

‘New’ and ‘Non-Traditional’ Challenges

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I believe that the biggest problems to our security in the 21st century and to this whole modern form of governance will probably come not from rogue states or people with competing views of the world in governments but from the enemies of the nation-state, from terrorists and drug runners, and organized criminals who, I predict, will increasingly work together and increasingly use the same things that are fueling our prosperity: open borders, the Internet, the miniaturization of all sophisticated technology, which will manifest itself in smaller and more dangerous weapons. And we have to find a way to cooperate, to deal with enemies of the nation-states, if we expect progressive governments to succeed.

President Bill Clinton, November 21st, 1999

The security of people recognizes that global security extends beyond the protection of borders, ruling elites, and exclusive state interests to include the protection of people. It does not exclude military threats from the security agenda. Instead, it proposes a broader definition of threats in light of pressing post-cold war humanitarian concerns.

Commission on Global Governance, 1995

Introduction

Since the end of the cold war, so called “new” or “non-traditional” security challenges have become the source of growing concern around the world. Indeed, many expect that they will become the dominant security challenges of the new millennium. But what are they and how do they differ from “old” and “traditional” security problems? Do they warrant such concern? How should they be addressed—using traditional approaches and instruments or novel ones? And what should be the role of the United Nations in tackling them? Depending on whom one asks the answers to these questions are likely to vary wildly. In general, however, the spectrum of opinion

typically gravitates toward one of two poles that represent competing “security paradigms.”

At one end, there are orthodox beliefs about the primary object of security, namely that it is to ensure the survival of the nation state (or ruling regime) from external attack and subjugation or internal subversion and overthrow. In both cases, the threat and use of countervailing force to deter and defend against the enemies of the state are the primary means by which security is sought and maintained. Thus, for adherents of this security paradigm, “new” or “non-traditional” threats can simply mean a different set of enemies or, alternatively, novel means of inflicting harm to the state.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is a normative re-conceptualization of security that puts primary emphasis on protecting the wellbeing of people and the planet in general rather than the survival of the state. By doing so, the range of conceivable security concerns broadens dramatically – some would argue limitlessly – to include a host of economic, social, political, environmental, and epidemiological problems. Whether they emanate from outside or inside the boundaries of the state is immaterial to their consideration as security threats. Likewise, whether they are the product of deliberate or inadvertent acts is irrelevant. The harmful impact on the individual or the surrounding ecosystem is what matters. What makes these problems “new” or “non-traditional” threats, therefore, is not that they are truly novel phenomena or products but rather that they are now treated as security concerns.

One can argue that the two paradigms are not mutually exclusive. Defense of the state as a policy goal can coexist alongside a desire to improve the human

condition regardless of geographical location and citizenship. Indeed, some have made such a case in suggesting the complementarity of “national” and “human” security concerns. Others, however, would doubtless disagree arguing that the state — its selfish priorities and sovereign encumbrances to say nothing of the sometimes negligent and repressive treatment of its citizens — can be as much a part of the problem as the solution. Either way, there are overlapping concerns and important linkages between the two paradigms. More importantly, the approaches that are being proposed and practiced to address both “national” and “human” security concerns are quite similar. This could be interpreted as evidence that a “paradigm shift” is underway and already well advanced. However, the considerable resilience of the state along with traditional security practices should caution us that this is not imminent. Rather it can be attributed to the impact of globalization and the policy logic that it engenders.

The Impact of Globalization

Globalization—hereafter used to describe the growing inter-dependence of social, political and above all economic activity as a result of the increasingly unhindered movement of goods, services, information and ideas around the world—can be seen to be having both positive and negative effects on national and human security agendas.

National Security Agendas

In a sense, traditional national security concerns have long been “globalized” as a consequence of the cold war. Through the intercontinental reach of modern weaponry, the extension of alliance relationships, and the use of clients in miscellaneous proxy wars around the world, the U.S.-USSR confrontation progressively evolved into a global contest. Every country on the planet became to a lesser or greater extent embroiled in the cold war and all were likely to suffer either directly or indirectly if it turned “hot.”

