

# Security versus Threat – Interrelations

Wioletta Koper - Staszowska<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Forest Holding "State Forests", the Regional Directorate in Katowice - Poland

**Abstract—** The issue of interrelations between security and threat has a history as long as the history of mankind. Human beings since the beginning of times have always had needs of higher and lower importance, these needs sometimes collide with the needs and interests of others, thus creating a threat. Originally, the meaning of the term ‘security’ was limited only to the armed protection of territories against the enemies from neighboring countries. With time other layers of threat were recognized and determined. Nowadays, protection against external aggression is just one of many threats which must be dealt with to provide security to a state, other threats are related to economic, ecological, social or cultural aspects.

**Index Terms—** security and safety, threat, fear, anxiety.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of security is under scrutiny of many scientific disciplines, it has rich literature and is considered from various angles. The interest in security related issues has increased in recent years due to the changes occurring in contemporary societies and impacting the living conditions of their individual members. Security is analyzed and researched in many dimensions, it may be perceived as decent persistence, survival and development in the perspective of ambivalent human inclinations and personalities (Świniarski, 1997). Contemporary understanding of security embraces all aspects of human life, therefore one may speak of military, political, social, economic and natural security (Ostojski, 2007). It should be emphasized that in the 21st century permanent expansion of the meaning of the term ‘security’ can be observed, but unfortunately up till now there is no universally accepted interpretation of its meaning. The presence of many different definitions generates considerable difficulties for identification of the field of security. What makes things even more complicated is the fact that security is both a state and a process, it is not a constant value of unchangeable designations.

## VII. DEFINITIONS OF SECURITY

The term ‘security’ comes from Latin and means sine -

without, cura - care, attention, anxiety; securitas – assurance, freedom from worries, anxieties and threats. In the Polish language the word security (“bezpieczeństwo”) denotes a state of peace and confidence that nothing may threaten the fundamental rights of people (Szymczak, 1995), a state in which life, health, personal dignity and immunity are sufficiently protected. Absence of threats is a critical but not the only aspect of the sense of security. The very awareness that security can be provided is also important. Perception of security based on intuition refers to the sphere of consciousness of a given entity – a human being, a social group, a nation or a group of nations. For example J. Kunikowski defines security as a notion reflecting the state of being free from threats (Kunikowski, 2005), N. Sillami views the sense of security as nothing more than complacency caused by confidence that there is nothing to be afraid of (Sillami, 1994); whereas A.S. Reber and E.S. Reber see it as a feeling of freedom from fear and anxiety (Reber and Reber, 2005). A similar viewpoint is shared by B. Malinowski who, while discussing emotional states, remarked that the essence of security is the freedom from fear (Malinowski, 2001). T. Parsons observed that lack of security is the determinant of fear (Parsons, 2009). Psychologists and sociologists alike see security as freedom from fear and uncertainty. Moreover, from the social perspective, security plays a critical role in the process of satisfaction of human needs, existential needs in particular. Security guarantees existence, survival, stability, identity and independence as well as protection of standards and the quality of life. Loss of security immediately generates anxiety and the feeling of threat (Zięba, 1989). A more extensive and complex definition of security was formulated by P. Sienkiewicz who claims that it is not only the absence of threats but also a whole system of institutional and non-institutional guarantees for liquidation or minimalization of threats. For P. Sienkiewicz security is an asset closely related to the feeling of stability, sustainability of the favorable state of affairs and confidence (Sienkiewicz, 2018).

## II. OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE SENSE OF SECURITY

Security may be considered in an objective and subjective



sense. Objectively, security, or lack of security as the case may be, is related to the existence of actual conditions that may trigger threats, whereas security seen subjectively reflects the sense of security felt by individuals or groups of individuals. The subjective assessment so as to the absence of threats is based on internal beliefs and emotions of an individual, while objective evaluation is based on statistical data, facts and professional analyses. In subjective view, threat is a state of mind of an individual who judges a given phenomenon as unfavorable or dangerous. Objectively, threat is a state of uneasiness and anxiety about a situation in which the risk (likelihood) of emergence of a dangerous situation really exists (Wolanin, 2005). According to A. Ostrokólski security may be considered subjectively as a certain state of the environment in which citizens do not sense the threat, and objectively, in which protection is guaranteed by public institutions, by the state in particular (Ostrokólski, 2004). Subjective feeling of security of individuals is related to the stability of the system they live in i.e. family, local community, region and country (Ostojski, 2007). In subjective view, one may speak of an interaction between what is imagined about potential threat and the actual conditions occurring in the immediate environment. In this way the sense of security is a state of a given moment which may develop into another state (creating a higher or lower risk of threat) as a consequence of changes which take place in the environment where people live. A threat as a physical or social phenomenon generates a state of uncertainty and fear, therefore it undermines the feeling of security. As sense of security is related to all aspects of human life and activity, thus it creates a multifold vector of mental comfort of people who feel safe. Similarly, any threat posed to this feeling of security embraces a whole spectrum of phenomena which deprive people of this comfort in various aspects of life and activity, or in different configurations of the first and the latter (Wiśniewski and Zalewski, 2006).

