

Globalization and Human Security

Weatherhead Policy Forum

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Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

September 11 stands as a watershed in reviewing our basic thinking 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 these 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 mostly 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. 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 high or missiles launched from thousands of miles away could bring destruction but not directly resolve house-to-house communal conflicts.

Moreover, it is important to recognize how globalization has added complication and potency to internal conflict and terrorism. While creating wealth, opportunities for work, and a better life for many, it has 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, have accelerated the movement of people and contacts among them. The distinction between desirable, lawful and safe movement of people, and dangerous, illegal and criminal movement has become unfathomable. The number of asylum-seekers and migrants all over the world is growing by leaps and bounds. The life stories of the September 11th terrorists attest to the growing realities of net-working possibilities in a rapidly globalizing world. Those who have felt marginalized, deprived or angered by what they perceive as injustices caused by poverty and inequity, have now found new ways of grouping themselves together. The network of al-Qa'ida, that resorted to international terrorist attacks against the United States reflects the new threatening linkages in the globalized world.

Today, states face difficult choices between resorting to more severe control measures or even to military means to contain a wide range of serious dangers. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the decade following the end of the Cold War, I was faced with the daily operational challenge to cope with the protection and solution of the millions of people forced to leave their homes. This was the period dominated by internal conflicts. While many had to cross borders and become refugees eligible for international protection, many more were internally displaced and received no protection from their states. Many others were left at the mercy of violence and disorder. The mixture of refugees and internally displaced, as well as the targeting and suffering of civilians were the main feature of the last decade. In carrying out my responsibility, my concern was always centered on providing security to these victims and helping them gain opportunities to lead happier lives.

In groping for an effective answer, I began to look more and more directly to the security of the people rather than relying solely on the state to provide security. By focusing on the people who are the very victims of today's security threats, it seemed to me that you can come closer to

identifying their protection needs. Also, by examining the people with their diverging interests and relations with each other, you can uncover the political, economic and social factors that promote or hinder their security. Whether in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Bosnia or Kosovo, when security deteriorated and people started to flee, humanitarian agencies were left to provide emergency assistance, or to negotiate with governments or de facto rulers for safe passage or open borders. By staying with the victims, humanitarian staff do and can provide limited security. But they cannot replace the local police or augment law enforcement capacity, nor can they serve as observers or peace-keeping forces separating belligerents or demobilizing combatants. Existing organizational mandates and mechanisms draw heavily from state security assumptions, but surprisingly few means exist to protect people and confront their problems.

The concept of “human security” began to impress me more and more as a useful entry point to the security issues involving people in today’s world. Internationally too, the concept started to gain prominence. At the Millennium Summit, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stressed that people should enjoy “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear,” and

declared that these were to be the priority objectives for the United Nations in the years ahead. In 1999, the late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan shared his belief that people should be able to lead their lives “without having their survival threatened or their dignity impaired.” His concerns led to two major initiatives by the Government of Japan. First, it established a UN Trust Fund for Human Security, from which, to date, more than US \$ 70 million has been distributed to projects through the United Nations. Second, it set up the Commission on Human Security “to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation.”

I am happy to have been invited to co-chair with the respected Nobel Prize economist Amartya Sen, the Commission that was set up by the Government of Japan with the support of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Ten outstanding individuals from all regions of the world with special expertise in various walks of life, have joined the Commission. Although the work of the Commission is still at an initial phase, the request by the Weatherhead Policy Forum to talk about our efforts has come as a welcome chance to share our current thinking as we move along. I would

like to thank the initiators for this unique opportunity which we have gladly seized. Let me now elaborate on a few salient points.

First of all, the Commission focuses on the security of the people. It is “people-centered.” In so doing, it is fully aware that it cannot examine human security issues relating to all peoples or all communities. The Commission is increasingly narrowing its attention on people who face critical and pervasive threats --- victims of conflict, refugees and displaced persons, people living in absolute poverty and facing hunger and disease. While not excluding the security of individual human beings, the Commission addresses the problems of the socially excluded groups be they by ethnicity, belief, tradition etc. The question of inequality among groups in the society over a long period of time has been identified as a key factor that leads to violence and eventually to humanitarian and political crises.

Second, in approaching the threats to human security, the Commission is considering a two-pronged approach: one of protection and one of empowerment. Protection requires a range of intervening actions from early warning to tackling judicial and institutional set ups as well as access to

basic human needs. It is generally assumed that early action is less costly on the part of the victims as well as the community as a whole. However, from my personal observation of crises that have erupted in recent years, it is not the lack of warning but the inertia to act that have led tensions to turn into conflict and civil strife situations. After all, who wishes to change advantageous, if not comfortable, political, economic or social orders unless the threat is so imminent that you have to totally reorient your standing? Whether in the Congo, or Kosovo or Afghanistan the warnings were ample, but the responses were meek. Although it is encouraging that prevention is becoming more and more the battle cry of the day, it will be a long way before it becomes the prevailing mode of policy implementation. The Commission must persist and will have to draw up a host of action points.

Empowerment measures have more potential. They involve bottom-up endeavors of the kind that development assistance programs have long aspired. The current attempt to emphasize community-building in the Afghan reconstruction program might lead the way towards greater emphasis on empowerment endeavors. In Afghanistan where the people suffered over twenty years of killing, violence and human displacement, as

well as extreme deprivation in health, education and a whole range of social services, there is no other alternative but empowerment as the priority for the rebuilding of the nation. A clearer linkage of empowering the people with the future security and stability of the nation may augment the cause of the human security approach.

The biggest challenge for the Commission is to present a fully integrated approach to address the wide range of human security issues. Broadly speaking, the approaches adopted by the international community fall into several operational categories notably humanitarian or development assistance. The Commission must provide a conceptual link that covers the domains of poverty and conflict. How do these problems build upon one another, as well as compound both when they are present and when they are absent? The humanitarian-focused vs. the development-focused approaches to human suffering have too often been kept apart. They have involved different disciplines, specialists and institutions. The “freedom from want,” and “freedom from fear” must be addressed as a whole by the international community to actually respond to the alleviation of human suffering and insecurity. Professor Sen and myself respectively trained and exposed to

different aspects of human security challenges, have joined hands to bridge the concept and action divide that has prevailed for so long. Identical in our commitments, we are already coming closer in our understanding.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to emphasize once again that the task of the Commission is to focus on the security of the people, and through the people to reinforce the security of the state. It is not to replace the security of the state with the security of the people. Both are needed and they compliment each other. However, it does represent a paradigm shift from the traditional resort to the state as the provider of security. It turns to the people themselves to safeguard human lives from critical persuasive threats and to promote the fulfillment of their dignity.