

# Security Ethics

## A Thin Blue-Green-Grey Line

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This literature review reveals that there is an academic void as far as ethics research into emergent hybrid and transnational security practices is concerned. Many factors and variables are at stake, and they mutually influence one another: security culture(s), leadership, training and education, social context, technological influences, security styles and ethical codes. The complexity of this hybrid and ethically blurred field has several implications for empirical research into the ethical values of security. The multi-variable dimensions of the shifts in security and the possible shifts in underlying values demands further empirical research.



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# SECURITY ETHICS

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*INEX POLICY BRIEF NO. 1 / NOVEMBER 2009*

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The security threat to Europe, once confined to the logic of a bipolar arms race, in recent years became ubiquitous, and the commonly-held belief in the need to guard against security threats has turned increasingly inwards. Security agencies (primarily the military) traditionally responsible for assuring security from external dangers began to develop means and mechanisms for identifying threats inside Europe, thus overlapping with the usual dominion of internal security agencies. Internal authorities, such as the police, increasingly seek security threats beyond their borders: transnational organised crime networks, terrorist networks, etc. This way, a security continuum linking and imbricating internal and external security concerns has emerged. As a result, the ethical framework of the security field has become an increasingly complex and dynamic subject. By *ethics* we refer to the systematic reflection on values and norms; to thinking about what constitutes good and bad and what should or should not guide human conduct (Van der Wal, 2008, p. 26). Thus, ethics is not a model of correct behaviour, it is about self-reflection. It is the label given to the recognition that we have choices (Burgess, 2008).

The values and norms embedded in security organisations are complex, dynamic and difficult to pin down. The scientific elaboration of theoretical concepts and empirical enquiry into the ethical dimensions of security practices are neither conclusive nor clear-cut. There is an ongoing discussion on the question of how the ethical dimensions of security practices are being shaped. Many factors and variables are at stake, and they mutually influence each other: security culture(s), leadership, training and education, the social and political context, technological influences, international cooperation, security styles and codes of ethics. Whereas in earlier research the focus was more on the personal characteristics of security officers, later on it shifted more towards the organisational values of security organisations. Solidarity, morality, loyalty, trust, integrity and societal involvement are for instance said to be the core values of police officers and police organisations. But, as experience and research show, these values also have their 'dark sides': loyalty can lead to an 'us versus them' mentality and an internal 'wall of silence'; morality can lead to 'noble cause corruption'; strong societal involvement can lead to 'Dirty Harry' behaviour. So, in contrast to the strong moral principles embedded in the ethical codes of police organisations, corruption, abuse of authority, brutal tactics and violations of constitutional protections have left an 'unfortunate imprint' (Neyroud & Beckley, 2001, p. 82) on the history of Western security organisations.

### Changing soul

Security organisations do not operate in a vacuum, however. Besides personal values and organisational values, the political and societal environment of security plays a key part in shaping the terms of the debate about its ethics (Neyroud & Beckley, 2001, p. 216). For instance, a police organisation that is mainly a 'crime fighting' organisation will have different attitudes and relationships with the civic community than a police force that has as its main orientation community policing. A strong emphasis on terrorism and radicalisation runs the risk

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that community policing is only valued as a function of intelligence-gathering on ‘suspected communities’ and interferes with the strategy of ‘winning hearts and minds’ that is normally embedded within community policing (Neyroud & Beckley, 2001, pp. 30-31). The changing ‘police environment’ in the Dutch context has, for instance, been described as the ‘changing the soul of Dutch police’ (Das, Huberts & Van Steden, 2007, p. 530). The ‘hyper politicisation’ of safety and security may well bring out lines of thinking that are less apprehensive about a community base for policing. If we look at other security organisations, an intelligence service that is ‘taking the gloves off’ will have a different ethical outlook to intelligence services that see themselves as mainly ‘neutral information providers’ to a wide audience of governmental services (Bellaby, 2006). Military personnel, trained for battle against standing armies of other nation states, will face different ethical challenges than do military officers that are confronted with forms of asymmetric warfare or peace-keeping missions. So changes in, and pressure from, the social and political environment will inform the ongoing discussions inside security organisations and policy circles on ethical standards and norms.