### III. TYPES OF SECURITY

According to J. Szmyd security on the one hand is a social, civilizational, cultural, political, economic and ecological value, and on the other hand, an existential, moral and spiritual asset (Szmyd, 2000). Simultaneously, it is a fundamental value which is desired not as a value in itself but because of other values it is supposed to safeguard. The Polish Dictionary of National Security Terms (Balcerowicz et al., 2002) defines security as a state which guarantees the feeling of assurance that the security is maintained, will be maintained and chances are that it will be even better maintained in the future.

The literature on the topic uses several typologies of security. The basic typology is the subject criterion, according to which the security is divided into national security and international security. The oldest security formula is the national security (a term which is often used interchangeably with state security). National security has its origins in the most basic existential needs of various local communities forming a state. These needs can only be satisfied by the apparatus of the state. When applying the spatial criterion, other types of security emerge:

local security; sub-regional security; regional security; supra-regional security and global (worldwide) security. If time criterion is used, one arrives at the state of security and the process of security (Balcerowicz et al., 2002). Security as a state refers to certainty, serenity and absence of threats, fear and aggression. D. Frei differentiated three states of security:

- state of absence of security, perceived as an actual threat appropriately assessed;
- state of security, when the level of threat is perceived as low, and the threat is accurately assessed;
- obsession, a minor threat perceived as a very serious one;

D. Frei also points to the so called false security i.e. a serious threat but considerably underestimated. Security as a process, in turn, refers to the state of security and its organization which are subject to dynamic changes. In other words, security as a process is a continuous activity of individuals, local communities, states and international organizations.

### IV. THREAT- A THEORETICAL ASPECT

A threat refers to the sphere of consciousness of a given entity, to a given state of mind caused by perception of a phenomenon as unfavorable or dangerous. S. Korycki notices a certain duality in the understanding of the term threat, which on the one hand is a purely subjective feeling resulting from the assessment of the occurring phenomena, on the other hand, it is an objective factor generating the state of uncertainty and anxiety (Korycki, 1994). E. Kołodziński wrote that the way in which individuals perceive threats, and the level of their sense of security is just a reflection of an actual or potential threat in their respective consciousnesses. This reflection may of course be inconsistent with the actual state of affairs as it is a sum of feelings and assessments formulated by individuals in various states of minds. Therefore, in assessment of the level of security one must take into account the reality in which the threats arise. The knowledge and awareness of participants of social life must be accounted for as well as their perception of the threats and the current level of the feeling of security (Kołodziński, 2011). Subjective views of individuals must not come unnoticed by the state organs who are responsible for upholding security in cases of emergency and who are supposed to eliminate or reduce harmful effects of the emergencies. State organs must also provide psychological support to the society, and take steps based on proper assessment of the situation to counteract outbursts of panic (Kołodziński, 2011). Thus, a threat on the one hand is a certain mental state of the consciousness brought about by subjective perception of reality as unfavourable or dangerous, on the other hand, a threat consists of objective factors which trigger feelings of fear and uncertainty (Korycki, 1994).

### V. THREAT VERSUS THE NEED OF SECURITY

At this point, it is worth looking at the so called safety need as described by Abraham Maslow. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier

model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. As it can be seen, the safety need is located right above the most basic, physiological needs tier. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is frequently used to clarify the relationship of an individual with the environment.

The psychological concept of the hierarchy of human needs in which the need of safety and security are seen as extremely important, is also reflected in sociological thought. B. Malinowski, for instance, referred to the hierarchy of needs while developing his theory of culture. While discussing emotional states, he observed that security means freedom from fear (Malinowski, 2001). T. Parsons, in turn, argued that the lack of security is a determinant of fear (Parsons, 2009). For psychologists and sociologists alike, security as freedom from fear, anxiety, uncertainty plays a very important role in satisfaction of human needs. With respect to the issues related to the security of groups and broader social systems, it is necessary to mention key terms related to this issue: social surveillance, trust, public order, social integration, disintegration, disorganization and the phenomenon of anomie.

