



Global Policy Brief No.3

The Policy Process

The International Working Group on National Security (IWGNS) was formed in 2009 to promote the intellectual development and systematic study of national security policy formulation and the broader implications for a range of related policy instruments. Members of the Working Group bring with them a background in both strategic planning and the facilitation of national security and development processes. The Group responds to requests to facilitate national security planning processes for both bilateral and multilateral partners, and contributes to the national security training and education programmes of all member institutions. The Global Policy Brief Series is meant to provide analyses and useful methodologies on challenges related to national security planning in order to support policy development and education.

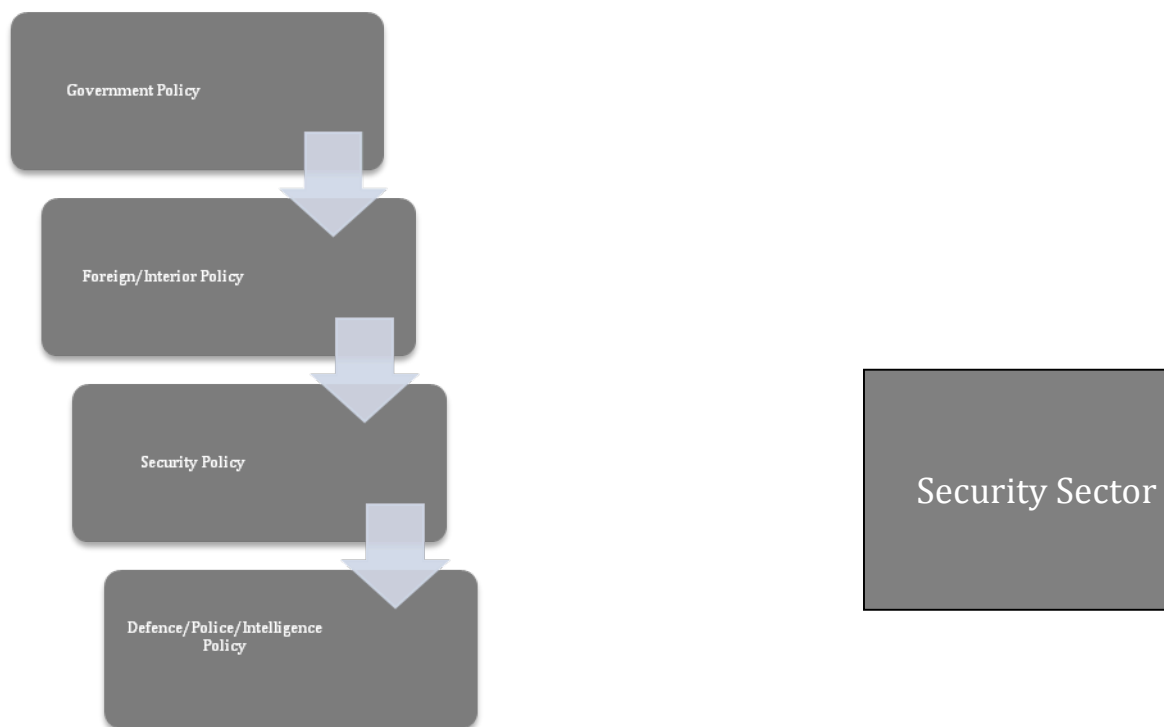
Introduction. This Policy Brief is concerned with the formulation and implementation of security policy, so as to give practical effect to the consequences of identifying values and interests, as discussed in the previous *Global Policy Brief No. 2*. It is thus largely concerned with what governments do, not what they say, since ultimately governments are elected to do things. The test of a good security policy is how well the nation's security interests are promoted, not how well they are described, and implementation of a new security policy should lead to visible changes on the ground. On the other hand, this brief is not primarily concerned with the mechanics of conducting a Security and Defence Review, which is something that happens only rarely, and often in response to fundamental change. Rather, it describes a simple logical progression of thought, which can be used by any government to ensure that its security policy remains as relevant and coherent as possible. Significantly large changes in the security environment are rare, and a process of continual adjustment, following the logic described below, should avoid the need for high profile Reviews, except under extraordinary circumstances.

