12. Epilogue

Concluding notes on the convergence between military and police roles

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The last decade has seen a fundamental reorientation in security, laying bare two opposing narratives about the way we wish to define and organise it. On the one hand, we have witnessed the emergence of the post-modernist narrative, which builds on the thesis that nation states gradually lose control over one of their prime pillars, as their strings of sovereignty are pulled by the forces of globalisation, computerisation, and individualisation. Such an environment places security providers in a different context, changing their roles and expectations. Both the positions of actors who are expected to contribute to state authority as well as the profiles of communities they should serve and protect are subject to significant shifts.

Who is the enemy for the contemporary military forces? Who or what should be the target of police services in societies which demand an all-in protection for a variety of risks? The strategic and intelligence requirements of these public security forces are being profoundly influenced by this risk orientation. This forces them into a direction where they become institutions with an insatiable desire for data on a vast scale of activities and events. This quiet evolution is supposed to reduce fear and anxiety in fragile and turbulent environments and ultimately should restore the trust in the relevant government authorities. Uncertainty about future developments and positions has become an essential part of post-modern discourses focusing on the world wide web of material, physical, economic and virtual connections in which the state monopoly over the provision of security is falling prey to fragmentation, privatisation and lateralisation of security.

In this perspective, police and military forces find themselves in a situation in which they have to deal with a great diversity of security risks and seek to define their role and task in a transnational world which is governed by a knot of multilateral organisations. The postmodern narrative predicts security organisations who have lost their traditional ties with the nation states and which now seek the connection with a transnational society which is marked by a wide differentiation of security deficits, ranging from straightforward local crimes and public order issues to the control of organised crime and counter-insurgency in territories beyond the realms of the state. Within this narrative, the role of the state as main security provider is increasingly being questioned as debates on the definition of key policing tasks and the police’s capability to meet the demands of the public have been reopened. Financial restraints compel administrations to stretch police budgets and to increase its efficiency. State security forces, such as the police and customs, are therefore increasingly teaming up in a public security domain that is characterised by partnerships and networks between and among state
and non-state security actors. Along a similar line of thought, in a postmodern narrative, defence forces face challenges that have forced them to go beyond their original remit, and to develop themselves to address the full spectrum of violence as well as provide a full continuum between prevention and post-conflict stabilisation. Besides winning wars, contemporary armies are increasingly expected to be able to support civilian crisis management activities, such as enabling the return of refugees, employing counter-terrorism activities, supporting elections, developing and maintaining the infrastructure, policing war-torn societies, escorting children on field trips or to their schools etc. The modern Janus-faced armies are therefore compelled to broaden their focus, re-train their soldiers and co-operate with NGOs, development organisations and state security actors such as the police, the border police, customs, public prosecutors and correctional services on both the international and national level in conflict-ridden societies.

Despite the popularity of theorists such as Castells, Rhodes, Held and others, who have predicted the onset of a networked society and a plural and hybrid style of security governance, living in a risk society does not necessarily lead to fundamental shifts and changing positions, including the authority by the state through the provision of security. This is a narrative that views the growing private security market as complementary instead of competing with the public provision of security. It is also a view, held by academics such as Loader and Walker, that claims the state still has the best qualities to ensure that collective security is distributed across the community. It is a point of view that explains why state authorities and the techno-industrial players are co-operators rather than competitors in a market that is always seeking new challenges, supported by each and every incident which occurs. In an anxiety society which seeks to minimise risks and dangers, the state can find ample space for governance through security. Different levels of government all seem to play their part in this governance through security: the nation state with its ministries, national defence and police forces, intelligence agencies, prosecutorial authorities, judiciary and penitentiaries. But also provinces, municipalities and increasingly international levels of government play their part in the provision of security.

The desire for security, in this sense, seems insatiable, which also builds on the perpetual chain of links between crisis, security deficit and restoration of that deficit by means of new policy instruments. The viability of this narrative has been demonstrated in several chapters throughout this volume. The values attributed to the state are mirrored in contemporary peace-building and security sector reform efforts. Although non-state actors are a focal point in most definitions of security sector reform, in practice, these activities tend to focus only on state actors. Despite the fact that the idea of the state as best suited medium for the equal and fair distribution of security is increasingly being contested by scholars such as Bruce Baker, the state centred approach towards security is anchored in the international community’s approach towards peace and related stability operations. Both narratives have a strong appeal and find their way into different realities. On the one hand, we witness the release of law enforcement control in geographical fringes, and the delegation of security to private providers and civil vigilantes. On the other hand, however, constabulary forces regain control in crime zones and are endowed with exceptional powers by their authorities.

