HUMAN SECURITY AND THE
WELFARE OF SOCIETIES

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Introduction

How do we define security? For at least four centuries, it has generally meant national security, with the focus on the security of the state. If a country is safe, it would naturally follow that the people who lived in it are also safe. In that construct, keeping the state secure requires military thinking and planning and armed forces and weapons systems to back that up. That, in turn, requires human and financial resources, sometimes on a massive scale, that cannot be used to ensure that competing needs of a society are met.

What if we were to look at security through a different lens? What if we were to think about it in terms of meeting the needs of the citizens of a country? A people-centered security instead of that of the nation-state. The world would look quite different and how our resources were allocated would be very different. The focus would shift from "national security" to "human security." Despite the fact that there has been a lot of thinking about a human security framework over the past few decades, it is still a relatively obscure concept. But it is one that deserves renewed emphasis in the 21st century.

Mahbub ul Haq, a late Pakistani economist, is credited with much important thinking behind the development of the concept of human security for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The use of the term is generally traced back to its 1994 Human Development Report, entitled *New Dimensions of Human Security*. In his own writing, Haq eloquently captured its essence when he wrote, "We need to fashion a new concept of human security that is reflected in the lives of our people, not the weapons of our country." (Haq)

As exemplified by the thinking of Haq and UNDP, with the end of the Cold War --now over three decades ago -- different ideas of what constitutes security began to emerge. Many people hoped to see bold efforts to redefine global and national security in that new, unipolar world. With the diminished military threat after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were expectations for reductions in standing armies and military budgets. Some even dared to believe that the number of nuclear weapons in silos, submarines and airplanes around the world would be drawn down.

The dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall sparked guarded optimism in people around the world that perhaps war and militarization would no longer define the contours of our future. Such changes could even spur a dramatic decrease in the global arms race and the resulting "peace dividend" – resources no longer spend on military budgets and weapons -- could be used to resolve some of the intractable problems facing humankind. The welfare of individuals and societies – *human* security -- could take precedence over the voracious appetites of militaries and defense budgets that have consumed precious

resources for war – *national* security -- since time immemorial. If such changes did occur, arguably the globe as a whole, and most of us in it, would be more secure.

At the same time, many who would also have preferred a world full of new and exciting possibilities did not expect to see that happen. Their more sober view recognized that crafting a new approach to a changed and changing world would require deliberate and concerted efforts by all sectors of society, including of course the military. Pessimists – some might call us "realists" of a different cloth – had little doubt that the sole remaining superpower would begin to seek new global enemies in part because real threats exist, but also in order to justify its continued militarism as the United States contemplated how to react to – and more importantly how to consolidate -- its unique position as the military, economic and technological behemoth in the immediate post-Cold War world.

Throughout the 1990s, UNDP continued its work around creating a human security framework. Then-Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, spoke out strongly in support of its core concepts of "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear." Significant impetus was breathed into the emerging human security paradigm with the wildly successful work of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines that pushed small and medium-sized countries to come together, and independent of the lethargic negotiating process at the UN in Geneva, create the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

Emboldened by the success of that process, Canada, Norway and other countries that had led the charge on banning landmines decided in 1999 to form the "Human Security Network." Having stood up to the intense pressure of the US and other powerful countries to derail the landmine ban and succeeded, through the Network they planned to see what more they could accomplish together to bring tangible security to the lives of individuals around the world. They wanted to shift the emphasis of "security" from that of the nation state to that of people.

Then came the attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington with the resulting huge and negative impact on the world. It is very different now from the one of post-Cold War dreams and expectations. Instead of any so-called peace dividend, the concentration of resources on the military and intelligence agencies has skyrocketed - - primarily, but not only, in the US. Human security as an alternative to national security, barely standing up on weak legs anyway, was knocked to the mat.

The human and financial costs of the post-9/11 "war on terror," including the full-scale invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq are truly incalculable. Estimates of the expenditures for the debt-financed wars range from $1.29 trillion by the end of fiscal year 2011 by the Center for Defense Information to $3.2-4 trillion in a study released by Brown University in mid-2011. (Infoplease)

These mind-numbing figures, which will hobble the economy far into the future, coupled with the financial collapse beginning in 2007/2008, have had a huge impact on

the social fabric of this country – and around the globe. Now faced with the emergence of global economic powers such as China, India and Brazil -- nations requiring increased access to limited resources to fuel their growth -- new tensions are arising and the world is experiencing an ever increasing divide between the global haves and have nots. And the have nots have not been silent in the face of the change.

