

Beyond Traditional Security: Emotional, Psychological, and Cultural Well-Being as Dimensions of National Security

Rohan

gulbarga university

Abstract—Traditional understandings of national security have focused primarily on military capability, territorial integrity, and economic stability. However, the changing nature of threats in the twenty-first century necessitates a broader conception of security that includes the emotional, psychological, and cultural well-being of citizens. This paper argues that national security is both tangible and intangible. While tangible security protects a nation's physical existence, intangible security safeguards the emotional resilience, psychological stability, and cultural continuity of society. The paper further contends that strengthening cultural institutions and the family unit contributes significantly to national resilience and social cohesion. By integrating psychological and emotional security into national security frameworks, states can better address contemporary challenges such as social fragmentation, mental health crises, radicalization, and cultural disintegration.

I. INTRODUCTION

National security has traditionally been associated with the protection of state sovereignty, territorial boundaries, and military preparedness. Such a state-centric approach emerged from realist perspectives in international relations, where external military threats were considered the primary concern of governments. While these dimensions remain important, contemporary societies face a range of non-traditional threats that cannot be addressed through military means alone.

Increasing rates of mental health disorders, social isolation, family breakdown, identity crises, and cultural erosion have raised important questions regarding the broader foundations of national stability. A nation may possess a strong military and a robust economy, yet remain vulnerable if its citizens suffer from psychological insecurity, emotional instability, and weakened social bonds. Therefore, security must be understood as encompassing both physical

protection and the preservation of the social and psychological foundations upon which national resilience depends.

Theoretical Framework: Security Beyond the State

The evolution of security studies has witnessed a shift from narrow military definitions toward broader human-centered approaches. Human security perspectives emphasize the protection of individuals and communities from threats that undermine their well-being and dignity. This broader understanding recognizes that national stability depends not only on external defense but also on the internal strength of society.

Security can therefore be conceptualized as consisting of two dimensions:

1. Tangible Security – military defense, law enforcement, economic security, food security, environmental security and protection of physical infrastructure.
2. Intangible Security – emotional well-being, psychological stability, cultural security, national identity, social trust, and community cohesion.

Both dimensions are interconnected and essential for the long-term survival and prosperity of the nation.

Emotional and Psychological Security as National Security Concerns

Psychological security refers to an individual's sense of safety, stability, and confidence in their environment. Emotional security involves feelings of belonging, acceptance, and social support. When large segments of a population experience psychological distress, anxiety, alienation, or hopelessness, the consequences extend beyond individual suffering and affect national stability.

The relationship between mental health and violent extremism has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Although mental illness is not a direct cause of terrorism or political violence, certain psychological conditions may create vulnerabilities that extremist organizations exploit. Mental health challenges can affect an individual's emotional stability, decision-making capacity, social integration, and perception of grievances, thereby increasing susceptibility to radicalization under specific social and political circumstances.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Radicalization

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) arises following exposure to traumatic events and is characterized by intrusive memories, emotional distress, hypervigilance, anger, and avoidance behaviours. Individuals suffering from PTSD often experience heightened hostility, rage, and a desire for retaliation against perceived sources of suffering. These emotions may be manipulated by extremist groups that frame violence as a legitimate response to injustice.

Research by Corner, Gill, and Mason (2016) suggests that lone-actor violent extremists exhibit higher rates of psychological disorders than the general population. PTSD can therefore contribute to a psychological environment in which revenge, rather than reconciliation, becomes an attractive response to personal or collective grievances.

Depression and Sympathy for Political Violence

Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, social withdrawal, loss of interest in daily activities, fatigue, and impaired functioning. Such conditions may generate feelings of alienation and exclusion, making individuals more receptive to extremist narratives that offer a sense of purpose, belonging, or significance.

Bhui et al. (2016) argue that depressive symptoms may be associated with greater sympathy for violent protest movements and terrorist causes. While depression does not directly produce violent behaviour, it may increase vulnerability to recruitment by organizations that promise identity, recognition, and empowerment.

Anxiety Disorders and Extremist Narratives

Anxiety disorders involve excessive fear, persistent worry, panic attacks, and heightened perceptions of threat. In contemporary societies, economic uncertainty, social instability, and rapid technological change contribute significantly to rising anxiety levels.

Individuals experiencing chronic anxiety may be attracted to extremist ideologies that provide certainty, structure, and clear explanations for complex social problems. Consequently, anxiety can indirectly facilitate radicalization by increasing psychological dependence on rigid ideological frameworks.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Cognitive Rigidity

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterized by intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviours aimed at reducing anxiety. Although OCD has no established causal relationship with violent extremism, the cognitive rigidity associated with obsessive thinking may reinforce black-and-white perceptions of reality. Such rigid cognitive patterns can make extremist ideologies, which often divide society into absolute categories of good and evil, more psychologically appealing.

Bipolar Disorder and Impulsivity

Bipolar disorder involves alternating episodes of depression and mania. During manic episodes, individuals may experience elevated self-confidence, increased energy, impulsivity, and impaired judgment. These symptoms can increase risk-taking behaviour and reduce the capacity for rational decision-making.