The end of cold war — in part the result of the forces of globalization — has clearly brought relief from such fears. This has not been to the extent one might have expected, however; many thousands of nuclear armed missiles still stand at the ready to used in a matter of minutes. For some countries, moreover, traditional security concerns remain just as real and may even have grown worse. One can cite in this respect some states in the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and East Asia. For those countries who have clearly benefited most by the demise of the superpower confrontation—principally in Western Europe and North America—new fears have emerged that can be partly attributed to the effects of globalization.

The first is the threat from so called “rogue states” — essentially countries that are perceived to flaunt generally accepted rules of international behavior, thereby undermining peace and stability. Though they can be considered just a new name for an old problem, rogue states have arguably grown more menacing because of the military capabilities they can potentially acquire in the form of weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological) along with the associated means to deliver them over long distances. Globalization has exacerbated this concern by

lowering the barriers to the worldwide diffusion of the relevant technologies, materials, and expertise for rogue states to develop or purchase such weapons and delivery systems.

Similar fears make up the second new type of security concerns that stem from the growing empowerment of non-state actors such as separatist movements, religious cults, anti-government extremists and other groups that use terrorist tactics as well as and organized crime syndicates including, most prominently, drug trafficking “cartels”. Though, again, this threat is hardly a product of the post-cold war era, the capacity of such groups to pursue their goals has increased considerably as a result of globalization. Access to financing and advanced weaponry — including even WMD — has become easier for the same reasons as it has for rogue states—perhaps more so. Their ability to operate globally has likewise grown not only because international travel is easier and harder to monitor but also through the increasing use of cooperative arrangements or “strategic alliances” with like minded groups around the world. Networks based on globally dispersed emigrant communities have also added to the reach of non-state actors.

Besides the physical threat that such groups can pose to people and property, there is also rising concern about their ability to disrupt the vital computer based information systems that modern societies increasingly depend upon through the use of so called “cyber warfare” tactics. And for those able to draw on profitable illicit business enterprises, the corruption of state officials at every level including the apex of governments represents a extremely pernicious threat as numerous cases have demonstrated. Overall, some consider the growing threat posed by transnational

terrorism and organized crime to be greater threat than that represented by rogue state actors.

Human Security Agendas

For adherents of the human security paradigm, globalization has a paradoxical meaning. On the one hand, it arguably buttresses their case for a re-ordering of policy priorities. By making the world more integrated and inter-dependent, globalization has rendered the classic threat of inter-state war less likely if not obsolete. Aggression and territorial aggrandizement is simply becoming too difficult and costly for states to contemplate. The propagation of democratic values and practices around the world—again helped by globalization—and the pacific tendencies this allegedly fosters further reinforces this trend. The rationale for large standing (or rapidly mobilizeable) national armies to defend the boundaries of the state thus diminishes. Certainly such concerns have receded among the countries of Western Europe and North America to the point of effectively vanishing as serious security imperatives. A similar transformation is expected to eventually take place in the rest of the world though some regions clearly lag behind others in this trend.

On the other hand, the downside of globalization is that it is engendering a growing sense of exposure or vulnerability to what has previously seemed distant or inconsequential whether it be far away conflicts, contagions, crop failures or currency fluctuations. The effects of such events can now resonate around the world more rapidly and touch the lives of many more people than was previously the case. The

magnitude of the underlying forces propelling globalization, moreover, is engendering a growing sense of individual helplessness and resignation.

Of course, not all of the threats to human wellbeing should be laid at the door of globalization. Very basic factors of a racial, ethnic, biological, geographical and climatic nature are often the chief culprit. Yet globalization is an important factor in many of the commonly cited items on the human security agenda. These include:

- Racial and Ethnic Conflict. Communal strife can be attributed in part to new ideas and cultural influences that challenge the prevailing socio-political order as well as new economic pressures that may erode the traditional base of employment and wealth and/or create new ones that open up schisms within society. As noted earlier, civil conflicts can also be inflamed and cause greater harm to non-combatants by the ability of warring factions to gain access to modern weaponry.

- Economic Insecurity. The progressive lowering of physical, political and economic barriers to the movement of capital and commerce has increased the exposure of firms and their workforce to foreign competition and the vicissitudes of the global marketplace in general. As the recent Asian financial crisis indicated, the economic fortunes of countries and their citizens can plummet with little or no warning, leaving many unemployed and even destitute. Events at the 1999 WTO summit in Seattle point to the widespread sense of unease and discontent with the effects of economic globalization.