A national security policy is, in practice therefore, a series of actions to coordinate and employ the security sector of a country in a way that optimally contributes to the achievement of the government's overall strategic aims. It is easy to have a document called a "security policy", which as often as not gathers dust on a shelf in a government office. This Policy Brief is concerned with the more difficult, but more important, process of putting the contents and objectives of such a document into practical effect, as well as ensuring that both are realistic to begin with. It focuses on the missing level between strategic policy formulation and detailed implementation of specific policies on the ground. It therefore covers the means by which a policy or strategy will be implemented, detailing aim(s), resources, responsibilities, and timing (how, who, where and when). It is this level where planning takes place, and without planning anything will happen.

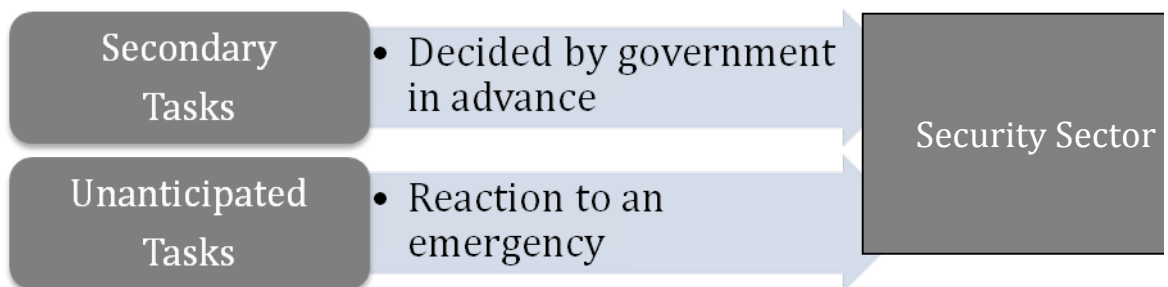
Threats and Tasks. The most popular way of approaching the security policy process is by the identification of "threats", followed by proposals for meeting them. Sometimes, threats are more politely described as "risks" or even "challenges," but the logic is the same. Whilst traditional military or violent threats do exist in some contexts, it is generally unwise to attempt to build a security policy entirely around them. To do so invites the search for threats as a justification for budgets and force structures, and the securitisation of issues that are actually better dealt with by other means.

Rather, it is helpful to think in terms of the "tasks" of the security sector. Some of these are core tasks, logically deduced from overall government policy, for which the security sector is trained, financed and equipped. Some are commitments stemming from international or bilateral treaties and agreements. Some of these tasks will be threat-related, but not all: simply put, all threats relate to tasks, but not all tasks relate to threats. We can call these core tasks *primary* tasks.

Equally, there are tasks which the security sector might be asked to take on, or help with, because of its special skills, even though they might not usually be considered part of its core tasks. Examples vary enormously, but might range from disaster relief and immigration control, to training unemployed young people and keeping essential services operating. These *secondary* tasks are not security tasks as such, but tasks where the security sector acts in support of other parts of government. Finally, there are unanticipated contingencies which have to be dealt with, and may involve the security sector in *unanticipated tasks*. An example would be massive population movements caused by famine or conflict in a neighbouring country. A diagram may make this clearer. The normal policy process is a hierarchical progression, with the security sector involved in security policy and more detailed policies:



But the security sector also has to react to the unexpected:



To advise against too great a focus on "threat", it is not, of course, to deny that societies face risks of all kinds. From crime to social unrest,

to natural disasters, government will be required to plan for a wide range of negative contingencies. Responses to some (like increasing crime) will involve the security (and justice) sector directly, although not exclusively. Other risks may involve the security sector only indirectly, if at all.