While most individuals with bipolar disorder are non-violent, untreated symptoms may increase vulnerability to manipulation by radical groups, particularly when combined with social isolation, political grievances, or economic hardship.

Schizophrenia and Severe Mental Illness

Schizophrenia is a severe psychiatric disorder characterized by hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thought processes, and impaired social functioning. Research examining extremist offenders has occasionally identified higher rates of severe mental illness than those found within the general population.

However, it is essential to emphasize that the overwhelming majority of individuals with schizophrenia do not engage in violence. Nevertheless, untreated psychotic symptoms may increase vulnerability to exploitation by extremist actors who manipulate distorted perceptions of reality for ideological purposes.

Substance Abuse and Violence

Alcohol and substance-use disorders often emerge as coping mechanisms for trauma, stress, and social exclusion. Substance abuse impairs judgment, increases impulsivity, and weakens self-control, all of which can elevate the likelihood of aggressive or criminal behaviour.

In the context of radicalization, substance abuse may reduce resistance to extremist influence and facilitate participation in violent activities. Consequently, addiction should be viewed not only as a public health concern but also as a factor that can indirectly affect societal security.

The Mental Health Burden in India

Mental health disorders represent a significant challenge in India. Depression and anxiety disorders affect millions of citizens and are particularly prevalent among women, adolescents, and economically vulnerable populations. Substance-use disorders remain a major public health concern, while severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia require sustained clinical intervention.

The prevalence of psychiatric disorders among young people is particularly significant from a national security perspective. Youth experiencing psychological distress, social alienation, or identity crises may become more vulnerable to radical narratives propagated through social networks and digital platforms.

Consequently, mental and emotional well-being should not be viewed solely as personal or medical concerns but as factors that directly influence national resilience and social stability.

Cultural Security and National Identity

Culture provides the symbolic framework through which individuals develop identity, meaning, and social belonging. Languages, traditions, customs, historical narratives, and shared values create a sense of continuity between generations and foster collective solidarity.

Cultural security can be defined as the preservation and transmission of cultural values, heritage, and identity in a manner that strengthens social cohesion. Cultural insecurity may emerge when communities experience the erosion of shared values, historical memory, or collective identity. Such conditions can contribute to social fragmentation and weaken national unity.

A culturally secure society is more likely to exhibit:

- Stronger social cohesion.
- Greater civic engagement.
- Increased resilience during crises.
- Enhanced trust among citizens.

Thus, cultural preservation is not merely a matter of heritage conservation but also a strategic component of national security.

The Family as a Security Institution

The family represents one of the oldest and most fundamental social institutions. It serves as the

primary environment in which individuals acquire emotional support, social values, ethical principles, and a sense of identity.

Strong family structures contribute to national security in several ways:

- Providing emotional and psychological stability.
- Facilitating socialization and value transmission.
- Reducing social alienation and isolation.
- Promoting responsible citizenship.
- Strengthening community networks.

When family institutions weaken, societies may experience increased social fragmentation, declining social trust, and greater psychological vulnerability among individuals. Therefore, policies that support family stability can be understood as investments in national resilience.

National Resilience and Social Cohesion

National resilience refers to a society's capacity to withstand, adapt to, and recover from internal and external challenges. Emotional well-being, psychological health, cultural continuity, and family support systems all contribute to resilience by strengthening social cohesion.

A resilient nation is characterized by:

- High levels of trust.
- Strong social networks.
- Shared cultural values.
- Psychological preparedness for crises.
- Effective community support systems.

These factors enable societies to respond more effectively to disasters, conflicts, economic disruptions, and information warfare.

Policy Implications

Governments seeking to strengthen national security should consider adopting policies that promote:

1. Mental health awareness and accessibility.
2. Family support and welfare programs.
3. Cultural preservation initiatives.
4. Civic education and value-based education.
5. Community-building and social cohesion programs.
6. Research on psychological and emotional dimensions of security.

Such measures complement traditional security mechanisms and contribute to a more comprehensive national security strategy.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary research design to examine the relationship between emotional, psychological, cultural, and familial factors and national security. Given the conceptual nature of the research, the study relies primarily on secondary data obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government reports, and publications from international organizations.

The interdisciplinary approach is particularly suitable because the concept of national security increasingly intersects with fields such as psychology, sociology, cultural studies, public policy, and international relations. By integrating insights from these disciplines, the study seeks to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the intangible dimensions of national security.

Method of Analysis

The study utilizes conceptual and comparative analysis. Conceptual analysis is employed to examine existing theories of security and identify gaps within traditional national security frameworks. Comparative analysis is used to evaluate real-world examples where emotional, psychological, and cultural factors have influenced national resilience.

The research specifically investigates three contemporary contexts:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic and psychological security.
2. Japan's disaster resilience and social cohesion.
3. Information warfare and emotional vulnerability in the digital age.

These case studies illustrate how intangible factors influence a nation's capacity to withstand and recover from crises.