The "Occupy Wall Street" movement has brought tens of thousands into the streets in protest of the rising economic disparities and millions more have done the same in countries around the world. Millions poured into the streets across Europe from Spain to Greece. Economic issues, poverty and other social ills and insecurities also helped fuel the uprisings of the "Arab Spring."

No one can accurately predict how all of these variables will ultimately play out to shape the future of the country and the world. What is increasingly clear to many in the aftermath of 9/11 and the global economic collapse is that providing for the security of societies is much more complicated than simply thinking about the security of the nation-sate. A fundamental question to be honestly confronted in this tremendously unstable world is how we as a global community will define what security means for the billions of us that live in our world today.

Will it continue to be defined in terms of national security, bigger weapons and more militarization or will it be understood through the lens of international law, human rights and human security? Will democracy, justice and human rights continue to be

eroded around the world to protect us from "terrorism" and economic instability or can we step back from the collective brink and make hard and sober assessments of what framework will best ensure peace, socio-economic justice and security in an increasingly globalizing world?

The Need to Redefine Security for the 21st Century

Since the mid-1600s, power in the world has been defined almost exclusively through the military and economic might of individual, sovereign nation states. In this Westphalian model, global stability – or "peace" – is maintained through a balance of power among these sovereign nations (O'Donnell). This framework continues to dominate thinking, reinforced by the extremely militarized response to 9/11, even as we are still coming to grips with the fact that in today's world, like it or not, there are now many factors that influence power among states and that many of those factors are interconnected, transnational in character. Continuing to cling to the increasingly outmoded notion of security as defending the nation-sate behind its borders is potentially dangerous and destabilizing in and of itself.

Before the 2007/08 economic collapse, globalization brought to mind the seemingly effortless movement of capital and business around the world with little apparent regard for "sovereign borders." The proponents of this economic scenario have pushed it as a positive force that would inevitably lead to increasingly higher standards of

living and the democratization of the planet. This, in turn, could only result in increased security.

Others questioned the relationship between democratization and corporate entities that, largely lacking in accountability, have little apparent regard for workers' rights, the environment or their impact on the social fabric of any particular country. The 2008 collapse and its aftermath demonstrate the horrific impact on social welfare wreaked by corporate greed and irresponsibility. Some have argued that globalization itself brought down the global economy (Creamer).

Even with the economic uncertainties now, corporations and even some individuals continue to amass fortunes that can dwarf the budget of a nation – or even an entire region of the world. The "rules of the game" of the global marketplace, whatever those might be, are shifting and the worldwide reach of business continues to call into question the very relationship between the nation state and such corporate entities. Even though for many of us, it is these financial aspects we think of when the term "globalization" comes to mind, it is not confined to the economic sphere alone.

Other global linkages have also increased exponentially and will continue to do so far into the future. The mass movement of people, coupled with 24-hour access to information, has helped fuel a global marketplace of ideas and has begun to blur the lines between what traditionally have been seen as domestic or international issues. As people, ideas and images move with lightening speed around the world, the challenges grow for

individual states to try to predict and manage the outcomes of such interactions. What does that mean for Westphalian concepts of security?

Witness the protesters of the "Arab Spring," who have used cell phones and the internet for some of their organizing. Governments and militaries were caught flat-footed and in many countries they lost power. Security threats can also have more serious global implications through this spread of knowledge and information.

Today it is much harder for a state to effectively isolate its population and focus their concerns on "domestic issues" while claiming sole purview over the international sphere. Often the domestic impact of foreign policy decisions has become too glaring for citizens to ignore. The horrific example that immediately comes to mind is the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks which have roots in decades of US foreign policy decisions toward the Middle East viewed as unfair by people in the region and that have fueled intense dislike and distrust of the US.

People are faced not only with economic instability and growing disparities of wealth, and with war, terrorism and armed violence around the world, but also with weapons proliferation, including weapons of mass destruction; global organized crime, including the trafficking of human beings, particularly women and children; perhaps irreversible destruction of our environment and the threats posed by global warming; widespread, pervasive poverty (this since time immemorial); and new and deadly diseases – to name but a few. Many actors influence both evolution of the problems

themselves and also possible responses to them. In addition to global business, international and regional institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and (transnational) civil society all have an impact in today's world.

This complex array of variables has made it increasingly difficult for countries to predict or confidently manage their place in the world. Old concepts of state-based security in our global political and economic environment no longer offer long-term answers to today's threats and challenges. Yet the resistance of governments to any open and meaningful analysis and discussion of what will bring us security – collectively and individually – is extremely strong and pervasive.

