

Introduction

Emerging Security Leitmotifs

Anne Aldis

It could be argued, with some justification, that Western International Relations specialists have been so preoccupied with discerning emerging security leitmotifs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over the last decade that little remains to be said on the subject. But it is in the nature of security that though certain preoccupations may remain more or less constant over time, they can be overlaid by a whole kaleidoscope of changing perceptions and priorities. Security is by no means a static concept, and it is rarely, if ever, comfortably achieved. That both halves of Europe could sleep soundly with the Iron Curtain between them for so long, that NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation were for so long almost the sole providers and embodiments of military security, the only kind that mattered at that time, perhaps did us a disservice in over-simplifying what is an essentially multifaceted concept.

A realisation that the picture is complicated and can change over time does mean that there is a need to evaluate, as it were in a series of snapshots, how the nature of security at any one time is perceived by its providers and consumers, and whether the kaleidoscope has beguiled us into looking simply at the patterns and not at how we can work towards actually producing a balance of security provision that satisfies the needs of all sides. That is why there is a continuing need for seminars and analyses such as those in the present collection, which can help to identify both the overlying patterns and the underlying concerns, and perhaps offer experiences to compare with one's own.

This collection of papers offers a plethora of examples in its wide geographical spread, from Kazakhstan in the east through Russia and the Caucasus to Romania and the Baltic States in the west. It illustrates a variety of approaches to a range of security issues which have certain common features, providing points where experiences can be compared and trends and alternative possibilities highlighted.

Russia, as the largest country in the area and the neighbour of most, naturally occupies first place in this analysis. Russia's security concerns, as laid out in its National Security Concept, summarised here by Steven Main, are legion. In contrast to the earlier, 1997, Concept, they are no longer predominantly internal. And yet it is a country where, as Stephen White shows, a majority of the population prefers the past to the present, and has little faith in the future, in its institutions, or in the rule of law. Its people have come to value their individual freedoms, yet there is overwhelming support for a strong line against those whose desire for freedom would take them out of Russia. Charles Blandy and Graeme Herd highlight in the case of Chechnya the lengths to which Russia has chosen or been forced to go to safeguard the perceived security interests of the Federation as a whole. It is the most current example of ethnic violence in this collection; while it is treated at greater length than the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict for this reason, the stalemate and the misperceptions described in the latter case by Rick Fawn offer no reassurance of a permanent or peaceful solution.

But preoccupied by the search for peculiarly Russian answers to systemic problems, Russia cannot turn its back on the rest of the world, beset as it is by threats from all sides as well as within. Chris Bellamy illustrates how, at all levels of security: national, international, regional, transnational and global, Russia continues to be a major player. Judging by its own and its neighbours' perceptions, Russia continues to occupy a prominent position in international affairs. The greater pity, then, that Russians' perception of the world outside, and the world's of Russia, is one of mutual suspicion, if not downright hostility.

It is striking, however, that while Russia features largely in the security picture of all the other countries, in none does Russia monopolise the frame. Micle Budryte notes that Russia has recently adapted its approach to its Baltic neighbours, having inched 'toward the conclusion that the Baltic states' admission to NATO is, ultimately, unstoppable'. Equally importantly, she highlights the dangers of treating all Baltic states as clones.

Relations with one's neighbours must always be a factor in the security equation, whether from a position of strength or weakness, friendship or threat. Sally Cummings' paper highlights an instance where, between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, border demarcation and territorial disputes are providing the focus for a wider struggle for hegemony against a background of increasing regional unrest and the potential involvement of global powers. But even here, as her paper makes clear, there are non-military and non-territorial dimensions to the security arguments. All the countries surveyed in this collection have moved away from seeing their security simply in international or military terms. Security is a much more complicated concept than it may have appeared ten years ago, and each country has composed its own very different picture from the standard components, which also include ethnic, economic and institutional factors.

One recurring feature, particularly prominent in papers in this collection on Georgia and Romania, but far from absent in the Baltic, Central Asia or Russia, is that security concerns almost always include an ethnic minority either straddling a border or in a well defined geographical area. While a state's treatment of the minority may not itself pose human or civil rights problems, its very existence gives neighbouring states the right to exercise a watching brief. This can lead to aspirant states feeling forced from the outset into adopting a defensive attitude about their treatment of minorities in negotiations with international bodies such as the OSCE or the EU, and in a worst case, to allegations of subversion against one's neighbours.

