



CENTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

The International Aspects of Societal Resilience: Framing the issues

Sir David Omand

Resilience is a useful borrowing from the science of materials: the ability, in this case of society, to absorb deforming shocks and to bounce back into shape as quickly as possible. We might also extend our use of the term into the realm of national morale and will as the ability of society to face dangers with fortitude, continuing with normal life and holding fast to cherished constitutional values and the rule of law. Seen in that light, resilience is now a critical component of national security. But resilience must not be seen as just an issue in the domestic political space. ‘No man is an island, entire of itself.’ Hazards and threats to domestic life respect no international boundaries. Global influences affect the fabric of society. The welfare and security of citizens and commercial interests overseas are directly at risk. More than ever, the nature of the risks we face is dissolving the boundaries between policy making in the domestic and overseas spheres. This paper examines these issues in relation to developed nations¹.

Horizon scanning for risks, threat and hazards

I shall use the term ‘risk’ to mean that combination of the likelihood of an event arising and the scale of its impact (good as well as bad since risk management means exploiting opportunities as well as building defences against attack). The British government now prioritises its resilience and civil contingencies planning by a ‘risk matrix’ classifying risks by the two dimensions of impact and probability. Much planning of resilience can be done by looking at consequences, such as loss of communications or power, regardless of cause. But British experience is that it is also useful to distinguish the management of ‘hazards’ (impersonal risks, whether from natural causes such as earthquakes and storms or man-made such as accidental environmental pollution) from that of ‘threats’ (such terrorism, where there is a malign intelligence behind them that is capable of anticipating our responses and shaping their threats accordingly, for example in cyber-space).

It is now commonplace to see the top teams of public bodies and private sector corporations using risk matrices from the point of view of protecting their enterprises from three types of risk - those whose incidence is outside their control, such as freak weather; the risks inherent in the nature of the business, such as communications failures

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or industrial accidents; and - especially - the self-imposed risks to business continuity involved in embarking on new ventures such as major technology and information innovation.

Generalising this observation, we should see a primary duty of government, local as well as central, as being to work with the other sectors of the economy and with allies and partners overseas to secure the safety of the public from all three types of major hazard and threat. Delivering this objective requires (a) taking anticipatory action to influence directly the sources of major risks facing society, and at the same time (b) to take steps to reduce society's vulnerability to the types of disruptive phenomena that we may face. Such anticipatory action will have international consequences that must be managed, and may also crucially require international understandings and arrangement to be in place in advance of a challenge arising, if the response is to be fully effective.

In terms of the first set of responses, the possibilities of acting now to reduce the risks themselves, we can certainly see looking outwards scope for continuing action in countering jihadist terrorism, and the rise of serious criminal economic attacks against the cyber-space in which we conduct so much of our business and private lives. The spread of destructive CBRN know-how and biotechnology into malevolent hands also remains a real source of uncertain danger and, above all, needs international cooperative action. We can also see trans-national hazards which could significantly disrupt our everyday lives. Current examples include global pandemics such as an H5N1 variant influenza or SARS. If we look further out then we face the prospect of threats driven by hazardsⁱⁱ as serious, irreversible impacts build up from climate change due to global warming caused by rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Examples given in the Stern Reportⁱⁱⁱ on the Economics of Climate Change include intra- and inter-state conflicts over access to energy or to fresh water and large-scale migration movements, including those driven by rising sea levels, much of which will be into Europe across the Mediterranean. Southern border control for the United States has of course long been an intractable issue. We can expect severe impacts of climate change in key Muslim countries already facing insurgency or terrorist threats. Will there be increased hostility to the US and Europe, no doubt accused of being responsible for the rise in global warming through disturbance of the natural order of things? And on the other side of the argument, will there be rejection of fundamentalist movements and regimes whose religious ideology would shut out modernity, the application of science and of international support and economic aid in managing the consequences of climate change?

