current Ukrainian crisis, the concept of intrastate conflict within Europe was viewed with disbelief, especially given the EU and the promise of security and stability it represents. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent insurgency in eastern Ukraine exposed the fragility of security, even within Europe. This may appear to be a conventional military threat by one state against another, but a closer look shows that the Crimea annexation resulted from internal societal divisions. Traditional realist and neo-realist views of national security, and threats to it, do not cover the complexity of the Crimean case. A closer look at the ethnic composition and history of Crimea, especially the history of the Tatars, shows that its vulnerability comes from within and is based on the historic challenges of meeting the security needs of different national and ethno-national groups. Melichar and Žídková argue that societal security

equals sovereignty in importance to state security, considering the negative impact that failing to provide societal security has on a state's security and stability. It has also been argued that ethnicity and, primarily, a lack of economic security for the Russian population in Crimea, contributed to their role in the annexation. According to data collected in eastern Ukraine measuring the level of violence versus economic and ethnic activity, a lack of economic security played a bigger role in the conflict than identity (Russian language or ethnicity), Tymofiy Mylovanov reported in a May 2016 article for the website openDemocracy. A population that lacks societal security clearly becomes more vulnerable to foreign influences, perpetuating a violent cycle that starts with internal destabilization and ends with a serious threat to national security, constitutional order and even the country's continued existence.

ACCOUNTABILITY

State institutions and public appointees must improve accountability to their citizens. Bordoni argues that while the democratic system is supposed to ensure that citizens participate in decision-making, especially on crucial issues that affect their lives, the separation of power from politics creates opportunities for decision-making bodies to be nondemocratically appointed or controlled. Therefore, these powerful nondemocratic entities make decisions — pertaining to social, economic and other issues that affect masses of people — that fuse together a variety of political interests. People who are unable to change how these processes work and have to live with the consequences of such decision-making may suffer societal disillusionment and develop common cause with others beyond their state's borders, further weakening the state and its security, Bordoni writes. This inadvertently feeds further disillusionment with the state and its institutions and widens divisions within society, destroying a sense of national identity and making the society more vulnerable to external pressures and agendas that may target the state itself.

The traditional view of security is based on realism, with national security protected by military power. In fact, military power is seen as a crucial element of national security and sovereignty, as well as a political instrument to exert power, deter attacks, ensure domestic security, preserve peace and fulfill economic goals. While this argument is valid when discussing external threats to the state, military power has significant limitations when it comes to threats from within that are based on societal issues. Critics of the realist viewpoint argue that it serves only the elites and their interests at the expense of the masses. Defining national security only in relation to external threats and focusing on exerting military supremacy when threats increasingly come from internal societal discontent puts both the people and national security at greater risk. The post-Cold War era, nonetheless, has shifted from a more state-centric perception of security to a society-focused or individually-focused viewpoint, according to Saleh.

The rise of right-wing populism across Europe is a sign that societal discontent has increased and people are increasingly dismissing the traditional view of security, according to Harris. Another way to look at the phenomenon of increasing right-wing populism is to view it as exploitation of social discontent, a view argued in *Is Europe On the “Right” Path?: Right-wing Extremism and Right-wing Populism in Europe*, edited by Nora Langebacher and Britta Schellenberg. According to the book, right-wing populism is also a result of societal discontent and unequal distribution of access. Therefore, for states to respond adequately, their definitions of security must be broadened to include societal security. Additionally, their responses should be designed to counter contemporary hybrid measures that target internal weaknesses, especially societal divisions.

The evolution of the security concept coincides with a challenge to the function of states. If states are to improve societal security, their authority must be reinforced. This tests the realist view of security — centered on the interests of the state — and it may also pose a challenge to the core Westphalian concept of states. States, and the international organizations to which they belong, possess only as much power as that given by their constituents. If the function of states is questioned — as people broaden their view of what “security” and “interests” mean — the effects will be felt not just by the states, as they struggle to maintain legitimacy, but ultimately within international organizations such as the EU, NATO and the U.N. A decrease of functionality also decreases the legitimacy of states, which could harm their ability to sustain internal societal security, allowing for more fragile and failed states, Bingham notes. Again, Yugoslavia is a good example of this phenomenon; the main culprit of its internal armed conflicts and breakup was a lack of societal security and massive societal divisions. Markus Thiel argues in his paper, “Identity, Societal Security and Regional Integration in Europe,” that the EU’s slow integration process also contributes to the loss of functionality and to questions about the legitimacy of Balkan states that have failed to progress. In addition, according to Bingham, “The implications of fragile and failed states in a globalized world means that the consequences of state failure do not occur in a vacuum and can have security implications for the international community at

large, not simply the populations of the states in question.”

To persevere, states must be resilient and capable of adapting to new environments and accommodating geostrategic changes. This may mean that the entire concept of security has to be reviewed and redefined to reflect the world as it is today. This may also mean that the role of the state should be reviewed, as should the roles and missions of international organizations that were established under completely different circumstances. What is certainly clear, theoretically and in practice, is that national security is linked to societal security and, to preserve national security, states must safeguard the societal security of their populations. People should be provided the space and tools to preserve their ethnic, cultural, religious and national identities within the state.

CONCLUSION

Societal security has proven to be an important element of national security. Threats to national security have also become more sophisticated and complex, with internal societal divisions an attractive target for destabilizing a country. These changes have ramifications for all entities and agents involved in security and defense, including international organizations such as NATO. It is of vital importance to adopt a security concept that better fits the current global security environment and takes into consideration the complexity of new threats. This requires knitting together the traditional realist view of security with a contemporary broadened security concept that includes societal security. On a more practical level, Eastern European and Balkan countries must also adapt their security and defense efforts with greater understanding of the need for long-term national security solutions. Response and prevention measures should be designed to counter the threat shift toward the exploitation of internal societal cleavages to destabilize countries. But as a more effective, long-term solution, countries must also take measures to heal and prevent societal cleavages in the first place. As with health care, prevention is more effective and less costly than treating the disease.

In the case of the Balkan states, addressing the challenges each faces internally — such as institutional structural issues, rule of law, corruption and organized crime, but also inclusiveness and the sustainability of different languages, religions, ethnic identities and culture — is key to immunizing their societies against divisive, destabilizing measures. By addressing societal security, states would take more ownership of their citizens’ well-being, creating more united and resilient societies, becoming more immune to external threats, creating a more self-sustainable security environment that is less dependent on international defense structures such as NATO, and ultimately increasing the functionality of the state in the international arena. Finally, as Tomas Jermalavičius and Merle Parmak write in their 2012 paper for Estonia’s International Centre for Defence and Security, it is paramount that any state wanting to preserve national security, “preserve the cohesion of its society when it is confronted by external and internal stresses caused by socio-political change and/or violent disturbances.” □