While none of the variety of approaches to minority questions illustrated here, with the possible exception of Abkhazia, has gone quite that far in recent years, it is clear that no state can regard the question of its minorities with equanimity. This is an issue that generally requires management in the long term, not an instant solution. Even states which believed they had avoided the problem by bestowing citizenship on all inhabitants, like Kazakhstan and Lithuania, have found that linguistic problems persist, for example in education, and thus the ethnic factor is reborn in a new guise. Devices such as dual citizenship or a second state language may go some way towards reducing the potential for conflict, but it can flare up at short notice, even without external interference. It is therefore reassuring to note that in all the countries surveyed, with the exception of Russia and Georgia, ethnic problems are largely under control and in all but Kazakhstan have been so for some time, even if, in the case of Georgia and Abkhazia, that control is exercised by an international body.

In institutional terms, it is illuminating to see how standard mechanisms have evolved differently to suit the varying political conditions in each state, and the measures of popular support (or apathy) the resulting institutions enjoy. Kristi Raik shows how external and internal factors are inextricably connected in the development of democratic institutions, and how public support for institutional stability does not translate automatically into a rounded, functioning democracy. Yet even if democracy means very different things in Estonia, Russia and Kazakhstan, the perception that they are democratic states is one they all wish to foster. All appear to be satisfied that they are making progress in this direction which suits their own circumstances. It should be remembered, however, that the accountability of democratic structures in 'the West' also varies enormously. Institutional security in each country should be seen as one of general credibility, a 'comfort level' rather than a rigorously-applied structural template eliminating the possibility of institutional misuse.

Institutionally, security concerns appear nowadays to focus for most inhabitants of most states in the region, on membership of international bodies such as the CIS, EU and NATO rather than on building more, or more accountable, structures at home. Here, the policy and perceptions are changing. Whatever the hopes and fears of those who joined the CIS security structures in 1992, it has obviously failed to deliver many tangible benefits, as Tamara Pataraiia shows. Her description of the evolution of natural interest groups among its original members and the difficulties facing Georgia in asserting its sovereignty reveal many of the shortcomings of the international institutional approach to security. There is a growing realisation that membership of these organisations in itself is not a panacea for insecurity; that contributions need to be made to the structures in order to reap the security benefits. Again, differences of approach are apparent both within states and between them, most notably in this collection with regard to the EU and NATO. It should cause no surprise that the percentages of those in favour vary from state to state and that support for membership of the EU appeals to a faster-growing proportion of the electorate than does membership of NATO. But the extent to which the populations of all three Baltic States are ambivalent about the benefits of membership of either the EU or NATO or both, despite the consistent support of all main political groups for membership, has not been appreciated outside their borders.

The reason for these differences between populations and their governments is the same as the reason for differences between states: a realisation that there are a multiplicity of security needs, and that they cannot all be met at the same time from a single source. Perceptions of how best to achieve levels of confidence across the widest spectrum should vary: it leads to healthy debate and a broader understanding of the complex issues involved and how they interact. This may seem to be stating the obvious, but it is an area where security policy all over the region has notably developed during the last ten years. Bald demands to join NATO as the only institution which can guarantee security have given way to a much more nuanced approach, economic as well as military; 'integration into Euro-Atlantic structures' has proved to be more of a gradual process of socio-economic assimilation than a big military bang. Mihai Maties sets out how the process has developed in the case of Romania, where foreign policy has consistently been focussed on these objectives. A comparison with the contributions of Migle Budryte and Margita Markevica shows how similar ends do not necessarily entail similar motives or similar means.

