

Security

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The plenary session on security issues was organized on the last day of the 3rd NRF Open Meeting. It was divided in two parts with senior participants' presentations in the morning session and young researchers' presentations during the square hour. Summarizing both distinguished presentations and discussions it is possible to conclude that two approaches to regional security issues were apparent. These approaches arrive from different levels of participant involvement in the policy-making process. The first set of speakers focused on hard-security issues thus delineating a clear approach to security issues from a national perspective. The second set of participants due to their specific positions in the policy-making process or research interests were more concerned with soft security issues that were often approached from local perspective. These two different levels of concerns – national and local – posed the biggest challenge for participants because they raised doubts about the possibility to balance these sometimes conflicting approaches.

Security on national level was understood mainly in terms of military or hard security, although this does not preclude a very wide understanding of security that stretches across military aspects into environmental, political and economic domains of security. On the local level security was understood mainly in terms of human security, based on the idea that besides traditional military threats there are other security threats, as for example nuclear accidents, international terrorism and crime, environmental degradation and health problems.

This dichotomy of defining security was seen as problematic because communities on local level sometimes tend to regard national and local security interests as conflicting. This is probably because the conventional concept of security is closely tied to a state's defence of its sovereignty and territory by military means. However, security applies most directly at the level of citizens, and this moves human security at the forefront of the debate.

In the young researchers' presentations and during the lively discussion following the plenary it was noted that conventional state-centric security thinking has largely excluded the use of non-military means. However, security threats of non-military nature, such as environmental degradation and international terrorism, to name but a few, suggest that cooperation, not competition, between states is the best strategy for addressing such threats. Speakers emphasized that security should not be understood as a matter of force, but in terms of communality, self-determination, empowerment, diplomacy, and practices of mutual cooperation by actors other than states. It was concluded that extended security implies moral and ethical aims because most security threats of non-military nature are linked to the problems of inequality and poverty.

Accordingly, it was emphasized that re-securitization process that started partly due to the tragic events of 11th September, 2001, can threaten human security, especially, its moral and ethical aspects. Pursue for more security can, in fact, result in less security and threaten democratic principles upon which our societies

are built. This dilemma has to be resolved by providing adequate responses to threats in the 21st century.

It was also noted during discussions that such a wide variety of security aspects leads us to questioning the usefulness of concept. Although majority of discussants still regarded security as a relevant analytical and political tool, it was agreed that in the absence of a common „language” security can become a rather confusing and „inflated” concept. This is due to the fact that various aspects of security sometimes overlap and contradict one with another.

Although the security concept was not always used with the same meaning and intentions, some conclusions can be drawn from both presentations and discussions:

1. It seems that it has been an illusion that North has become or in the near future will become a de-securitized area. On the contrary – the word „security” is used with a growing frequency due to the fact that the concept of security itself has been significantly expanded during the past decades. International terrorism and development of military sector in Russia and the US ensure that even hard security issues will continue to play an important role in our lives. It means that although researchers are sometimes much more comfortable dealing with soft security issues, one should not forget about hard security issues and interests. This is not to mention that harsh climatic and specific geographical conditions of the Arctic still challenge national authorities in providing military presence in these areas.

2. There are many challenges at different levels of politics – ranging from global to local challenges. These two micro and macro levels heavily influence one another. One could clearly see the mutual impact of these levels during the speeches and the following discussions. On the one hand, some stakeholders have concerns about the impact of global security environment on the northern areas, but, on the other hand, there are local communities that might be not always aware of these global challenges and pressing for the issues that are of great immediate concern for them (hunting and fishing opportunities, quality of food, air, water, etc). The greatest challenge thus is to have a balance between local, national and, perhaps, regional security interests of the involved stakeholders

because this balance would lead to balanced policy outcomes. People are on an everyday basis confronted with economic and environmental challenges that are sometimes perceived as threats. Therefore dialogue between local communities and national and regional authorities is so essential.

3. The debate on international terrorism took a substantial part of the debate on security. There was no agreement between discussants about the potential impact of the international terrorism on Northern communities. There is an opinion that it is fear-mongering of some political stakeholders who might benefit from the fact that society perceives itself as living under a constant threat of terrorist attacks. However, there is also a very different opinion that international terrorism can and will influence security environment in the northern parts of the globe. The challenge is to balance these diverse opinions because although northern communities sometimes are not fully aware about being threatened by international terrorism, the Arctic can be seen as a transit point and therefore an essential and vulnerable part of the national security system. International terrorism calls for a balanced assessment of possible threats and vulnerabilities. However, in doing this we have to remember that threats in the 21st century tend to go beyond objective facts.