



Security in the Age of Cities

2018 Chicago Forum on Global Cities Workshop Report

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Cities around the world find themselves at the front lines of our most pressing global security issues. Today, terrorism, transnational violence, civil and ethnic unrest, organized crime, and cyber threats all have an urban face. Extremists attack cities to achieve maximum impact and criminals use violence to control territory. Hate crimes, demographic tensions, and lone wolves add to the disturbing trends and high homicide rates manifesting in cities. In conflict zones, cities tend to become the symbolic as well as de facto epicenter of conflicts with humanitarian and criminal spillover effects, such as human displacement and trafficking of people and weapons.

Securing our cities is emerging as one of the most important challenges of our time. For an extended historical period, nation-states have held nearly sole responsibility for providing security, and they certainly continue to have the greatest responsibility today. However, city and municipal authorities are increasingly proactive, and in some cases, are becoming security actors in and of themselves. This change brings with it uncertainty around the division of responsibilities between the local, national and international authorities. While local governments play an important role in both national and international security governance processes, it is not always clear what role, function, means and responsibilities local governments have in relation to other levels of government.

In some cases, the political structure of nation-state level government impedes the ability to prepare and respond effectively to urban security challenges. Intelligence communities are not set up to communicate easily with municipal forces, and local agencies typically do not have the security clearances they need to stay abreast of transnational threatsⁱ. In response, cities are creating their own counter-terrorism and security agencies given the problems associated with coordination across levels of governmentsⁱⁱ. Cities are also struggling with the need to strike a balance between

safety and security measures on the one hand, and keeping the city open and welcoming on the other. Security concerns have led to increased surveillance and expanded legal and physical capacitiesⁱⁱⁱ. There's a clear risk for a militarization of urban space.

The global community lacks a consensus definition of city or urban security, and those terms are used broadly to refer to a wide range of issue areas. City security may mean something very different to a resident in Gaza City, someone living in mid-town Manhattan, and a low-income tenant in Manila. During the last decade, experts and researchers from renowned think tanks, international organizations, NGOs, and universities around the world have begun to examine city security and develop indexes to compare cities across the world^{iv}. The potential scope of inquiry around city security, however, is enormous. Different experts have focused in on public health, housing, economic security, infrastructure, climate change, inequality, social unrest, crime, terrorism and cyber security as key elements of analysis.

The aim of this report is not to provide an exhaustive review of the topic, nor is it to supply a new definition of the concept of urban security. Instead, it will focus on a few specific lines of inquiry that are broadly considered to be at the core of understanding urban security. In particular, it will examine man-made threats including violent extremism, terrorism, crime, and social and political violence. It should be noted, however, that threats often become intertwined and cannot be considered in isolation. Criminal activity might come in the form of hackers attacking a city's power supply, bringing together cyber security and infrastructure concerns. Global urbanization will continue to drive us towards larger and more diverse cities, making city security a large and growing concern.

Identifying the Challenges

Crime, violence and terrorism

Cities are increasingly confronted with urban violence from religious and political extremists of all stripes, as well as from criminal gangs and organized crime. Whether considering militia groups in Syria, cartels in Mexico, or gang violence in the U.S. criminal groups are increasingly well organized and equipped. This type of violence plays out in cities around world and affects not only safety and security but also harms economic prosperity and development.

From an internal perspective, the complexity and quality of crime statistics is a challenge for cities. Crime statistics often fail to capture details and information in a way that allows identify, analyze and compare patterns. There can be cases where an essentially identical violent incident could be treated as a crime of violence, a hate crime, or a terrorist attack. The classification of an incident will determine who is tasked with responding to it, what kind of information is collected and stored, and whether that information is shared (domestically and internationally).

Another central problem is the way we understand the threat of criminal behavior. Poor people are often perceived to be the offenders, and yet in reality they are the prime victims of violent crime, and typically also lack a collective voice in politics. Poor people living in deprived areas are overall the most likely victims of crime and often do not have confidence in the criminal justice system to support them^v. At times, militarized security is employed in low-income neighborhoods in an effort to control crime; these types of policies tend to escalate social tensions rather than decrease them^{vi}. Police repression, institutional racism, rising inequality and the corrosion of citizenship are closely related problems that may lead to social unrest and riots.