The lack of security translates into the so called 'sense of threat' which may be influenced by (...) dynamics and scope of political, social and economic changes such as for example: political and economic crisis, struggle for power, departure of the ruling authorities from deep moral values, absence of reasonable long-term social policy based on universal values and justice, equal opportunities and solidarity (Hołyst, 1997). The feeling of threat impacts the satisfaction of the security need, the more intense is the feeling of threat, the more difficult it becomes to satisfy this need and vice versa. The sense of threat intensifies if the emerging dangers are unfoundedly and excessively treated as personal by the affected individual.

A threat may also be considered in a narrower and a broader sense. With respect to the first, a threat is born (...) when a person starts to experience fear of losing highly treasured values such as the most important one i.e. life (Hołyst, 1997). Here the threat is understood as a situation an individual is aware of (Hołyst, 1997). In a broader sense, (...) threats may also embrace situations of which individuals are not aware (Hołyst, 1997). According to the Polish Language Dictionary, 'threat' is a situation or a state of danger threatening an individual, it may also be a person who creates such a situation (Sjp.pwn.pl, 2018). The Concise Polish Language Dictionary defines the verb 'to threaten' as to scare and frighten, to become a menace and danger for someone (Skorupka, Auderska and Łempicka, 1989). 'Danger' on the other hand is a menacing state, a situation which spells certain doom (Skorupka, Auderska and Łempicka, 1989). The users of language usually accompany the noun 'threat' by an adjective or adjectives which specify the object of the threat and a specific area concerning the threat.

## VI. TYPES OF THREATS

With the development of civilization new threats emerge and enter more and more areas of social life. A threat may be understood as an intersection of events within one country or on the international arena, which generates a danger for undisturbed being of citizens and peaceful development of the state. Depending on the kind of entity whose vital interests may be endangered, one may speak of national and international threats. The state related threats (national threats) may come in two categories: **internal threats and external threats**. So a threat to national security may result from internal and (or) external conditioning and have military and (or) non-military nature. Each conditioning may occur independently (separately) or in any configuration, in this way contributing to a conflicting situation within a state or in its immediate environment. The penetration of causes and interrelations of threat conditions may be so far-reaching that unambiguous qualification and identification of the threat becomes virtually impossible. Therefore, threats should be considered on various levels and from various angles, in order to determine all possible cause-effect relationships (Dworecki, 1996).

In literature on the subject the following kinds of threats to the security of the state may be encountered: military, political, economic, social and ecological (Górka-Winter and Dębski, 2003). In general sense, threats may also be divided into: natural disasters or technical failures. Natural disasters are major adverse events resulting from *natural* processes of the Earth (Sosada, Żurawiński and Niczyporuk, 2011). Whereas technical disasters are caused by human factor and they may be both intentional (e.g. terrorist attacks) and unintentional (e.g. railway accidents, car crashes, building collapses). The scope and consequences of the above mentioned disasters depend on the number of people who find themselves in their immediate vicinity.

Taking into account the organization of security on the level of an individual member of the society, the following threats may be identified (Leszczyński, 2011):

- educational threats – generally limited access to education for some social groups, or additional difficulties on a particular level of education,
- threats to public health – epidemic outbreaks, diseases of civilization (obesity, cardiovascular diseases), lack of appropriate health care, limited access to doctors, health care facilities and rehabilitation, disability,
- health related social pathologies i.e. alcohol, narcotic, nicotine, psychoactive drugs addictions with all health and social consequences, this group also includes prostitution,
- cultural backwardness,
- demographic threats – low generational replacement rate, ageing of population,
- threats to the family– divorce, aggression, domestic violence, single parent families, orphanhood.
- With respect to collective threats to social security, their nature comes down to (Leszczyński, 2011):
- absence of social trust, closure of social groups, prejudice and xenophobia, all of which considerably hinder social integration,

- loneliness and alienation of elderly and disabled people,
- absence of legal and political conditions for creation of non-governmental organisations,
- centralization of power within a state, lack of financial resources for non-governmental organizations,
- absence of local government authorities,
- high crime rate, terrorist acts in a given area,
- social disturbances and unrests.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Security has become one of the most popular notions of everyday life. The subject matter related to this issue is raised by mass media who frequently report on events related to personal security, social security, public security, energy security, information or military security of the state. We want the space around us to be safe and secure, we do not want to fear unpredictable behavior of other people or unexpected impact of the forces of nature. From the world around us we expect peace, confidence, predictability and transparency, these are, however, difficult to achieve, as the surface of our planet shrinks alongside growing population, and the forces of nature cannot be tamed despite all advances in technology. We are exposed to dangerous situations on daily bases and we must be aware that more often than not we will be forced to face various threats either individually or collectively. How we cope should dangerous situations materialize, will depend on our attitude and the level of social organization.

