

Human Security in the 21st Century

Mrs. Sadako Ogata

Coca-Cola World Fund Lecture

Yale University

27 February 2002

It is almost six months since the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon on September 11th 2001. Having watched the World Trade Center buildings on fire and crumble from my 40th floor window in mid-Manhattan, I still recall and share the deep sense of shock, fear and sorrow of all Americans. For those of us involved in policy thinking, the attacks stand as a watershed event in reviewing our basic assumptions regarding security.

Traditionally, security threats were assumed to emanate from other states with aggressive or adversarial designs. Security issues were examined in the context of state power. The protection of the state --- its boundaries, people, institutions and values --- was the responsibility and objective of the state. States built powerful military structures to defend themselves. People were presumably assured of their security by the shield of the state. Territorial boundaries were considered inviolable, and external interference in internal affairs of sovereign states was not acceptable.

With the attacks on September 11th, terrorism manifested itself as a powerful new source of threat. Terrorism as such always existed, but had taken on different dimensions. The end of the Cold War resulted in the decline of state-sponsored terrorism. While the leftist terrorist groups showed signs of considerable weakening, ethnic separatist organizations began resorting to terrorist means to pursue autonomy and/or independence. Religiously based groups, identified both with major religions as well as new cults, emerged on the scene. It became clear that threats of terrorism emanate both from external and internal sources.

In the decade following the end of the Cold War, the nature of war changed from inter-state to intra-state. The sources of insecurity became largely internal, with ethnic, religious and political groups fighting over contested rights and resources with vengeance. Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Sierra Leone come to mind. The international community, on the other hand, was short of effective tools to deal with the myriads of these claims. Applying the doctrine of self-determination would only break up states into unviable political and economic units. Air strikes from 15,000 feet or missiles launched

from thousands of miles away could bring destruction but not resolve house-to-house communal conflicts.

Moreover, globalization added complication and potency to internal conflict and terrorism. While creating wealth, opportunities for work, and a better life for many, it often impacted adversely on vulnerable strata of society. The extraordinary growth in the diffusion of information technology, the advancement in transportation and communication and the free flow of financial capital, accelerated population movement as well as networking of people across international borders. Those who felt marginalized, deprived or angered by what they perceived as injustices caused by poverty and inequity, found new ways of grouping themselves together. The network of al-Qa'ida, that resorted to international terrorist attacks against the United States was a product of the new globalizing threat.

How then should we address the evolving security issues of the day? What are the useful entry points to tackle the difficult task of reinforcing not only the security of state but also of the people? I would like to refer to the case of Afghanistan which became the hotbed of international terrorism and the scene of serious internal strife and human insecurity. Recently, Afghanistan has been blamed as a “failed state” that spread danger not only within its borders, but also throughout the region and even beyond. How did it become a “failed state” and what could have been done to prevent this turn? Who could have helped the people? I raise these questions because I believe they are relevant as we reflect on the future course of Afghan reconstruction, and a host of preventive steps to ensure future security.

I visited Afghanistan and the neighboring countries several times over the last ten years. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the problem of Afghan refugees was very high on my agenda. The Afghans were the largest single caseload of refugees, totaling close to 6.3 million when I took up the office in 1991. With the withdrawal of the Soviet occupying forces many returned home. In the subsequent years, some went home as others continued to flee. In the end of 2000, they were still the major refugee group numbering some 2.5 million.

In the fall of 2000 before leaving the office, I visited Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran again. It was my last try to mobilize interest and support for refugees, internally displaced and affected civilian people in the region. The refugee hosting countries, both Pakistan and Iran, faced serious difficulties since international aid to refugees was dwindling. These governments faced economic constraints and drought was causing additional hardship. To the international donor community, repatriation to Afghanistan was not an attractive solution, because Afghanistan at the time was under the fundamentalist Taliban regime. They assumed that nobody should want to go back and live under the Taliban, although in fact, some refugees were even asking to be taken home as a last resort. I felt that the only solution, however limited, was to identify pockets of security, negotiate with the more moderate and pragmatic Taliban administrators and help refugees return back to Afghanistan. I tried to raise some funds, but the response was not forthcoming. I felt very hurt by the impression I gained that the

international community simply did not care about Afghan refugees. In fact they had written off Afghanistan and the Afghan people.

Afghanistan was indeed a forgotten country, left to humanitarian charity and even inadequately at that. It never entered the realm of strategic debate. After the Soviet withdrawal, it faded from the Cold War scene. During the time of endless fighting among the mujahidin warriors and the control under the Taliban, the international action was limited to levying sanction, against small acts of terror traced to the al-Qa'ida organization, or against the Taliban for their acts of violence and violation of human rights. The security situation in Afghanistan was left to the Islamic radicals to fight. The armed Islamic groups originally came to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet troops, and the government they established. Organizing themselves into the al-'Qa-ida, they received financial and military support from abroad and linked up with the Taliban. Afghanistan became the haven for international terrorism --- training terrorists and networking terrorists across the globe. Their final act was the devastating attacks on September 11th.