Arguably the greatest progress has been in economic security. The implementation of a market economy has proved in all cases to be much more than simply privatising state-run industries and opening branches of McDonalds. But it is here that CEE states have also seen the biggest gains, despite the economic and social pain which has been felt by the overwhelming majority of the population in the process. This pain has naturally led to criticism of the policy of seeking membership of the EU, which is seen as the ultimate provider of economic security (and increasingly of other types too). The EU itself has been revealed as a more complicated organism, which requires more than just a thriving economy and goods which have a ready market among existing members. The transparency of the accession process has been widely praised, but the comprehensiveness of the reforms it requires in institutional, legal and social structures has given rise to further criticism of government policy in aspirant states. Reforms are often seen as necessary simply because EU membership requires them, as the demands of an external agency and not as good things in themselves, appropriate to the country and stemming from its own requirements. Margita Markevica refutes this argument in the case of Latvia; since Latvia and the EU share common values in foreign policy, assimilation poses few problems. She rightly reminds us, however, that in the process of enlargement, the EU itself must be prepared to change.

A common thread running through all of the above is that the nature of security and priorities in achieving it continue to reflect vulnerabilities which vary depending on where one is looking from. However, it is the perceptions that are paramount, and the potential for misunderstanding and manipulation is considerable. In the case of Georgia and Abkhazia Rick Fawn shows how easily misconceptions can establish themselves, and how persistent they can be. Military actions in Chechnya enjoy widespread public support in Russia, because of the perception that Chechen terrorists threaten the security of the whole country. The attention devoted to fostering this perception and the management of the media during the conflict show this in an extreme form, but attempts to sway public opinion are no less apparent in their diluted forms in other countries. 'Information power' may be the new buzzword, but the practice has been around for at least as long as politics; it is time it was appreciated for the potent tool it is.

It is noticeable, however, that these attempts are much more successful in reinforcing an existing perception than in creating an antagonism out of thin air. Russia's capacity for destabilising its neighbours, as in the case of Georgia, should not be underestimated. No amount of public pronouncements will convince Georgia that it has nothing to fear from its larger neighbour to the north. Even in what is now Romania, on territories where ethnic Romanians and Hungarians have lived together for centuries under a variety of rulers, suspicion and spasmodic violence are easily spread and much harder to quash, as Ana Serafim shows. Defensive nationalism, which incites populations to intolerance and manifests itself through exclusive internal policies and lack of cooperation across borders, remains a real threat throughout the region.

What is remarkable is that despite the potential for provocation at individual, interethnic and interstate levels, counsels of moderation have so far prevailed, and this in a decade where the temptation to resurrect old scores in a struggle for power has led to serious violence elsewhere, most notably in the Balkans. Events in the former Yugoslavia stand as an awful warning of the consequences of a failure to steer a moderate course. Thus the predominant security leitmotif in CEE countries must be one of guarded optimism, based on a deepened understanding of what constitutes security and how it can be worked towards, if not actually achieved.

The optimism is guarded, because the risks, dangers, threats and weaknesses highlighted in this series of papers should not be underestimated, but optimism nonetheless because states and peoples which can cope with the complexities outlined here in a period of rapid and demanding change can surely continue to do so.

The exception to all this, as is so often the case, is Russia. There we have a country which, well understanding the interplay of factors which constitute security at national and international levels, and under a new leader who has identified economic weakness as the prime inhibiting factor, has nevertheless chosen to use a great deal of force to solve a security problem, albeit a serious one, in Chechnya. In doing so it has forsworn virtually all the avenues of dialogue and mediation, and demonstrates that to the Russians, the use or threat of armed force as a tool of policy continues to be a viable option.

Russia feels vulnerable and excluded, and outclassed by the West in the latest international battleground, the infosphere, despite its long familiarity with the power of propaganda in other circumstances. It has until now seen the EU's enlargement as less of a threat than NATO's, confined as it was to economic and political matters, but if the EU's new defence identity becomes more than a hologram, Russia is unlikely to retain its equanimity for long. It is worth bearing in mind that the EU Treaty provisions on security, if fully implemented, will be stronger than those of the NATO Treaty's much-paraded Article 5. Experience has shown time and again that a threatened Russia is an uncomfortable neighbour. Perhaps this would be an appropriate moment, now that the path for other countries is becoming more clearly marked, to consider how we can all move towards our goals without making Russia a dangerous stumbling block.

Anne Aldis is Research Manager, Conflict Studies Research Centre.

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