The second response to which I referred relates to reducing the vulnerabilities of an advanced society to disruption^{iv}. The complexity of modern society makes it more likely that disruptive events will trigger cascading effects, creating more disruption, both physical and psychological. Attention is focussing on the vulnerabilities of the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI^v), those assets, services and systems that support the economic, political and social life of the nation whose importance is such that any entire or partial loss or compromise could cause large scale loss of life; have a serious impact

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on the national economy; have other grave social consequences for the community, or any substantial part of the community; or be of immediate concern to the national government.

Here too there are international dimensions, as ownership of CNI goes global, urban mega-cities become ever more diverse and mobile in their populations and international conventions and regulations govern critical sectors such as sea and air transportation and travel or migration. As we saw in the United Kingdom^{vi} first in the 2000 fuel dispute, in the floods of 1998 and 2000 and in the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak, and over the same period in North America with power outages and severe weather events, modern society is strongly interconnected. We rely increasingly on complex computer and telecommunications systems in power, telecommunications, transport, food and water distribution, and finance to keep normal life going. Strongly coupled markets operating globally can transfer financial shocks quickly around the world. 24/7 communications can quickly lead to rumour and panic buying. Protecting and strengthening critical infrastructure both physically and psychologically is therefore going to be an increasingly important component of national security and well-being, a challenge when 80% of the CNI is owned by the private sector, which in turn operates increasingly on a global or trans-national basis. To which, as I have mentioned, we can add the psychological dimension driven by the ease and speed of communication, rumour and propaganda which in an internet age is as likely to start offshore in cyberspace. We need to be very aware of the effect on societal cohesion of serious events overseas affecting minority populations at home.

It is in the judicious combination of these two responses, reducing the risks and reducing societal vulnerability to the risks, that we will find future 'national security'. The expression 'creating the protective state' is one that I have coined for this task^{vii}. The international dimensions arise naturally from this way of framing the issue since the potential global hazards and threats that really should command our attention are not going to be susceptible to simple solutions, least of all purely domestic remedies. Tackling most of these risks involves international cooperation and action, as does reducing some of the key vulnerabilities in society (for example, in relation to cyberspace). In this short paper I therefore suggest a framework for considering the international dimensions of resilience at the strategic, operational and tactical levels at each of which different issues arise.

Framing the issues: at the strategic, operational and tactical levels

Modern government is so complex that we cannot hope centrally to plan and coordinate all the contributory activities to building resilience. Even at the domestic level, a coherent approach to resilience is going to involve government working through many independent organisations in the private sector, at local level and even at voluntary community level. Many of these contributing organisations are not, and short of wartime conditions cannot be, 'under command'. Instead, the approach must be to establish

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consensus over the threats and hazards to be faced and the strategic objectives to be secured, to build strategic partnerships to work together, but all the time recognising that what is being sought is the freely given alignment of independent actors working to a shared purpose and inspired by the same goals. Internationally, it is even more essential to apply the same approach, given cultural differences and national sensibilities.

Along with the analysis of risks and vulnerabilities arising overseas goes the parallel consequence that solutions too require international action. The activities to that end can only be mutually reinforcing if their various decisions are guided by understanding of and general sympathy for the 'Grand Strategy' being followed. This has significant implications for national leadership, for the framing of strategy and for the international presentation of the shared values that underlies it. The strategic paradigm must be the 'Nelsonian' rather than the 'Napoleonic' model of leadership. For the United States in particular, this represents a challenge to rebuild 'soft power' and moral leadership^{viii}, as well as having the capacity and will to deploy hard power when national interests demand it.

At the strategic level

Good strategic process with partners overseas can therefore help give a sense of direction and of shared priorities. The process must involve the key players being brought together in an orderly programme of:

- discovery and sharing of understanding of the nature of the threats and hazards, leading to identification of where shared strategic aims can be created;
- recognition of and reconciliation of different interests (what diplomacy is about);
- recognition of interdependence; international as well as domestic;
- emergence of strategic concepts, shared initiatives and campaigns between the nations most concerned;
- agreement on the developments of international institutions to carry forward this work, UN agencies, G8, NATO, EU, regional fora etc recognising that for the most part such institutions were designed to deal with the containment of State power not to act to restrain non-State actors;
- underlying such strategic discussion should be wherever possible, reduction of complexity to a simple conceptual framework that can be understood widely internationally, thus enabling independently captured

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ships to sail in convoy towards common destinations, dealing in common ways with the dangers and enemies found en route.