Such discussion is even more difficult to generate given that one of the most lucrative exports for US companies are weapons, often justified as enhancing our own security. In 2010, the US Department of Defense revealed to Congress plans to sell approximately $103 billion worth of weapons outside the US. A Deutsch Bank analyst noted this is a phenomenal increase over the $13 billion sold annually between 1995-2005 (Kimes). To counter pending cuts in the defense budget given the economic situation and the massive US budget deficit, increasingly US weapons manufacturers are taking production outside the country. The long-term implications of that strategy for global human security are frightening to contemplate.

Despite the resistance from many fronts, discussion about what kind of security people should seek must take place. Despite the knock that thinking about human

security took after 9/11, with all of the dramatic changes taking place globally since the economic collapse, it is time for us to seriously approach a human security framework as the best answer for meeting the needs of individuals and the societies they live in.

Human Security: Its Fundamentals and Its Roots

As noted above, during the 1990s, some bold new initiatives provided collective solutions to various problems of global scope and also had an impact on security thinking. One of those initiatives was the movement to ban antipersonnel landmines. The landmine campaign is important not only because it led to an international treaty in 1997 that, for the first time in history, eliminated a long and almost universally used conventional weapon. It also provided a successful model of government-civil society-international institution partnership that offered a concrete example of how the global community could work together to resolve common problems.

Another such successful effort resulted in the creation of the International Criminal Court after 50 years of work to create an independent court to try war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Rome Statue, establishing the court, was adopted at a diplomatic conference that took place in Rome on July 17, 1998.

Partly inspired by these accomplishments, the nucleus of a movement beyond UNDP began exploring ways to enhance global security not by increasing "national security" but by addressing "human security" needs as the fundamental linchpin upon

which rests all security. Any number of governments, international institutions and civil society alike began exploring the framework as a distinctive concept for addressing global insecurities.

One effort grew out of discussions between Canada and Norway, expressly resulting from their work in the landmine ban movement. The "Human Security Network" was founded by a group of "like minded" countries at a ministerial meeting in Norway on May 20, 1999. It sought to apply a human security perspective to political processes aimed at the prevention or resolution of conflict as well as promoting peace and development. Ministers of the member countries continued to meet after the Norway meeting to maintain a "dialogue on questions pertaining to human security," but the response to 9/11 left the Network somewhat frayed. Canada in particular has done an about face.

Lloyd Axworthy, the Canadian Foreign Minister of the Liberal Government of that period, had taken the lead on the government side in banning landmines. He also played a significant role in human security thinking within both the Canadian government and the Human Security Network. When the Liberals lost power in 2003, the new Conservative government began moving away from ideas and actions that had defined the Liberals. Finally when Prime Minister Stephen Harper took power in February 2006, the Conservative government fully reverted to a much more state-centered concept of security with a correspondingly muscular foreign policy. By mid-2009, the government had gone so far as to systematically expunge the term "human security" from its

governmental and diplomatic lexicon. (Davis) It has been the UN that has most systematically carried forward the banner of human security.

Following on the earlier work of Haq and UNDP, in 2000, an independent Commission on Human Security was launched at the UN Millennium Summit. The Summit itself focused on two key pillars of human security: freedom from want and freedom from fear. The Commission, an initiative of the Japanese government, began its work in January 2001.

During its two-year life, the Commission considered the human security agenda to formulate its report, entitled *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People*, which it presented to the Secretary General on May 1, 2003. The Commission's press release of that date said, "The report proposes a new security framework that centers directly and specifically on people. Human security focuses on shielding people from critical and pervasive threats and empowering them to take charge of their lives. It demands creating genuine opportunities for people to live in safety and dignity and earn their livelihood. At a time when the consensus on the meaning of security is eroding, there is growing fear that existing institutions and policies are not able to cope with weakening multilateralism and global responsibilities. Nevertheless, the opportunities for working toward removing insecurities facing people are greater than ever."

Thus, at the core human security policies seek to enhance both individual and societal security by promoting "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear." This concept was also underscored by observations of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan around that time that security, development and human rights are interlinking elements of real security and that if all those elements are not advanced simultaneously, ultimately none will prevail.

Subsequent to the Commission, and to follow up on its proposals, the UN created the Human Security Unit in May 2004, housed in the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The primary functions of the Unit are to mainstream human security concepts and action throughout UN activities as well as to administer the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), established by Japan and the UN in March 1999. Until its transfer to the Unit in OCHA, the Trust Fund for Human Security was managed through the Office of the UN Controller.