Overall, threat and security are two opposite terms which are closely related to each other. These terms are omnipresent in the lives of contemporary people. While security specifies a certain state, threat is associated with a phenomenon the undermines this state (Prońko, 2001). Security has a positive meaning, it is associated with peace, stability and absence of threats. Threat, on the other end, means anxiety, uncertainty and fear of the future. The development of civilization and globalization may generate and multiply threats. Despite the fact that the term threat is intuitively understood, experts have not yet managed to formulate an unambiguous definition.

## REFERENCES

- Balcerowicz, B., Pawłowski, J., Ciupiński, A. and Łepkowski, W. (2002). *Słownik terminów z zakresu bezpieczeństwa narodowego*. Warszawa: Akademia Obrony Narodowej, p.13, 31-32.
- Dworecki, S. (1996). *Od konfliktu do wojny*. Warszawa, pp.18-19.
- Górka-Winter, B. and Dębski, S. (2003). *Kryteria bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego państwa*. Warszawa, pp.22-23.
- Holyst, B. (1997). *Wikymologia*. Warszawa, pp.64-65, 72-73.
- Kołodziński, E. (2011). *Wprowadzenie do zarządzania bezpieczeństwem*. [online] Available at: <http://www.uwm.edu.pl/kis> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2011].
- Korycki, S. (1994). *System bezpieczeństwa Polski*. Warszawa, p.54.
- Kunikowski, J. (2005). Słownik terminów z zakresu wiedzy i edukacji dla bezpieczeństwa. *Bezpieczeństwo człowieka i zbiorowości społecznych*, p.169.
- Leszczyński, M. (2011). *Bezpieczeństwo społeczne Polaków wobec wyzwań XXI wieku*. Warszawa: Difin, p. 61.

Malinowski, B. (2001). *Wolność i cywilizacja oraz studia z pogranicza antropologii społecznej, ideologii i polityki społecznej*. Warszawa: PWN, pp.42, 454.

Ostojski, J. (2007). Bezpieczeństwo narodowe. *Konspekt*, 2, p.26.

Ostrokólski, A. (2004). *Doskonalenia systemu ratownictwa w sytuacjach kryzysowych*.

Parsons, T. (2009). *System społeczny*. Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, p.200.

Prońko, J. (2001). *System kierowania reagowaniem kryzysowym w sytuacjach nadzwyczajnych zagrożeń dla ludzi i środowiska*. Ph.D. Akademia Obrony Narodowej.

Reber, A. and Reber, E. (2005). *Słownik psychologii*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, p.535.

Sienkiewicz, P. (2018). Teoria i inżynieria bezpieczeństwa systemów. *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Obrony Narodowej*, 1(66), p.252.

Sillami, N. (1994). *Słownik psychologii*. Katowice: Książnica, p.210.

Sjp.pwn.pl. (2018). *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*. [online] Available at: <http://sjp.pwn.pl/> [Accessed 14 Feb. 2013].

Skorupka, S., Auderska, H. and Łempicka, Z. (1989). *Mały słownik języka polskiego*. Warszawa, p.965.

Sosada, K., Żurawiński, W. and Niczyporuk, A. (2011). Pomoc medyczna w zdarzeniach masowych i katastrofach. In: *Medycyna ratunkowa i katastrof*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, p.370.

Szmyd, J. (2000). Bezpieczeństwo jako wartość. Refleksja aksjologiczna i etyczna. In: P. Tyrała, ed., *Zarządzanie bezpieczeństwem*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Profesjonalnej Szkoły Biznesu, p.47.

Szymczak, M. (1995). *Słownik języka polskiego*. PWN, vol.1.

Świniarski, J. (1997). *O naturze bezpieczeństwa*. Warszawa: Agencja Wydawnicza ULMAK, p.42.

Wiśniewski, B. and Zalewski, S. (2006). *Bezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne RP w ujęciu systemowym i zadań administracji publicznej*. Bielsko-Biała.

Wolanin, J. (2005). *Zarys teorii bezpieczeństwa obywateli*. Warszawa: [Fundacja Edukacja i Technika Ratownictwa], pp.15-17.

Zięba, R. (1989). Pojęcie i istota bezpieczeństwa państwa w stosunkach międzynarodowych. *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, pp.50-51.