A sound strategic principle in relation to national resilience is to take an anticipatory view of national security. ‘Clear and present dangers’ do of course arise unexpectedly. Such dangers have to be faced nationally with whatever weapons, defences and allies are at hand at the time. That will always be the case, but it is more important now than for some time past that we look ahead and recognise what may lie ahead; preferably, when the prospect of danger is sufficiently clear to justify attention but before the danger becomes present; ideally, acting in advance so as to avert the problem altogether but if not then reducing its likely impact on our lives; and certainly, preventing the needs of the moment crowding out the necessary preparations to face the future with confidence. And a similar statement can and should be made in respect of spotting opportunities when they are real enough prospects, and early enough to allow the necessary investment to capitalise on them. Risk management is about seizing opportunities as well as avoiding loss. To take an obvious example, should we be encouraging parts of the developing world to join global action to divert resources now into tackling CO₂ emissions before the problem becomes significantly worse, or allow a decade or more of further growth to create societies that can then better afford the costs of action, with the better technology that will then be available but at the expense of all of us having to devote a much greater share of national wealth to tackle what by then will be a significantly more dangerous problem?

It is not hard to list the subject areas on which we should be seeking to arrive at a strategic consensus with allies and partners. They include:

- Increased influence of non-state groups such as international terrorist and criminal activities, noting that the 2005 UN World Summit did not accept the Secretary General’s draft Counter-Terrorism Strategy and that international corruption remains a major problem despite the work of OECD and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- Climate change, and associated tensions including population migrations, noting the difficulties with following up the Kyoto Protocol process
- Growing pressure on natural resources, , noting the difficulties of delivering international support for such agreements as the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the need for international agreements on water as well as increasing energy security issues
- Cultural and religious divisions, including those that inspire jihadist terrorism, noting that the UN has consistently failed to agree on a definition of terrorism
- Adjusting to the likely return to multipolarity in world affairs as the relative dominance of US economic and military power declines

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- Disease, poverty and environmental degradation, with growing inequalities of poverty and deprivation, and despite the medical cooperation through the WHO and FAO, the need for practical arrangements to deliver support to poorer countries when outbreaks occur
- Proliferation of WMD and related knowledge, noting that the main NPT, Chemical and Biological and Toxin Weapons Conventions need to be kept effective, and the current difficulties with Iran
- The impact of scientific and technological advances that may require future international safety regulation, noting that there is no current multilateral regime addressing biosecurity

Nor is it hard to spot some of the significant changes in the international environment in which these policies will have to be pursued:

- The changing nature of the risks, demanding both soft and hard power;
- The dissolving boundaries between domestic and overseas affairs;
- The impact on domestic social cohesion of instant access to world events and opinions available through the internet and personal video;
- with internationalisation and interconnections, globalisation and the rise of China and India;
- domestically, the rising public expectations of security;
- the changes wrought by global 24/7 media.

At the operational level

Many of the broad classes of risk referred to earlier are of uncertain nature and require early targeted responses when they start to emerge. The first requirement at the operational level is therefore specific risk identification at expert level through horizon-scanning and where appropriate intelligence analysis, leading to methodical risk assessments. Arrangements are then needed to share the resulting risk assessments, internationally as well as domestically, developing the networks of experts and policy makers subject by subject. As an example, in the important area of counter-terrorism, more and more nations are creating special coordinating centers. In United Kingdom, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, in the USA, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center later replaced by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), in Australia, the National Threat Assessment Centre, in Canada, the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre, in New Zealand, the Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG), in Spain - Centro Nacional de Coordinación Antiterrorista, in France, L'unité de coordination de la lutte antiterroriste.