- Environmental Degradation. The expansion in global economic activity has accelerated the damage, destruction, and modification of local ecosystems and the planet's climate in general (due most importantly to global warming, ozone depletion, deforestation and desertification). At the same time, the natural resources of the earth (fresh water, arable land, fish stocks, and sources of energy) essential for sustaining life and, more generally, for fostering continued economic growth, are also diminishing. Besides the immediate social and economic consequences, environmental degradation may also increase the risk of conflicts over access to scarce resources.

- Epidemiological Threats. The dramatic growth in personal travel whether for business or pleasure, along with the expansion of global trade, have increased the risk that outbreaks of infectious disease in one part of the world will spread to others. The AIDS pandemic represents the most obvious case, but there are many other examples.

These “new” security concerns are not mutually exclusive; important overlaps and linkages exist. Thus, the most commonly cited “rogue states” are known to be internally repressive of their people. The typical methods employed by the “international community” to contain and punish them — economic sanctions and sometimes military action — also affect the wellbeing of their citizens — arguably to a greater extent than that felt by members of the ruling regime. Similarly, measures taken to deal with non-state actors can be equally repressive and harmful to the general population. Recent examples include Kosovo, East Timor, and Chechnya

where separatist movements were in each case cited as “national security threats” justifying severe, and to many observers, inhumane countermeasures by the armed forces of Serbia, Indonesia and Russia respectively.

Conversely, many of the challenges that make up the human security agenda can have national security implications of the traditional kind. Civil conflict can embroil neighboring countries in the form of cross border migration and incursions by the warring parties. This can raise tensions and even lead to conflict at the international level. Again, Kosovo is a recent prime example. Not only did the fear of a widening conflict force NATO to act but a failure to respond was widely perceived to risk undermining the credibility of the alliance’s traditional security commitments. Environmental degradation and resource scarcity may also exacerbate, if not cause, international friction.

Addressing the Challenges

Regardless of which security paradigm one favors, the logic of international cooperation and collective action to address the new or non-traditional security issues has become readily apparent for several commonly cited reasons:

First, many of the issues are beyond the capacity of individual states to tackle alone, though clearly independent measures can be taken to reduce the vulnerability to certain threats.

Second, the increasing interdependence of security – in which events in one part of the world can undermine the security of those in another – necessitates broad cooperation that spans not just national borders but also regional boundaries.

Third, the empowerment of transnational non-state actors as security threats necessitates international cooperation to deny them access to sanctuaries, weaponry, financing and other resources.

States, of course, have long sought the cooperation of others to enhance their security—principally through peacetime defense alliances and wartime coalitions. These have typically been directed, however, at specific military threats and have therefore been limited in geographical scope and duration. New or non-traditional security threats call for broader, deeper and more durable forms of international cooperation—broader in that they have to be globally inclusive, deeper in that they require states to accept further limits on their sovereignty, and durable in that they have to be sustainable over the long term.

Such cooperation is the functional equivalence of what is often loosely referred to as “global governance”—essentially norms and rules of behavior that regulate international society for the common good. Global governance defined this way is already well advanced even if it is not widely appreciated. It can be seen to have progressed, albeit haltingly, in two phases, with some evidence that we may now be entering a third.

The first phase of global governance effectively started at the end of the 19th century with the dramatic expansion in world trade, communications, and travel. States increasingly acknowledged the need to regulate cross-border activities in the

interests of public safety, efficiency and mutual economic benefit. Though predominantly focussed on peacetime interactions, efforts were also made to regulate hostile relations between states by proscribing the use of certain “inhumane” weapons and establishing codes of conduct for the treatment of the wounded and prisoners of war. Though some of these agreements worked better than others, efforts to outlaw aggressive war and establish a collective security system failed entirely.

The second phase began with the establishment of the United Nations and its constituent elements in 1945. This phase is characterized not just by the extension and intensification of previous efforts to regulate international behavior but also control the use made of the global commons (the atmosphere, the oceans, and outer space) and increasingly the domestic conduct of states. As a consequence an enormous corpus of international regulatory arrangements is now in effect, many of which are designed to address both traditional and non-traditional security concerns.