New ethical challenges will arise if the different ‘normative orders’ (Herbert, 1998) of police, military and intelligence intertwine as a result of the merger between internal and external security. Each of these contexts raises different issues and questions concerning ethical security practices, and they may produce different dilemmas and contradictory ethical claims. Scholars expect a ‘hardening’ of policing and a ‘softening’ of military practices, for instance. Police officers, used to mostly peaceful conditions in their daily routines at home, now find themselves in quite different, more hostile conditions when they are sent on peacekeeping missions abroad. The military in peacekeeping or peace-enforcing situations is expected to be able to deploy more police-like tactics than ‘old-fashioned’ military tactics. Instead of a ‘military ethos’, the new security environment is asking for a ‘peacekeeper ethos’ (Tripodi, 2006). Besides the confrontation between different ‘normative orders’ in the European context, the merger of internal and external security also leads to a more international merger of ‘normative orders’. International investigations can have the effect of police exchanging information with police forces that are not known for their good record on human rights and civil liberties; intelligence services are working together with foreign intelligence services whose practices infringe on non-derogable human rights. The increasingly blurred boundaries between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ security, cooperation between police services and military organisations, and the cooperation between police forces from countries with different histories and perspectives on ethical issues like investigative powers, human rights concerns, accountability and policing cultures can be all seen as an enormous challenge to the future of ethical policing (Den Boer, 2008). Potentially problematic areas can be conceptualised in the ‘quid pro quo’ mechanisms underlying international cooperation, information exchange with countries known to use methods that liberal agencies normally regard as wrongful, and compromising domestic standards of constitutionalism, legality and accountability, resulting in a blurring of ethics, democratic control and accountability.

## **Domains of generalised suspicion**

Despite differences in culture, style, organisation, mandate and powers, international cooperation can foster a ‘transnational solidarity’ between security officials founded on the shared peculiarities of their jobs that give rise to new (hybrid) working practices amongst officers moved by the common threat of the transnational *criminal other* and possessing a shared ‘feel for the game’ (Loader, 2002, p. 132). These police elites can become part of an opaque, thinly accountable policy network increasingly organised around a particular ideology of European security (Loader, 2002, p. 133). However, as Bigo (2006, pp. 111-114) reminds us, within this ‘blurred transnational sphere’ transnational informal and horizontal networks of security professionals produce a ‘European field of security’ or a ‘field of truth’ in which they cooperate but also *compete* with each other for the monopoly of legitimate knowledge on what constitutes risk and (in)security. These professionals employ the strategy of overstepping

national boundaries and forming corporatist professional alliances; drawing resources of knowledge and symbolic power from this transnationalisation that can also be used to win the internal struggles in their respective national security fields. Within this field, ethical boundaries can be expected to be 'on the move' in the same way as the boundaries between different security cultures.

New security paradigms also raise ethical dilemmas and questions. The emphasis on risk orientation and prevention comes with ethical challenges. The focus on surveillance for risk management means that knowledge of the persons or the organisation 'at risk' is emphasised more than the subject's moral culpability or responsibility for a particular act of wrongdoing. "Everyone is presumed guilty until the risk profile proves otherwise" (Haggerty & Ericson, 1997, p. 42). Zedner (2003, p. 169) points to the "zones of high security" like airports, which are turned into "domains of generalised suspicion" in which people become members of a population who, by their very presence in the place, are suspect. And to a significant degree, the security arrangements once thought necessary only in zones of high security have 'spilled over' into ordinary life and ordinary places. It seems obvious that the 'automatic detention of unusual behaviour and anomalies' can have far-reaching ethical implications.

### **Hybrid security practices**

Notwithstanding the rich academic research on security ethics, of which the literature review (Den Boer & Van Buuren, 2009) conducted by working group 3 of the INEX-project offers an appreciation, we have come to an academic void as far as ethics research in emergent hybrid and transnational security practices is concerned. The multi-variable dimensions of the shifts in security and the possible shifts in underlying values demands further empirical research. Many factors and variables are at stake, and they mutually influence one another: security culture(s), leadership, training and education, social context, technological influences, security styles and ethical codes. The complexity of this hybrid and ethically blurred field has several implications for empirical research into the ethical values of security.

First of all, it is necessary to identify and operationalise the variables that are at stake and to analyse their role in specific contexts: the ethical values that apply in local community projects may be considerably different from those that apply in the context of a joint international investigation team on organised crime; the application of homogenous legal frameworks may differ greatly from the use of incremental or even fragmented legal norms; ethical values may be differentially applied by public police forces in the context of third-party policing. The 'normative orders' of police, intelligence and military differ but also intertwine. Each of these contexts raises different issues and questions concerning ethical security practices, and they may produce different dilemmas and contradictory ethical claims. The political and administrative prioritisation of ethical values may deliver different outcomes as to the way in which security organisations account for the compliance with ethical standards.

Second, the literature review has also made clear the urgent need for empirical longitudinal research: compliance with ethical standards in security organisations can only be properly investigated when measured over a longer period of time in stable professional environments.

Third, and perhaps most important in view of the INEX-project, we have come to an academic void concerning ethics research in emergent hybrid and transnational security practices. There is an urgent need to expand the scope of ethics research to new security arenas, including international intelligence-led policing, cross-border policing, peacekeeping missions, international counterterrorism, co-operation and information-sharing between different intelligence organisations, and security reform projects. There is also the need for specific research into the European context. American literature and American research dominate the scientific debate, but experiences and insights from the American context cannot be translated unthinkingly into the European situation, however. Hopefully, our empirical research into the

shifting value systems of security professionals as the next step in the INEX-project will serve as a starter towards filling these gaps.

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