

From State Security to Human Security

Sadako Ogata

Brown University

Ogden Lecture

26 May, 2002

It is more than eight 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. Recently the United States government has been issuing warning signals against renewed attacks by the al'Qai-da groups, based on collected intelligence information. However, the difficulty with these sources seems to lie in not being able to identify possible time nor the place of attacks. How then, do you help prepare the public against unspecifiable terrorist attacks?

Anti-terrorist strategy pursued by the United States in the aftermath of September 11th was recognized widely as necessary action by the state. The

big challenge, however, is to balance the protection of state security with the equally vital safeguarding of civil liberties and civil life. 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 and the freedom of speech and thought? The threat of terrorism is real. The need for homeland security is real. But terrorism in a globalizing world cannot be counteracted by military power or government control.

Let us for a minute, examine the basic attributes of a globalizing world. While creating wealth, opportunities for work, and a better life for many, globalization often impacts 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, accelerate population movement. These factors also help network people across international borders. Those who feel marginalized, deprived or angered by what they perceive as injustices caused by poverty and inequity, find 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.

Moreover, in the decade following the end of the Cold War, the nature of war changed from inter-state to mostly intra-state conflicts. The sources of insecurity became largely internal, with ethnic, religious and political groups fighting over contested rights and resources with vengeance. Conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Georgia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda come to mind. The international community, on the other hand, was short of effective tools to deal with the myriads of competing claims. Applying the doctrine of self-determination would only break up states into unviable political and economic units. Massive air strikes could destroy main military strongholds, but hardly eliminate clan or local command centers. They certainly cannot resolve house-to-house communal conflicts.

How then should we address the evolving security issues of the day? In groping for an answer, I began to look more and more directly to the security of the people. Traditionally, people were regarded as beneficiaries of state protection, or victims of wars and conflicts. What are the useful entry points to tackle the difficult task of reinforcing not only the security of state but also of the people?

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. 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.

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. In all those countries undergoing internal conflicts, 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 did provide limited security. But they could not replace the local police or augment law enforcement capacity, nor could they serve as observers or peace-keeping forces separating belligerents or demobilizing combatants. I realized that existing organizational mandates and mechanisms drew heavily from state security assumptions, but surprisingly few means were available 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, I would like to 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 conflicts and civil strife. 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. The Commission is especially examining the empowerment potential of Afghan women. A clearer linkage of empowering the people with the security and stability of the nation's future, 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. There are ample examples of conflict affecting the economic development of societies. It is not a coincidence that countries at the bottom scale of development indices are all conflict ridden. When it comes to linking poverty to conflicts, the cases are a bit more hard to prove. However, a sudden downturn in economic and financial situation often leads to drastic political action. The situation following the Intifada and loss of jobs on the part of many Palestinians suggests that economic hardships lead to desperate and radical action. 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.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to emphasize that the task of the challenge to focus on the security of the people is not to replace state

security. Security of the state has to be reinforced. Both are needed and they compliment each other. However, it does seem important to me to attempt a paradigm shift from the traditional resort to the state as the provider of security. In turning to the people themselves to safeguard human lives from critical persuasive threats and to promote the fulfillment of their dignity, the fundamental security of the state is reinforced.