There are essentially three conditions that have to be met before a security policy along the above lines can be successfully implemented. First, it must be realistic in terms of the strategic, financial and political situation of the country. Second, it must be based on capabilities which exist, or which plausibly could exist in a reasonable timescale. Third, it must be supported at all levels by a centrally coordinated programme of acquisition, training and planning. These three conditions are considered in turn.

Realism - Many nations have a declaratory security policy, which bears little relationship to what their security forces actually do. This is particularly the case in former colonies whose constitutions, where security functions are set out, may have been written by the departing colonial power. Likewise, their declaratory policies are frequently influenced by donors who may, for example, seek references to supporting regional security structures, which they themselves are trying to encourage. Many such countries have defence forces which are simply not large enough to implement the tasks suggested in the constitution – usually territorial defence. As a result, defence forces, and even more police and intelligence services, find themselves taking on a series of *ad hoc* tasks divorced from any declaratory security policy that may exist, and with no central coherence or planning. In turn, this often means that force structures and equipment programmes are developed in a haphazard fashion.

To some extent, this kind of problem can be alleviated by a careful analysis of values and interests, as described in the previous Policy Brief. However, even when these values and interests are properly defined, a whole series of choices arise about how to construct a security policy based upon them. Finance will always be a particular constraint, and it is often better to do simple things properly than to do complicated ones not as well. Part of the realism of a policy is whether it can be afforded. This means that the finance and budget departments of government must be involved in policy making and policy implementation from the start.

Political limitations may also prevent the desired policies being fully implemented: contributions to regional peacekeeping may be much more problematic if there is a history of political distrust and conflict or economic rivalry within the region. Indeed, a mere announcement that a major regional power is re-evaluating its security policy is in itself a political act, which will have international consequences. Of course, the ability to make such choices requires the kind of central coordination, which is part of the argument of this Policy Brief.

As mentioned in earlier sections, a purely national approach may not be wise, or even effective. It may be more important to use, for example, cooperative border management processes, framework agreements for regional security, formal or unattributable negotiations, or third party facilitation mechanisms. Indeed, the best solution may not be directly related to the security sector at all, and may involve, for example, trade agreements or cultural exchanges. The key is to recognise the range of choices on offer and to be able to choose intelligently between them. It is also necessary to have the professional skills, institutionally and personally, to implement the choice once made.

Feasibility - Likewise, a security policy must be feasible. Playing a major role in regional security issues, for example, depends on having, or being able to rapidly develop, capable contributors from the armed forces, police or civilian agencies, able to deploy abroad, and with the necessary equipment and training. It also requires support capabilities, notably high-quality diplomatic representation and intelligence analysis, in order to play a significant role in regional decision-making. Lastly, the role requires a well-developed concept for profiting politically from such a capability, and a clear idea of which wider objectives (including command and other positions) it is reasonable to pursue, as well as how to ultimately leverage one's new status for maximum political and economic benefits.

Military forces are not the only tool for implementing policies of this kind and may not be the most important. A good national capability against organised crime may be of value regionally and internationally, as well as for the benefit of one's own country. A good capacity to collect and analyse relevant intelligence can bring enormous political benefits out of all proportion to the assets involved, and can greatly strengthen the nation's status as an independent actor, if that is among the strategic objectives chosen by the government.

Such capabilities are seldom developed quickly, and do not happen automatically. A nation which hopes to provide a United Nations Chief of Staff or Special Representative, for example, as part of a policy of heightening its international profile, needs to start developing such people now. Military or police personnel with no experience of overseas deployments will need careful selection and training: sending inexperienced personnel and units on complicated operations is highly likely to undermine any objective of higher-profile international or regional involvement; the international community can be very unforgiving about such things.

A security policy of this kind must also take account of wider issues. A programme of extended regional cooperation, for example, could most plausibly start with countries where there were already strong non-security links and common interests. For example, a maritime security initiative with a close trading partner, which was also confronting a common piracy problem, would make much more sense than an initiative with an acknowledged economic rival.

