Introduction to Preventism in Security

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Security, in many countries, has become the focal point of policy making.Returning foreign fighters, diseases like Ebola, problems with childcare and education, issues in cyberspace—all such issues, which might or might not originally be related to security, are now being dragged into the realm of national security, and security measures are being implemented on a much largerscale than previously. The determining argument in this debate is the idea thatwe live in a constant state of emergency in which exceptional measures must be taken to control the threats and dangers we face.[1]

This shift has taken many different shapes in many domains of security. In the field of security policy, there is a general tendency to create a split betweenapproaches that focus on responding to threats and policies that aim to prevent threats. One prominent example is the field of terrorism, where the old"counter-terrorism" paradigm was first replaced with countering violent extremism (CVE), which in turn was replaced with the label, "preventing countering extremism". All such concepts have spurred debate in the academic worldwhile often remaining un-explained in policy documents as if their meaning isself-evident. As a result, any research that attempts to understand the process of radicalization or vulnerabilities to extremism falls under the banner of "prevention", whereas any research that is focused on responding to terrorist attacks—such as investigating, capturing and prosecuting terrorists or military responses to terrorism—falls under the banner of "repression". Though many security agencies have traditionally been focused on "everything that happens after the bomb goes off", to paraphrase Peter Neumann,[2] in recentyears we have witnessed a shift towards a more prevention-oriented security policy in Western countries.

Another example can be found in the field of crime fighting, where a temporal shift has taken place from what Zedner coins post-crime to pre-crime,[3] thereby resulting in, "a society in which the possibility of forestalling risks competes with and even takes precedence over responding to wrongs done". As a result, security has become a much more "time-laden" concept. Rather thanjust the "absence of threats", it has become directed much more towards theprojected future and the perceived threats in that future. The question for policymakers in the field of security used to be how to map, categorize and assessthe potential risks and then to control them: i.e., how to prevent threats from materializing. With the rise of "preventism"—the desire to prevent threatsfrom materializing as the underlying ordering principle driving security policies and practices—the focus has shifted more and more to mapping potentialrisks and scenarios, distinguishing between different types of "risky groups" and "risky citizens", with an emphasis on permanent monitoring and surveillance to prevent and mitigate risks. Data mining has thus become a spearheadin the preventative approach—where surveillance (monitoring citizens on the basis of a presumption or allegation of misconduct) has turned into datavaillance (gathering as much data as possible to predict future behaviour).

Preventism currently seems firmly integrated in the academic literatureon conceptual shifts around the concept of security: the changing attitudesamong politicians, policy makers and security professionals about the prevention of crime or terrorism; and modern police strategies such as "preventivepolicing". Over the past decade, the literature on security, pre-emption, risk society and the culture of fear and control has grown exponentially. Most of theongoing debate, however, is limited to discourse analysis and to what exactly is meant by concepts such as threats, risks or prevention. Rather than add tothis debate, we would like to focus in this special issue on the more

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1   See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 25.

2   Neumann > radicalization.

3   Lucia Zedner, 'Pre-crime and post-criminology?' in Theoretical Criminology, May 2007, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 261–281.

concrete question of what consequences this shift towards preventism has in the field of security—especially from the perspective of human rights.

The assumption in much of the literature is that there are indeed consequences. Here, grand statements are not always shunned. Preventism is perceived as detracting from the presumption of innocence, leading to criminal law based on intent, discrimination and racial profiling, serious violations of the privacy of citizens, and limiting the mobility of citizens or imposing such stringent discipline upon citizens that the space for free choice is severely infringed upon.

These warnings are generally based on solid argumentation and must therefore be taken seriously. However, what is often lacking are precise empirical studies that examine whether these expected negative consequences actually materialize. What precisely are the consequences at the social and individual level? Other related questions include the following: To what extent does the shift to preventism occur primarily on the discursive level? How new is preventism, really? Is it merely the continuation of the development of preventive thought that has always been present in security thinking? Is the "preventative shift" driven mainly by more recent technological developments than by new ways of thinking about security? And to what extent is preventism effective?

In this special issue, we want to conceptualize the broader shift that is taking place when it comes to prevention (and adjacent concepts such as precaution, pre-emption, deterrence and risk assessment). We also wish to apply this concept to several security issues where this shift has supposedly taken place and where it is often said that, as a consequence, fundamental human rights (to privacy, freedom of expression, etc.) are at stake. First, Monica den Boer sketches the overall development of the European Union's preventive-security governance structure and asks to what extent the preventative logic in EU strategies, policies and instruments influences human rights. Second, Liesbeth van der Heide and Jip Geenen argue that there is a growing trend in Europe to criminalise preparatory acts related to terrorism. In their article, the authors look at this trend in the Netherlands and analyse how it plays out in the courtroom and to what extent preventative logic has permeated the legal sphere. Finally, Karen da Costa explores the notion of preventism as it relates to disaster-risk reduction (DRR). She analyses how the combination of preventism with disaster-risk reduction may impact human rights. Different scenarios are considered in which the interaction of these concepts is relevant. The main argument is that preventism may lead to more DRR initiatives and that this may well be considered to a certain extent a positive development, but that care should be taken not to jeopardize human rights in this process.

This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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