Not only can relevant terrorist threat assessment be passed quickly between such centres, the developing bilateral relationships between them improve the mutual understanding of the underlying thinking behind national approaches to counter-terrorism and thus support strategic alignment as well as providing greater confidence for tactical engagement.

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Shared assessments can in particular lead to the development of common or aligned planning assumptions on which specific measures to build resilience can be based. In many areas of risk, individual nations can be only as resilient as their neighbours are. The development of the EU Situation Centre under the European Council to share national assessments is a notable recent development to that end.

A similar approach can be found in the international network of public health authorities under the WHO, with the operational arrangements made for sharing research findings on communicable disease, including animal diseases where there is a risk of the species barrier being jumped, and for harmonization of the relevant regulations for notification, quarantine and case management. International arrangements for the ensuring the integrity of air safety and security, for sea container transport, for regional power grid management and oil and gas pipelines, and the management of nuclear facilities are other examples that relate directly to the confidence individual nations can have in the resilience of their own critical national infrastructure in face of international interdependence and influence. With the growth of advanced control and logistics systems using modern data management and internet communications technology the need for international cooperation in cyber-defence will in particular inexorably grow.

Each subject area has over the years developed its own networks and preferred approach. At the operational level, what is needed now is a systematic mapping of critical infrastructure identifying its international dimensions (in terms both of the import and the export of causative events), and the systematic development of the cross-border, regional and global understandings and where appropriate regulation to provide greater assurance and predictability to national resilience assessment.

Finally, we might note that future national security, as at key moments in the past, is going to have to draw on the national talent for innovation in applying science and technology to resilience. And that has organisational consequences for international cooperation in this area, a good example of which is the US/UK bilateral Homeland Security Contact Group^{ix}, which provides an umbrella for the sharing of experience and technology between those two nations.

At the tactical level

At the tactical level the issue for government is the ability on the day to use the strategic understandings and various collective operational policy arrangements described above to manage holistically a disruptive challenge so as to reduce its impact in terms of severity and duration. The elements of an effective response are well understood nationally, but the international dimensions may be less so.

A series of initial questions suggest themselves:

1. Is there a clear and promulgated ‘operational doctrine’ (to use a military term) that sets out in advance the mandates and levels of authority of decision-makers at

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- the national, regional/state/lander, and local levels? Are the international dimensions identified and responsibility for managing them allocated?
2. Are the likely international neighbours and partners aware of how the national system will operate in a crisis, and thus know when, how and where to plug in and connect their own emergency management arrangements?
 3. Is it clear what issues would benefit from prior international decision/consultation and which issues are already the subject of international notification or control agreements?
 4. For multi-point and multi-dimensional challenges, is it clear to all when higher level (up to Head of Government) control will be exercised? And when conventional diplomatic channels for international communication will have to be replaced by direct communication between national command centres – and do secure and reliable communications channels exist for that purpose?
 5. Are there practised public information arrangements for mutual sharing of statements and clearing of lines to take on events with cross-border and international implications?
 6. Are there specific international arrangements for mutual aid in a crisis, and are the mechanisms understood? At EU level for example who will be in charge, and operating from which command centre? What are the arrangements for EU/NATO coordination?
 7. Are there well-rehearsed casualty notification and handling schemes for foreign nationals caught up in domestic incidents^x, and for own nationals affected by events overseas, in each case respecting the different religious and cultural issues that may arise?

Institutional Implications

Clearly, there are many other questions that could be added to such a list in terms of tactical preparations. The key to effective tactical working once crisis looms is careful anticipation of the types of issues that may arise, and testing of arrangements through exercises (ranging from table-tops to full blown playing out of scenarios on the ground with real responders). The international dimensions need to be rehearsed as part of those preparations, building on the patient strategic and operational campaigns that will have hopefully prepared the way. A model is the way that the UK and Canada have worked with the United States Homeland Security Department and have actively participated in TOPOFF exercises^{xi} to test cross-border and trans-Atlantic dimensions of events such as pandemics and terrorist attacks.

