

# **Fafo AIS' New Security Programme - A Manifesto**

**Morten Bøas, Christian Ruge, Mark Taylor**

Not so long ago we thought we knew what security was and what it meant to be secure. In the field of security studies, we used to find security in the comfort of immediate recognition: we found it in the maintenance of the Cold War balance between the two superpowers, even if that balance threatened our very existence or perpetuated conflict by proxy.

Today, the concept of security is radically altered. Traditional state-centred security concepts, involving armies fighting across borders between nation states, no longer hold true. Thus, defence ministries and military leaders constantly redesign and reorganise their armies in an attempt to meet new threats. At the same time, the realms of security have opened up to new actors and approaches, as the apparently predictable, marionette world of the Cold War puppet masters gives way to reveal a much more complex and multidimensional stage - where actions and counteractions follow no well-established pattern.

This has led to the inflation of the term security. Researchers and policymakers pack new issue-areas into an ever-expanding vocabulary of security issues. On a personal level many of us are engaged in practicing security: many of those who can afford to buy into private security, accept ever-expanding levels of surveillance and control, or elect governments on promises they will be tough on crime or root out terrorism.. Security is something that we strive for, but it has become an elusive target, a vote winner and a growth industry. It is provisional by nature. It is always a becoming. Somehow the meaning of security as a category seems diminished.

There is violence. The threat of violence is truly global, something US citizens learnt during the September 11 attacks. As a response, The United States has waged two major wars in as many years - in Afghanistan and Iraq - in the name of combating terror and weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the United Nations estimates that 1,000 people die every day in countries around the world as a result of small arms - the vast majority of victims being women and children. Yet, violence, whether political or criminal, is only part of the story. Since the famine in the Horn of Africa in the 1980s, we have known about the links between war and famine. Since then, we have come to realize that the 'secondary effects' of war often kill far more people than does the direct violence of war. Nowhere in recent times has this reality been more grimly demonstrated than during the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the effects of violence rippled outwards, destroying health and food systems and killing an estimated three million people in four short years.

For many people on the planet, the possibility of safety, dignity and survival is a dream. The zones of vulnerability and insecurity in our world shift and change shape, but they do not seem to shrink. As economies and states fade into informal markets and networks, these zones are growing, putting more and more stress on state capacities and putting more and more people in peril. In these places, a majority of the inhabitants experience and respond to violence, fear and insecurity on a daily basis.

Today, governments of the world's nations, large and small, are in principle obliged to provide security for their citizens. Our multinational institutions, particularly the United Nations, are asked to respond to human insecurity by preventing conflict and protecting people. Meanwhile, these institutions, which in theory are there to grapple with global problems that states alone will never solve, are enfeebled by the diplomacies of their own member states and are in a perpetual crisis of effectiveness and legitimacy.

In the state-centred politics of international relations, the struggle against impunity has stalled. Many countries today are effectively abandoning the notion of human security and human rights, taking up defensive positions behind barriers of national security and limitations to basic rights and freedoms. At best, such responses are mere gestures - governments, being governments, must be seen to be doing something. At worst, they are manifestations of the politics of fear, precisely the responses best suited to the perpetuation of discrimination and insecurity.

Yet, for all of these changes, the human condition remains what it was, in particular when experienced on the ground, in countries like Afghanistan, DR Congo and Colombia. People continue to kill each other because of who they are and the identities they represent. In spite of all the dramatic shifts of recent years, it is possible to see that little has changed. We are all to some degree still tied to the identities around which conflicts arise and wars are fought. In order to offer insight and understanding our approaches must capture the nexus between change and continuity.

In our view, there is a tension between top-down approaches to security and the realities in which people live. We believe that traditional, neo-realist state-centric approaches to security are not helpful in navigating an increasingly fragmented and incoherent world. Similarly, liberal approaches to human security focused only on universalistic rights-based solutions have also proven inadequate and potentially dangerous.

For these reasons, we believe that a new approach to security is needed. We do not accept that this should involve an inevitable expansion of security and security studies into all possible dimensions of human life. Rather, a new approach to security should place people and communities at the centre of considerations about security. It involves a new approach to security based on the principle that there can be no hierarchy of suffering. Ultimately, the victims of violence do not distinguish between small arms or tanks, smart bombs or dirty ones. It may seem that they know only that they have suffered and experienced loss. But, as survivors, they may also know who has caused that suffering, what it means for their lives, how they will cope, and how they have responded or will act. Therefore, to understand insecurity from this perspective we must understand agency. This is human security from below.