Various contributions in this book have shown that – both historically and currently – it is hard to distil a dominant security discourse. Nevertheless, by analysing different strands of the military and
the police sector, the authors have identified several interlinking developments. Significant is the growing extra-territorialisation of security: in a line of thought which seeks to prevent insecurity from spilling over into other countries or areas, countries with financial, material, professional, political and human resource capacity have gradually adopted the role of preventive security agents. Security sector reform, for instance, which can be seen as a comprehensive though inherently ambiguous package of instruments, is generally regarded as a tool-box for bolstering the security task of local authorities and is often used as a leverage to prompt these local authorities to address the security interests of donors and push for democratic reforms.

Important is also the philosophy which embraces the comprehensive approach to security. This integrated strategy embodies interagency co-operation between public and private security actors, as well as between internal and external security agents, and lays serious emphasis on the interconnection of phases between, for instance, the restoration of order to post-conflict institution-building. The extraterritorial, preventative (pre-emptive), multi-agency and comprehensive security perspective has become interwoven in the security strategies of nation states as well as multilateral organisations with a security mandate, in particular the UN and NATO, but also the EU, the Council of Europe and the OECD. The European Union, for instance, adopted a Security Strategy in 2003 which harbours these new principles, and at the same time, through its external relations policy, for instance in the context of the Transatlantic Dialogue or the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Union seeks to export police and judicial reform as well as a human rights philosophy.

If there is one aspect which is illustrated vividly in this collection it is that the blurring of boundaries between police and military is not new. The blurring of boundaries is inherent in the fault-lines of history, the colossal changes brought about by colonisation, the seismic shifts caused by technological innovation, and the tidal drifts of global and regional conflict. The disappearance of the organisational and cultural borders between police and military is perhaps because there never were any substantial differences between armed and civilian forces. Both are bestowed with the monopoly of violence, albeit with different tasks, powers and resources. In essence, however, one finds that core values of the police and military organisations are nearly identical: the masculinity, the hierarchy, the order and discipline, the internal loyalty, the closed ranks. Several contributions in this book argue that the dividing line between the military and civilian forces can be seen as a human construct that serves specific purposes, including political, and depends on the time and place in which they are active. Both the police and the military can be situated on a civil-military scale which is influenced by, amongst other things, political priorities and preferences, local conditions and institutional culture. As the military can adopt a constabulary role, so can the police adopt a paramilitary role.
It is a commonly held belief that societies that claim to be ruled by democratic principles prefer to secure peace and public order by an institutional means of coercion that is controlled by a civil rather than a military authority. From that perspective, categorisations like ‘military’ or ‘police’ remain relevant and the blurring of these labels will call into question again the issue of civilian control.

What we presently are witnessing is – besides being a reorientation in terms of budget and policy - a response to an era in which the lines between the two organisations were much sharper, an era in which the philosophy of community policing stood out strongly against aggressive military intervention. Paradoxically, in times when security dangers acquire a more asymmetrical and unpredictable character, police forces use harsher measures against the population whilst the military – at least when we have the pictures of bike-patrolling soldiers in Afghanistan in mind – try to ‘win the hearts and minds’ of the population, not least by receiving cultural awareness training before they go on mission. Does this ‘paradox’ – if it can really be shown to exist – entail that defence and police forces are becoming more ambiguous and hybrid in their roles? Are the military forces turning into peacekeepers and the police officers into urban warriors? Does the creation of paramilitary police units demonstrate a more martial approach? These may merely be external phenomena but at the same time they may signs of deeper dimensions.