Central Coordination - Finally, a security policy must be supported and centrally coordinated at all levels. Assume, for example, that a nation's main problems are frontier-and coastal-related, and include such issues as refugees and economic migrants, smuggling and trafficking and organised crime, as well as an overspill from conflict in neighbouring states. At the highest level, government policy direction may emphasise control of frontiers, but also regional cooperation on transnational issues, rather than the attempt to construct an impenetrable fortress around the country. Such may be the conclusions of a Presidential summit with a neighbouring country. The critical question is how is this to be transformed into a working security policy?

Obviously, there are a large number of alternative, and potentially overlapping, measures that could be taken. Without central coordination, indeed, it is likely that all sorts of disconnected initiatives will be begun by different parts of the security sector, hoping to profit from whatever political imperatives are currently in vogue. To avoid this, the fundamental requirement for an effective security policy is central direction, usually undertaken by the office of the President or the Prime Minister. This coordination entails a number of stages.

First is the disaggregation of high-level government policy into a series of concrete *tasks* for the security sector. It does not follow that the security sector will have a monopoly in such tasks, and in some – like refugee and migrant control – its role may be quite limited. If people are fleeing a terrible war or economic collapse, they are usually prepared to take enormous risks to leave their country, and one's own security forces are not necessarily able to discourage them. In other cases, the role of the security sector will be fundamental although, at this stage, the question of which parts of it should be involved in which tasks will be left open.

Once the overall shape and extent of the security sector's involvement is clear, the problem resolves itself into a series of *missions* with specific objectives. They might include such things as helping the neighbouring government to address its own internal security problems, increased coastal and border surveillance to deter smuggling, better regional cooperation on organised crime, better control of borders to prevent conflict overspill, and many others. In practical terms, it might be decided that the policy would be implemented by despatch of training teams, joint exercises, purchase of equipment, interoperability with neighbours, and many other initiatives. It might also be supported by a strong diplomatic effort to rally support within the region. It may not be necessary to devise new approaches to deal with each situation. There is a great deal of international experience now available to be drawn on. If it is seldom wise to import ideas from abroad indiscriminately, it is nonetheless useful to study cases where other nations have successfully confronted the same or similar problems.

To carry out these missions it is obviously necessary to have *capabilities*. These may be equipment based, but are not only so. An improved capability for criminal analysis work (perhaps involving

training overseas) could be very important, as could language skills, better training for intelligence analysis, and training of the military in low-intensity public security type operations. There should be an audit of agreed missions to see which can be carried out with existing capabilities, and where new capabilities have to be developed.

Capabilities may then require *acquisition*, which goes much wider than just procurement. It covers all stages from conception, through defining the requirement, providing resources, procurement to in-service support of capabilities. For example, if the main smuggling problem is the use of small boats by night in remote coastal areas, then one set of capabilities (perhaps sensor-related) will be required. If the problem is smuggling of high value items through the main port, then quite different capabilities will be needed. Acquisition frequently involves equipment, but not only equipment. Support and training are essential if capabilities are to be correctly introduced, and properly used. In any event, a response to a problem like smuggling will necessarily involve more than one agency of the security sector. Therefore, mundane but important issues such as interoperable communications equipment and joint training must not be neglected.

Finally, the effective use of these capabilities requires *planning*. And planning implies a central coordination mechanism of some kind, able to make judgements about the best way to deliver certain capabilities, and to knit the various efforts together in a single coherent policy, which can then be rehearsed and refined as necessary.

Conclusion - Obviously the circumstances of different countries will vary enormously, and not all of the factors set out above will be equally relevant in all cases. However, the principle remains that the only way to establish a proper security policy is to follow a logical and centrally directed scheme somewhat along the above lines. In theory, it should be possible to trace every procurement decision or every training course within the security sector to an agreed mission which in turn forms part of an agreed security policy, supporting government objectives at the highest level. In the absence of this central coordination and direction, security policy can too easily remain declaratory only, or alternatively become nothing more than a random list of tasks, often dictated or influenced by others.