During these years, the people of Afghanistan were the gravest victims. They suffered twenty years of killings, violence, displacement inside and outside the country. They endured oppression under the changing regimes that neither provided security nor welfare. Today, you will find Afghans at the bottom of all measurement of human development. In terms of life expectancy, mortality of women and children, nutrition, health, literacy, access to clean water --- Afghans rank among the lowest in any international comparison. Moreover, I understand that the figures representing Afghan statistics are rough guesses, since no national institutions have functioned to compile any statistics. The reality could be worse than what international reports portray.

In spite of all the tragedies involving September 11th for Afghanistan and the Afghan people, it was the subsequent developments following the attacks that brought them new opportunities. Frankly speaking, I was very worried by President Bush's remarks in the days immediately following the event. I understood his anger and sympathized with the victims. The terrorist attacks on United States territory, threatened national security and interest. But I asked myself, as undoubtedly millions of others did, can a large modern military force solve the cumulative causes of the Afghan tragedy? What will happen to the Afghan people who have suffered enough? It was in this context that I recall a great sense of relief when I heard Secretary Powell state that the United States was targeting Osama bin Laden, not the people of Afghanistan.

The world attention turned to Afghanistan. The forgotten state and people of Afghanistan took center stage. There was increasing international support for the anti-terrorist action led by the United States. Broad coalitions of supporting governments were formed. The United States carried out an effective strategy of high-technology warfare, combined with limited resort to ground forces. It mobilized support from the Northern Alliance which had fought against the Taliban and had managed to keep limited territorial control in the north. The Taliban lost, disappeared or capitulated, and the political pendulum changed with the fall of the capital Kabul. Although the original American war aim of eliminating Osama bin Laden and al'Qa'ida has not been fully attained, the rebirth of Afghanistan is now on the horizon. The United Nations through

the successful negotiations of the Secretary-General's Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi brought together Afghan groups that were opposed to the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, to form the Interim Authority of Afghanistan based on the Bonn Agreement of 22 December.

The international agenda has moved quickly toward establishing peace, stability and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The broad outline of these efforts is to reconstruct Afghanistan on two fronts: the state and the people. I support this two-front approach. Having been appointed by the Prime Minister of Japan to serve as his Special Representative on Afghanistan, I have become involved again in the region. I visited Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran in January, and co-chaired the International Conference on Reconstruction of Afghanistan that took place in Tokyo on 21 – 22 January. With the participation of 61 countries and 21 international organizations, well over 4.5 billion dollars altogether, and over 1.8 billion dollars for 2002 alone was pledged at this conference. This clearly demonstrates the commitment by the international community to support Afghanistan as it begins its long journey to peace and stability. The challenge now is how soon the pledges turn to actual contributions, and how best to use what comes.

First, at the level of reconstructing the state, the most urgent task is to establish nation-wide security. At the same time, administrative capacity has to be installed to provide services and governance. Currently, an international security presence has been provided, authorized by the Security Council and led by the United Kingdom and joined by fifteen states. Its mission is to provide security to Kabul. However, there are worrying signs of security deterioration in parts of north and south-east Afghanistan. Chairman Karzai of the Interim Authority and many others have requested the Security Council to authorize an extension and expansion of the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force. I have joined my voice in asking the Council for early examination and determined action. Concurrent to the deployment of international forces, two related endeavors will have to be made: the establishment of the Afghan national defense and police force, as well as demobilization and reintegration of former combatants to civilian life. All three interrelated endeavors are major undertakings in a country full of arms and armed people. But they do have to produce rapid results, as the establishment of security is the basic condition for humanitarian and reconstruction work to proceed.

The need for the Interim Authority to develop service capacity is also urgent. When I called on Chairman Karzai in Kabul in early January and asked him what were the priority needs, he gave me an interesting and frank answer. He said that when he was out of the government, he thought the first priority was education, followed by road repair and health. Now that he was in the government, he felt the absolute need to set up a functioning government. He had to have money to pay salaries to the civil servants, buildings to house ministers, telephones to communicate. He had to restore the supreme court, establish a new central bank, issue currency and build various other governing institutions to strengthen the administrative capacity to work in accordance with law. In several other post-conflict situations, I have tried to help governments start up from scratch, but the Afghan needs seem more vast and dense. It is the legacy of over twenty

years of war and devastation. At least, the international community has been mobilizing resources to cover the basic salaries for civil servants for the first few months.