## **New Security Research**

In recent years, the individual has been added as a new referent for security studies. This approach, broadly described as human security, has produced a wealth of literature. Much of this is normative, or policy driven, in the sense that it seeks to assist policy in defining and dealing with fundamental violations of human rights or international norms.

As part of advancing this cause, researchers and campaigning organisations have sought to communicate the realities in which people live, and to project an idea of the scale of a

problem in order to generate the will for change. The statistic quoted above concerning the impact of small arms is but one example of this use of data for the purpose of generating political will. These are laudable approaches. But the spread of insecurity and the polarisation of international politics has both challenged human security and forced a return to state-focused security policy.

This moment will pass, but the limits to the effectiveness of state-focused approaches to security will remain. Human security, too, is challenged by the need to understand insecurities at the level that it professes to be concerned with, namely the individual, the household and the community. Yet, researchers have only recently begun to take up this challenge.

Decisions are being made about the strategy or design of international or national responses to insecurity in the absence of any real data. There is a real-world demand, a pressing need, for data and information that describes the landscape of insecurity. To practitioners in the field, that need is obvious. It would seem obvious that these complex situations require good data in order to plan national or international responses to insecurity. In some places it is being generated. There are an increasing number of examples of sectors or countries where data and information have played a key role in shaping decision-making.

Yet, the policy community - both researchers and practitioners - has yet to successfully grasp the significance of people-centred data and information for how we think about security. We have not yet comprehensively thought through how people-centred approaches to mapping insecurity should inform policies and practices of human security, conflict prevention, peace-building and peace operations.

The 'New' in the Fafu AIS' New Security Programme is the programme's assumption that regions and conflict zones constitute lived social space. A region or conflict zone occupies a territory - material or imagined - and as a territory it is delimited not by official borders, but by social practice. The region is a dynamic entity and a social construct. It is both formal and informal. And the moving bodies that inhabit the space (material or imagined) of the region are knowledgeable actors who manoeuvre in what is an environment of great uncertainty.

The research to be undertaken under the New Security Programme over the coming three years will focus on the following dimensions of security:

New Security research will seek to understand agency and the ways through which agents reproduce themselves and the structures (constraints and opportunities) in which they live.

New Security research will seek to understand insecurity, conflict and war as lived social space.

New Security research will place debates about globalisation, structures of political economy, international organisation or historical/social movements in the context of lived social realities

New Security research will seek to understand the link between people and those bodies that can provide security with effectiveness and legitimacy. This includes local government, nation states and international institutions, but also civil society and social movements (both armed and unarmed). New Security research assumes that states can be both the problem and the solution to human insecurity, a threat as well as the most effective and legitimate protector.

New Security research asks whether ethnographic methods can assist in the definition of threats (e.g. secondary effects of conflict;) the implications for people of policy change (e.g. informalisation via privatisation) and the effectiveness - measured in impact on people - of international responses.

New Security research brings together deductive and inductive approaches to knowledge and learning, in an attempt to create a dialogue between practice and research. The objective is to ensure that policy research is informed by learning as well as by science.

New Security research assumes that good science is fundamental to policy change, but it is not enough. Policy change will not happen on the basis of applied research alone. Researchers must find ethical and constructive ways to engage with the participants and end-users of our work.

The NSP asks the question 'Security for whom?' We believe that security, or rather the sentiment of feeling secure, can never be presented in a purely objective manner. It has to be felt; it must be lived. Thus, what is security for one individual may be insecurity for another. This means that we need to understand the historicity of the actors involved, and how they think about themselves and their place within specific conflict zones. We need in-depth knowledge of these actors, including how they design their coping strategies and how the design of such is influenced by their interpretation of their contextual surroundings and previous experiences.

In short, this programme will seek to develop approaches that can capture these dynamics, not in order to search for universal laws, but for interpreting and understanding meaning within the context of security politics. In this spirit, the NSP's assumption and assertions will be assessed over time in light of the experience of affected communities and policy makers, as well as new analyses, empirical evidence and developments in method. All criticisms are welcome.