Cities also struggle to identify the individuals in jeopardy of radicalization or gang criminality. The people involved in urban violence represent a diverse set of backgrounds. Young men between the ages of 16-24 are often seen as being a prime risk group, but this is very rudimentary, and sometimes even misleading^{vii}. A more effective method for identifying those at risk would provide the opportunity to tailor a therapeutic approach to prevent violence (versus only in response). These kinds of efforts demand coordination, and might draw on information from social services, education, public health, and law enforcement. It would also necessitate careful consideration of larger questions around the handling of digital evidence, privacy rights, and the rule of law. We need new mindsets, norms, and approaches to manage the complex array of modern urban threats in a responsible and effective way.

The institutional void

Urban security is not only a local issue—it has the potential to deliver spillover effects on national politics and stability. Natural disasters can, for example, cause situations of lawlessness and provide a window for insecurity to rise (e.g. Hurricane Katrina^{viii} and the earthquake in Haiti^{ix} were followed by periods of lawlessness where institutions crumbled). In the worst-case scenario, natural disasters can drive economic declines and refugee flows that then stress the international system.

The risk of an institutional void is particularly acute when national governments are not stepping up to meet their responsibilities. A key question, therefore, is how to organize collective action across levels of government in response to weak national leadership. In many instances, local level governments face and solve the majority of public security challenges. Practically, however, local leaders may not have the authorities or resources to lead on security issues when national governments fail.

When it comes to counterterrorism, the US State Department has taken a special interest in coordinating all levels of government. In an effort to promote better cross-coordination, the State Department created the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism in 1985, which became the Bureau for Counterterrorism in 2012^x. A

problem however is that the State Department is set up to deal with relations with other nation-states. Depending on the country, the State Department may not have the opportunity to interact directly with city level authorities. Ironically, it can be fairly easy for the State Department to coordinate counterterrorism efforts through and with foreign cities but much more difficult to communicate with domestic cities like Chicago or St. Louis.

Striking a balance between security and civil liberties

Information sharing is critical, and in many respects, it already works quite well at the international level. There are, for example, various international forums where law enforcement leaders come together with their information and best practices. One example is the European Forum for Urban Security^{xi}. However, there is still a great deal of potential to integrate and leverage information in various databases that exist at different levels of governments and in different government agencies around the world. For example, in many cases it would be easy to connect databases, but it is illegal.

There are also questions around ethics and privacy. Where do we draw the line between personal integrity and the need for security screenings of various sorts? How do we balance personal privacy and our desire to be safe at, for example, various sports events? How do we make sure the need for increased security measures and screenings doesn't result in abuses from government and security services? How do we avoid racial profiling? How can we make sure to uphold the rule of law and human rights while also increasing security measures? Perhaps most importantly, how can we incorporate local perspectives and knowledge to prevent security issues instead of just reacting?

Identifying Solutions – Key Recommendations

The city as a force of social integration

A first step in trying to address the wide-ranging problems of city security and urban violence is to accept the fact that we are living in a 'new normal', and therefore we also need to be creative. Challenges around violent extremism, terrorism, crime, political violence and social tensions are complex and intertwined. They do not lend themselves to one-size-fits-all-solutions and demand long-term strategic thinking. At the same time, the rising wave of populist political movements around the world means leaders will be tempted to sell quick fixes and easy answers to complex problems. For now, the most notable populist political movements and leaders operate at the national level. Local leaders seem to have more room for pragmatic and forward-looking policy development. Much hope, therefore, lies in the continuous maturation of cities as innovative policy actors.

There is a need to move towards a much more comprehensive and holistic approach on city security and urban safety rather than narrowly focusing on crime and violence prevention. Cities, therefore, need a broader conception of their own security. There is a need to tackle the root-causes that lie in the realities of health, education, recreation, etc. The city has a role in terms as defining itself as an element of social integration. All parts of the local government and its public institutions (e.g. schools, social services, cultural institutions, etc.) can play a role in fighting extremism and violence, especially when it comes to influencing the social decisions of its residents.

In order to be able to do so positively, cities need new planning systems that allow for diversification across identities. Citizens need to be included as key actors at the center of the solution. Therefore, inclusivity must be part of the strategy, where diversity is seen as a strength. There is a need for a holistic approach to policies around social integration, neighborhood planning, access rights and allocation of streets and public. These policies are mutually reinforcing of positive security outcomes; there can be no security without development. We need social equity and to fight poverty in order to ensure security and safety.

One of the areas where cities and local authorities can play an especially salient role is in identifying extremism and preventing radicalization through community policing, CVE programs, and serious work on counter-narratives. For example, Boko Haram uses children for violence and there is therefore a need to focus on youth education in order to prevent scenarios like this^{xii}. The future is investing in the youth and in education – explaining that there is something other than terrorism.