Let me turn very briefly to some implications for key components of national government.

First, the centres of national government must have the capacity to provide strategic direction, mobilise resource across the whole of government, and manage the international implications of a major disruptive challenge. In turn, such national centres

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need to be able to work confidently and securely with opposite numbers in other capitals affected by the crisis. All that needs to be thought through in advance, in relation to the full range of possible hazards and threats, and not just the traditional national defence threats.

For defence establishments, the direction of travel is already clear, for example in the provision of specialist support for homeland security, for example in explosive ordnance disposal, and chemical, radiological and biological defence, under the doctrine of aid to the civil power and with the ability to deploy such support overseas. But in the UK at least defence thinking needs to be taken further. In such areas as the security of borders, sea and air space, the capacity to provide response to severe dislocation, for example in providing emergency communications connecting seamlessly with neighbouring nations that may be affected, and in proving the framework of permanent joint command in the home theatre of operations.

Likewise for foreign offices and international development departments, there is increased need to work at multilateral and bilateral strategic and operational levels as well as the basic day-to-day diplomacy and consular support. I would add too that given the nature of the international risks ahead international development agencies and financial institutions must participate in the formulation and execution of modern national security strategy.

For the homeland security and interior ministry functions, we have new organizational drivers: key aspects of national security are once again major preoccupations that should not just be seen as a sub-set of what in the past would have come under police and criminal justice arrangements. Add the immigration, intelligence, law enforcement and security communities and you now have significant parts of government with major overseas liaison roles working for the most part out of embassies but with their own direct links back to their parent agencies or departments. Overlapping global networks are thus being developed that demand new levels of coordination within the operational level campaigns suggested above.

Conclusion

Change on an international scale takes a long time, particularly if a new international consensus has to be built, so a greater emphasis on the international dimensions of resilience is needed now. The words of that old Victorian, the Duke of Cambridge, whose statue stands outside the Old War Office in London, hover in the air: "There is a time for everything, and the time for change is when you can no longer help it." But in building national resilience against the range of threats and impersonal hazards we may face we do not have the time to wait for such realisation of inevitability of global interdependences to dawn unaided, nor should we wait for fresh disaster to strike before acting. So to accelerate the process we need to work with allies and partners overseas at the strategic level to show that the necessary changes fit a narrative that explains

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convincingly where and how hazards and threats are to be expected. Operational arrangements are needed to realize the contribution that international institutions and relationships can make, how they are evolving and why the time has come to accelerate the pace of change towards common goals. This brief paper is offered in that spirit.

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ⁱ For wider issues affecting the resilience of developing nations see Conclusions of the International Workshop on building the economic resilience of small states, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of Malta, at the University Gozo Centre, Island of Gozo, Malta, 7-9 March 2005

ⁱⁱ Human Security and Resilience, ISP/NSC Briefing Paper, London, ChathamHouse, February 2006

ⁱⁱⁱ The Stern Report, 2007

^{iv} M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996

^v The UK government considers that there are ten sectors of economic, political and social activity in which there are critical elements: Communication, Emergency Services, Energy, Finance, Food, Government and Public Service, Public Safety, Health, Transport and Water

^{vi} Sir Richard Mottram, *Protecting the Citizen in the 21st Century*, essay in *The Protective State*, Continuum Books, London 2007

^{vii} Sir David Omand, *Using Secret Intelligence for Public Security*, in *The Protective State*, op. cit.

^{viii} for example, as advocated by Professor Joe Nye,

http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2003/nye_soft_power_iht_011003.htm

^{ix} See the Ministerial statements at <http://www.iwar.org.uk/news-archive/2003/04-01-2.htm>

^x the plans for London are described at

<http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk/londonplans/emergencyplans/massfatality.jsp>

^{xi} http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press_release_0641.shtm

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