If the boundaries between police and military are blurring, as the growing constabularisation of the military seems to indicate, this may be due to the shift in the external environment of these forces and services. On the one hand, an upsurge of asymmetric conflicts such as counter-insurgency can be discerned, which requires fighting and policing at the same time. On the other hand, new paradigms such as the Human Security Doctrine and the Responsibility to Protect have redefined security priorities from protection of the homeland to the promotion of the international rule of law and international stability. Much of this falls into line with the growing importance of preventive security, such as the establishment of a ‘well-governed ring of friends’ around the European Union, meaning that Europe as a region should be protected against the hangover from social, cultural and economic
deprivation, fragile states, and ethnic and religious strife in adjacent regions. Good governance by exportation of police and security reform has become a well-trodden path in the realisation of the convergence of values, not merely horizontally between police and military, but also vertically between coloniser and colonised, between the occupier and the occupied, and between donor and recipient. Convergence processes, whether or not inter-sectoral in nature, are often based on the need to mimic strategies and to copy-cat organisational models. From a survivalist point of view, however, military and police must ensure that their tasks, powers and resources remain distinctly different; a security amalgam may undermine their reason for existence. Hence, more research could and should be undertaken into the tension between convergence and competition of values and organisational models of police and military.

Budgetary constraints and economic forces form a dimension mentioned by some of the authors, but we have not identified the extent to which the strategic reorientation by police and military forces, both at national and international levels, has been dictated by the decreasing national budgets for defence. A preliminary assessment is that budgets for intelligence and surveillance (the latter particularly through technological devices) are still going up, despite the economic crisis, whilst budgets for human resources are going down. If this can be demonstrated to be true, it means that nation states will become more wary – as Janssens has argued in this volume – of sending expensive, well-trained people to remote high-risk areas with little security profit. A research avenue for the near future would be how economic variables influence the orientation of security forces. Questions such as the balance of expenditure between human and technological resources will be important: Will it be the case in the near future that only countries that can provide large-scale, low-wage security professionals can participate in expeditionary forces? To what extent will the reorientation of police and military forces entail a return to traditional core tasks (e.g. national defence for army forces) whilst delegating or ‘off-shoring’ security tasks to private providers, like private military companies? Will the distribution of security still be an equitable service delivered to all citizens, or will it become a privilege for the happy few that can afford to buy security, like the Amsterdam ‘burghers’ did in the past, as Last tells us in his chapter?

Much of the organisational and cultural blurring between police and military stems from common, i.e. international, training modules. Both security organisations have an important responsibility in extraterritorial peace-building missions, in which their assistance is sought in several ways, for instance in the control of crime and corruption. The training of these security officials is based on toolboxes derived from experience and best practices in Security Sector Reform, Responsibility to Protect or the Comprehensive Approach. Empirical research is required to analyse the extent to which international training vocabularies contribute to blurred security semantics. And how do the trainers (for instance of police in Afghanistan or Iraq) train the trainers, in other words, how is training used as a vehicle for the transportation of ‘blurred’ organisational and cultural values? On a more fundamental level, more research is needed to understand the nature of the blurring boundaries: Which boundaries are being blurred? Does it happen intentionally or unintentionally and why? What are the push and pull factors, and more importantly, what are the consequences? Does the blurring of boundaries between security actors support or undermine the establishment of the rule of law?
Omitted from this book – certainly not deliberately but more by default – is the discourse relating to aspects of ethics, integrity and accountability. An important question that comes to the fore is that, if it is the case that police and military are in the process of amalgamation, then how, by whom and by which set of rules are they to be managed, supervised and controlled? The challenges that are brought along by urban warfare or policing post-conflict cities, for instance, may be formidable in that they demand the security professional to use coercive powers in a situation which may be legally void. The judiciary and parliamentary oversight authorities will have a tough job in defining what is wrong and what is right in potentially ambiguous contexts. Codes of conduct are essential, but may have a limited application in situations that reach far beyond traditional warfare. Hence, research is required into strands such as whether the expansion of expeditionary forces entails the need for a global constabulary ethic, or whether we should leave room for differentiation and situational logic. Do expeditionary responsibilities bring with them the need for a reconsideration of ethical values, including the need for impartiality and the immunity to political influence? Does the reliance on technology mean that policing implies the use of the remote control button, by which the much cherished ‘winning hearts and minds’ slogan turns into a hollow phrase?