Policing and beyond - intergovernmental, inter-agency and stakeholder cooperation

As already indicated above, law enforcement neither can nor should work on these types of issues alone, it needs to be a comprehensive community effort. Overreliance on policing strategies may actually exacerbate the problem. Nonetheless, a well-functioning police is still at the core of city security. We need to foster a community where community members and the police work well together.

In order for this to be possible, the police need to be personable and accessible. Police must be in touch with the people to create community; this can be done through efforts like citizen security committees. Another strategy is to establish local community police booths where people can report incidents directly. Changed uniforms for police (for example less ‘militarized’ and brighter, so people can see them) can also be part of fostering a community in which people feel safe and protected. Yet another solution is to install (panic) buttons around the city that people can press, and a police officer will come within a few minutes.

In order for community policing to be efficient, police need to be well educated and certified, and there must be clear measurements to hold the police accountable. Lack

of capacity of law enforcement around the world is a problem. Local law enforcement agencies are typically also ready to jump on the bandwagon of counter-terrorism to get high military grade weapons, and this may entail a great risk without the appropriate training. Making sure training is offered to law enforcement in all countries should therefore be an international undertaking.

As discussed above, we also need solutions beyond policing. Public-private partnerships hold a great deal of potential when it comes to enhancing city security. For example, billboards owned and used by the private sector can be used to advertise if there is an attack in order to ensure safety of citizens. These kinds of partnerships, however, raise coordination challenges. Information needs to be shared in an appropriate fashion, and structures need to be set up to be able to combine intelligence of local law enforcement, the government, and the information from the private sector. Cities also need to be able to align data sources with different levels of government. For this to happen, it is imperative to build trust between levels of government.

However, the question of coordination is obviously not only an issue of intelligence sharing, another imperative is the sharing of *knowledge*. This is particularly critical as we are now facing dramatically changed global terror landscape compared to the time of 9/11. Today, recruitment and radicalization primarily happen through videos distributed online^{xiii}. This new wave of sophisticated and targeted recruitment is new, and more investment is therefore needed in research focusing on understanding the narratives and dynamics of video recruitment. This is something that needs to be coordinated on the national and possibly on the international level. This knowledge is crucial for cities and local governments and must be shared promptly since it is imperative to understand the recruiting narratives in order for local governments and agencies to efficiently create counter-narratives.

City to city cooperation – taking the next step

Transnational city networks (TCNs) are highly useful for cities when it comes to information exchange, cooperation and lobbying activities between cities from different countries—and TCNs provide an arena where this can be done independent of the national level. Up until now, these networks typically organize large-scale events where large numbers of cities from all over the world can meet and benchmark. The next logical next step is therefore to develop more structure to these meetings, and develop way to link specific cities with similar contexts experiences in order to encourage high quality learning. With more structure in the actual linking of cities with similar problems, more workable solutions will come to the fore. This could for example take the form of a focus on more local networks of cities in a cross-border region.

Beyond TCNs, cities should be seeking to engage in other international venues to share and exchange knowledge. The U.N. can play an active part in facilitating this

type of network and long-term approach (e.g. Strong Cities Network)^{xiv}. TCNs should also be going in the direction of having a multi-stakeholders and multi-layered approach; this includes focus on public-private partnerships and increased networking with researchers and academia.

Finally, there is currently a lack of understanding when it comes to various cities' experience after terrorist attacks. During recent years we have had a number of cities with serious incidences with terrorism and they have all responded in their own individual way. An annual conference gathering mayors, local law enforcement, and community leaders from cities from Europe and North America that have experienced recent terror attacks could facilitate sharing of best practices and create tangible information that could then be spread in wider networks.

Conclusion

The conversation around city security is important because cities are increasingly the backdrop for our most pressing security concerns. At the same time, national governments tend to retain control over security resources and policymaking and have been slow to incorporate urban perspectives and cooperation. This dynamic can be particularly damaging in contexts where national governments lack the capacity or will to deliver on their security responsibilities, and can lead to stress on the broader international system. A rising wave of populist leaders at the national level has also put greater pressure on city leaders to deliver pragmatic policy solutions to urban security challenges. Cities have the opportunity to take a holistic view on the security value of investments into health, education, and social integration. They should also seek to deliver a highly trained, but not militarized, police force that works with and through the community. Finally, cities should be engaging in the TCNs that will allow them share and exchange experiences with other cities managing common security issues.

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Endnotes

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