It is important to recognize that the international community has not set up a transitional administration in Afghanistan, as it has done in Cambodia, Kosovo or Timor. It is assisting an Afghan administration to set up institutions which are owned and accountable to the people of Afghanistan. The international community, on their part, should help at the people level to meet their needs and strengthen their capacity. In fact the main current activities of the United Nations are concentrated on humanitarian relief efforts. Access is improving to several areas that were considered unsafe or too remote to reach. Moreover, people who were displaced by war or drought are beginning to move home. There are some one million internally displaced persons whom the government has been very keen to help return. Moreover, there are up to four million refugees in Pakistan and Iran some of whom have started to repatriate. Let me share with you two episodes to illustrate what I consider to be necessary approaches to be taken by international agencies at the community level.

When I opened the Tokyo Reconstruction Conference on 21 January, I spoke to the participants about what I observed upon arrival at the Kabul Bagram airport. We were invited to visit the returning displaced people in the Shomali Plain. We drove along winding roads through devastated fields which had once made the region famous as the “fruit basket” of Afghanistan. Afghan deminers were working on both sides of the road. Against all odds, 109 displaced families totaling some 1,000 members, who had fled the fighting in the Shomali Plain, and taken refuge in Kabul, decided to move back. They apparently felt that peace having arrived, they should go home, no matter how cold and tedious the return trip. UNHCR and partner agencies decided to assist them, as they realized that these people could not make it in one stretch. Their villages were still far beyond the steep hills. The agencies brought tents, food, and household kits, as well as some money to pay for donkeys to transport their belongings. I talked with the returning families about what they planned to do. They answered without hesitation. They wanted to rebuild their houses, start planting in time for the spring season, even go back to animal husbandry. In the clear words of the returning displaced people, I saw the first real step towards peace.

Let me introduce one more story to share my thoughts on how to go about community reconstruction. When I visited Herat, the provincial capital in south-west Afghanistan, I was invited to visit a girls’ high school. The building had been restored by a contribution from a European humanitarian organization. Three days ago, experimental classes were opened funded by UNICEF to prepare for the new school year on March 22nd. Rows of students met me in the courtyard. Little girls in their native costumes greeted me with flowers and songs. I visited three classes. Each one struck me for the age variation in the student composition. Girls were prohibited from going to school under the Talibans, so that in the new school year different age group girls would be in all different classes. They were quite lively and responded to my questions. Obviously elated by the prospect of returning to school, one said she wants to be a doctor; an other an engineer. I also met the teachers. I asked what they wanted the most. There was a chorus. “Salaries!” They

had not been paid for months and years. They needed books and notes. They needed everything.

In the midst of this meeting, a city education officer suddenly stood up and stated that he was the one who took me to classes held in private homes for girls on my visit to Herat in October 2000. He said that the then Taliban governor had ordered him to identify home classes, in order to meet my strong request to visit. It was in response to my message that the Afghan refugees were hesitant to return because of limited education opportunities, that the Taliban governor was trying to convince me that there was some ongoing teaching in a limited way. Incidentally, he was known to be among the more pragmatic of the Taliban leaders. The education officer said that it was not easy to identify home schools because the teachers were afraid to disclose their involvement. One of the teachers present in the meeting said that she had at one point 79 girls coming to her house. When the Taliban discovered that they were running schools, they would order them to be closed. She said she sometimes had to explain that these girls were guests coming to her house on visits. Even the Taliban could not stop guests from coming. I was surprised and moved by the frankness of the conversation. Obviously, the desire for schooling, particularly for girls was strong all through the difficult times. I noted that there was also more continuity in the civil service at least at the provincial level than generally understood. My experienced UNHCR interpreter commented quietly at the end. "This was a good day. Girls are going back to school!"

The stories that I have introduced, "back to home," or "back to school," are small projects, and you may wonder what difference they would make to the overall reconstruction of Afghanistan. However, you should appreciate the implied scale of these projects. There are four to five million internally displaced persons and refugees who will be heading home. There are at least one to one and a half million children expected to enroll for the new school year, with many more to come. There are also high school and university students to consider.

Reconstruction of Afghanistan at the community level means engaging Afghans who have the desire and determination to be part of the contributing elements of their society. What is expected of international assistance is to be close to them to understand their needs and to extend help, but not to impose. The objective of aid is to reinforce Afghan institutions and capacities. What then are the inputs required by the international community? I think there are at least two. First of all, the humanitarian assistance to bring back the displaced families home, should be quickly met by the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts to build viable villages in the places where they return. There should be shelter, seeds, schools, health clinics, access to water. In short, efforts to reconstruct a full range of village facilities should be brought in as soon as return movements are set in motion. One of the agreed working principles of Afghan reconstruction as it was repeatedly stated in the various forums was that there should be a seamless transition from emergency humanitarian assistance to reconstruction. In the Shomali Plain, I saw a clear indication of what "seamlessness" signifies. Failing to tackle the vital linkage, the returnees might give up living in the devastated villages and head back to urban areas. Another point to remember. The repatriation of refugees who return from abroad and internally displaced persons who come back from other parts of

the country should not be handled separately by different agencies. I recognize to some extent, the need for special protection when people are in flight to different destinations. But when returning to their original homes, their needs are the same. Both depend on immediate return packages, and more sustained assistance coming from reconstruction assistance.