III. LIMITATIONS

The study is primarily theoretical and relies on secondary sources. It does not involve primary data collection through surveys or interviews. Future research may strengthen the framework by employing quantitative methods to measure emotional security, cultural security, and social cohesion across different societies.

Case Study I: COVID-19 and Psychological Security

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that national security extends beyond military and territorial concerns. While governments focused on controlling infection rates and protecting healthcare systems, the crisis also generated widespread psychological distress among

populations.

Lockdowns, social isolation, economic uncertainty, and fear of infection contributed to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional stress worldwide. Many countries experienced declining public trust, social polarization, and widespread misinformation. These developments revealed that psychological security is essential for maintaining societal stability during emergencies.

Nations with strong social trust and effective communication strategies generally experienced greater public cooperation and resilience. Public confidence in institutions played a significant role in determining compliance with health measures and crisis-management policies.

The pandemic therefore illustrates that psychological well-being constitutes a strategic resource that directly influences national resilience. A population experiencing severe emotional distress may become more vulnerable to misinformation, social conflict, and institutional distrust, thereby weakening overall national security.

Case Study II: Japan and National Resilience

Japan provides an important example of how cultural values and social cohesion contribute to national resilience. As a country frequently exposed to earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters, Japan has developed a strong culture of preparedness and collective responsibility.

Following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, Japanese society demonstrated remarkable levels of social cooperation and community solidarity. Citizens generally adhered to evacuation procedures, participated in relief efforts, and maintained social order despite widespread devastation.

Several factors contributed to this resilience:

- Strong community networks.
- Cultural emphasis on collective responsibility.
- Trust in public institutions.
- Effective disaster preparedness education.
- Family and community support systems.

Japan's experience suggests that resilience depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on cultural and psychological resources. Social trust and shared values function as forms of intangible security that strengthen national recovery capabilities.

Case Study III: Information Warfare and Emotional Security

The digital age has introduced new security challenges that target emotions, perceptions, and social relationships rather than physical infrastructure. Information warfare involves the

deliberate use of misinformation, propaganda, and psychological operations to influence public opinion and destabilize societies.

Social media platforms have increased the speed with which false information can spread. External and domestic actors may exploit existing social divisions by promoting fear, anger, mistrust, and polarization.

Unlike traditional military attacks, information warfare seeks to weaken a nation from within by targeting emotional and psychological vulnerabilities. Such campaigns may reduce public trust in institutions, undermine social cohesion, and contribute to political instability.

The emergence of information warfare highlights the strategic importance of emotional security. Citizens who possess strong critical thinking skills, social trust, and psychological resilience are generally less susceptible to manipulation. Consequently, emotional and psychological security have become essential components of contemporary national defense.

IV. DISCUSSION: TOWARDS A THEORY OF INTANGIBLE NATIONAL SECURITY

The case studies demonstrate that security cannot be reduced solely to military capability or territorial defense. Psychological well-being, emotional stability, cultural continuity, and family resilience significantly influence a nation's ability to withstand crises.

This study proposes the concept of Intangible National Security, defined as the protection and strengthening of the emotional, psychological, cultural, and social foundations that sustain national resilience.

The theory rests upon four pillars:

1. Psychological Security
2. Emotional Security
3. Cultural Security
4. Family Security

These pillars interact to produce social cohesion, trust, and resilience. When strengthened, they enhance national stability and improve a society's capacity to respond to both traditional and non-traditional threats.

Intangible National Security does not replace traditional security frameworks. Rather, it complements them by recognizing that the long-term security of a nation depends not only upon military strength but also upon the well-being and cohesion of its people.

V. CONCLUSION

The concept of national security must evolve to reflect the realities of contemporary society. Security is both tangible and intangible. While military strength and economic resources remain vital, the emotional, psychological, and cultural well-being of citizens constitute equally important foundations of national stability. Cultural security and strong family institutions provide individuals with identity, belonging, and emotional support, thereby enhancing social cohesion and national resilience. A nation that neglects these intangible dimensions risks undermining the very foundations upon which its security ultimately depends. Consequently, emotional and psychological security should be recognized as essential components of a comprehensive national security framework.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition, Verso, 2006.
- [2] Baldwin, David A. "The Concept of Security." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5–26.
- [3] Booth, Ken. *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- [4] Booth, Ken, and Nicholas J. Wheeler. *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and T*
- [5] Buzan, Barry, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.
- [6] Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Free Press, 1951.
- [7] Erikson, Erik H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. W. W. Norton, 1968.
- [8] Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press, 1991
- [9] Maslow, Abraham H. *Motivation and Personality*. Harper & Row, 1954.
- [10] Norris, Fran H., et al. "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 41, nos. 1–2, 2008, pp. 127–150.
- [11] Paris, Roland. "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2001, pp. 87–102.
- [12] United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- [13] Walsh, Froma. *Strengthening Family Resilience*. 3rd ed., Guilford Press, 2016.
- [14] World Health Organization. *World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All*. World Health Organization, 2022.