The most important and well established of the former are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which among other things commits states to respect the territorial integrity and sovereign equality of other states, to not interfere in their internal affairs, and to settle international disputes peacefully. It also provides the legal basis by which states can individually and collectively respond to threats to international peace and security including, if necessary, the use of force. The security of states has also been enhanced by several global arms control and disarmament regimes limiting weapons of mass destruction among others. More recently, global efforts to tackle terrorism and organized crime by limiting the opportunities for money laundering have been implemented.

At the same time, several global regimes have been put in place that directly address the key human security issues outlined above. Among other things these commit states to respect basic human rights; to protect the environment from pollution and other harmful effects of human development; to reduce human suffering in wartime (including most recently a global ban on the production and use of anti-personal landmines); to ensure free and fair trade; and to limit the spread of infectious diseases. Given the inherent nature of the international system, however, the effectiveness of these agreements and regimes have ultimately rested on the inclination or capacity of the state parties to comply with them. Some agreements have consequently fared better than others.

However, in what could herald a new phase in the evolution of global governance, states have shown a greater willingness since the end of the cold war to buttress new or existing international regimes with the threat of sanctions and other punitive measures including the use of force to ensure compliance. International organizations established to monitor and manage various cooperative arrangements have in several cases been empowered to perform these functions, albeit still with the acquiescence of member states.

Another feature of this putative new phase in the evolution of global governance has been the greater engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in both the process of rule making and implementation. For addressing many of the new and non-traditional security challenges, the role of the non-governmental or private sector has become essential. For example, banks and other financial institutions represent the first line of defense in combating the money-laundering

activities of organized crime. The assistance of domestic and industrial chemical producers are likewise necessary to restrict diversion of materials to make illicit drugs as well as chemical weapons. Airline, shipping agencies and port authorities can help in deterring and detecting illegal smuggling. Various human rights watchdog groups often provide early warning of communal violence while humanitarian relief agencies can help reduce the consequences. These are just a few examples.

How these trends develop and what course global governance in general takes in the future will depend greatly on how much sovereignty states are prepared to cede to international bodies above them and non-governmental organizations below them.

The Role of the UN

The United Nations can play an important role in helping to address many of the new and non-traditional security challenges by contributing what can be described as the four “L’s:” leadership, legitimacy, labor and logistics:

Leadership When addressing a particular problem, preventive or proactive approaches are generally recognized to be more efficient and less costly than remedial measures. New or non-traditional problems are no different. Mobilizing the necessary political will for collective action whether it be under direct UN auspices or so called “coalitions of the willing” has often proved difficult, however, and in some cases failed altogether. This problem is even greater when the threat is still distant and open to doubt. To overcome this obstacle, the United Nations can serve not only as the

international community's early warning system but also as its primary mobilizing force for action.

Legitimacy The effectiveness of multilateral initiatives to address specific problems derives greatly from the perceived legitimacy of the endeavor. While legitimacy can be built on various factors, the degree of inclusiveness and the moral weight that this can convey is especially important. Given that every state is a member of the UN, the legitimacy invested in decisions and actions taken by the body is obviously enormous. In particular, for sanctioning enforcement actions that may require breaching the sovereignty of a state, the ultimate approval of the United Nations is arguably indispensable.

Labor All cooperative endeavors inevitably entail discussions, sometimes acrimonious, about burden-sharing. Left unresolved they can prove divisive to the extent of undermining the viability of collective actions. The perennial debates about UN funding bear out the persistence of this problem. The greatest burden that a state may potentially have to bear, however, is that its citizens lose their lives for the common good. The fear of suffering such losses especially for causes that may not have a direct bearing on their national interests, often dissuades states to commit personnel. Though the possible loss of life by UN personnel is no less a concern, fewer obstacles stand in the way of their timely use in the service of the international community. At the same time, they are also viewed as more impartial than nationally affiliated personnel, which in certain situations is a distinct advantage.

Logistics The global reach of UN organizations and networks provides a vital resource for addressing new and non-traditional security problems. As indicated earlier, many are already dedicated to this task.

Like any large organization, the United Nations needs to adapt constantly to new demands placed on it that over time may exceed its original purpose. It is already making a valuable contribution to tackling many of the new or non-traditional security challenges. With the necessary support and commitment of the international community it can clearly do more.