Of course, the reconstruction of Afghanistan requires large infrastructure rebuilding -- electricity, water and roads. The international financial institutions will be expected to survey, plan and come up with overall recommendations. I hope their plans will be shared as soon as possible. There are many bilateral donors interested in undertaking these projects. Afghanistan will certainly need their investments. The existence of an overall plan can help direct the individual projects in a coordinated overall context. Of particular importance for both the economy and security of Afghanistan is the control of opium poppy cultivation. Provision of alternative crops to farmers as well as establishment of drug law enforcement agencies will be an invaluable part of reconstruction efforts. Needless to say, the demining activities carried out by the United Nations and a corps of some 5000 trained Afghan deminers will have to continue and be enlarged for a long time.

At the outset of this lecture, I reflected on the changing nature of security threats, and the need to focus on significant issues. It seems to me that the two-front approach that I outlined for the reconstruction of Afghanistan might give some clues on how we deal with security in today's world. Clearly, the state continues to be important in meeting its security requirements even in a globalizing world. But equally important is to focus on the people, to examine the protection and promotion of their security. The reconstruction blueprint for the Afghan state provides what most states have as a starting point. Any state has to have the basic governing capacity to maintain law and order, provide basic administrative services and eliminate threats against their own citizens or against others whether regional or global. No state should turn into a haven for terrorists. Borders have to be controlled and legitimate economic activities must be promoted. But states cannot control the entire economy, nor all information flows nor movement of every person.

Anti-terrorist measures adopted by the United States, have also been recognized widely as necessary action by state. The challenge is to balance the protection of security of state with the equally vital safeguarding of civil liberties. The principles of freedom and democracy are the basis of American statehood. How far should it uphold the rights of citizens, the fair treatment of non-citizens, the freedom of speech and thought? The threat of terrorism is real. The need for homeland security is real. But terrorism in a globalized world cannot be counteracted only by military power or governmental control.

Here, I think we should turn to the question of the security of people. In my ten years dealing with refugees, I witnessed people caught by eruptions of violence within their states. The sources of security threats emanated mostly from internal conflicts, caused by historical rivalries and animosities among different ethnic, religious and social groups. The victims of these conflicts were primarily, if not almost exclusively, civilians --- ordinary men, women and children. States were hardly effective in protecting their people. Often, they even played adversarial roles. It was in this context that I felt we

should focus more directly on the security of people, and set up principles and mechanisms more directly related to rescuing people. We should examine the people with their diverse interests and relations with each other, and uncover the underlying social, economic and political factors that often turn into sources of threat. A sea change in basic humanitarian and development thinking and action is clearly called for.

Organizationally speaking, the international community has two separate compartments, humanitarian and development, to respond to war-torn societies. However, the needs of these societies do not fall into two neat categories. The reality demands much more simultaneous relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction interventions. Moreover, so many people are caught in the downward spiral of poverty and inequity. Development assistance should reach out more directly to the people as generally carried out by humanitarian work, rather than counting heavily on official state apparatus.

In full commitment to strengthen the security of people, both through protection and promotion of their rights and potential, the Commission on Human Security was established last June under the joint initiative of the United Nations and the Government of Japan. It was at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, that the Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on the international community to give high priority in the new century to the twin goals of “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want.” His call found ready response from Prime Minister Mori of Japan. The Commission on Human Security was established last summer consisting of competent and influential individuals from various walks of life and parts of the world. I have the honor to co-chair this Commission together with the Nobel prize economist Professor Amartya Sen. We are now working hard to prepare a full agenda of “human security” encompassing action plans covering conflict situations to poverty and inequity questions.

The Commission’s work is still at its infancy. However, its main focus will definitely be on people, referring very much at the community level. Individuals are certainly recognized as relevant, but people will be considered more in the context of evolving social arrangements. The Commission’s aim is not only to overcome the security needs of the victimized and the vulnerable, but also to help them find ways out of the security quagmire and take their fate into their hands. In reinforcing the security of people, the security of state will thereby be enhanced. Afghanistan will be a constant reminder of what should not have happened, but also could emerge with the right security focus for the twenty-first century.