As described on the Trust Fund's webpage, the "objective of the UNTFHS is to finance activities carried out by UN organization(s) and/or designated non-UN organization(s), which translate the human security concept into practical actions, in particular those at the field level, to demonstrate its added-value in view of promoting and disseminating the concept." It has supported projects ranging from enhancing food security in Cambodia to prevention of the trafficking of women and children in Cambodia and Vietnam to rebuilding communities in post-conflict Liberia.

While one can find any varying definitions of human security, in essence a human security framework recognizes that in a globalized world, many actors can have an impact on outcomes so means to address issues must be as broadly multilateral as possible. Dialogue, cross-cultural understanding and conflict resolution enhance human security. Globalized relations, interaction and communication enhance human security. The use of force is not scorned, under certain circumstances, but it is recognized as the absolute last resort, employed only if all other methods to resolve conflict have failed.

Part of the logic behind this thinking is that if the basic needs of the majority of the people of the world are met, providing them with a stake in and hope for their own future, the root causes of conflict are diminished. When a small minority has access to the majority of goods, services and resources of the planet, those who have nothing, have nothing to loose in giving up their lives on a suicide mission. Considering even a few of the commonly used statistics on poverty is numbing. And many of them are from the period ending just as the much of the global economy was falling apart.

In 2008, the World Bank determined the international poverty line to be $1.25 a day (at 2005 purchasing power parity*); previously it had been considered to be $1.00 a day. It estimated that 1.4 billion were living below $1.25 a day and another 2.6 billion were living below $2 a day (Haub and Sharma). [*]

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[*] This is measured in 1993 purchasing power parity (PPP), which the Bank defines as "a method of measuring the relative purchasing power of different countries' currencies

All the weapons in the world will not save us from angry and desperate people willing to fly airplanes into buildings to take the lives of thousands and sow the seeds of terror. The human security framework would help sow seeds of hope by providing for socio-economic justice and more equitable distribution of the world's resources.

As even George W. Bush – the world's strongest champion of a "muscular," national security based approach in his war on terror -- opined in a speech at the United Nations on September 14, 2005, we share a "moral duty" not only to fight terrorism, but also the poverty, oppression and hopelessness that give rise to it (Baker, p. A8).

"Real" Security and Attacks on the Human Security Framework

Mr. Bush's words were one thing. It is the action taken by a state that matter. And the national security "realists" throughout US administrations, and particularly during that of the Bush administration, have a very dim view of any meaningful debate about human security. It has been regularly painted as a wishy-washy concept conceived by "lesser powers" – read irrelevant – who do not have the military might or the "spine" to deal with real security issues.

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over the same types of goods and services. Because goods and services may cost more in one country than in another, PPP allows us to make more accurate comparisons of standards of living across countries."

"Real" security is the purview of the individual, sovereign state based upon nation-to-nation interaction.   It then follows that if the nation itself is secure, by rights its people are secure.   Human security is dismissed as utopian, unrealistic, and idealistic and therefore not worthy of real discussion.

The human security framework is also criticized as being too vague and a catchall attempt to try to resolve all problems facing humanity rather than confine itself narrowly – therefore effectively, of course – to real security issues. Critics of human security also imply that those who do support the framework see it as an either or situation – either you are for human security or you are for national security but apparently they cannot coexist. And how could such a "vague" security framework possibly replace the centuries-old system of nation states interacting through a delicate balance – or not – of a global chess match of power?

In this chess match, states with the most access to resources tend to dominate global politics and back that dominance with military might. Security, then, is as the ability of the state to advance and maintain its interests, generally at a cost to other states. Since security is state to state, realists also argue that national security is generally far too complex for the average citizen to understand let alone have a voice in. They would also argue that even if some people had been able to delude themselves in the immediate period after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the world was changing, the 9/11 attacks and ensuing war on terror should have dispelled all those fuzzyheaded notions.

Others argue that human security rhetoric is not matched with "concrete policy that makes a difference to the safety of people whose security is threatened" (Hataley). This argument seems to imply that the critical measure of a human security agenda is whether or not a state engages in humanitarian intervention to "ensure the safety of ordinary people in other places" (Hataley). Humanitarian intervention is a hotly debated issue in and of itself and is not and should not be the sole or even primary measure of a human security approach to global security.

For some – particularly US neo-conservatives – discussion of a human security framework is not just an attempt at an objective assessment of what really would make the world as a whole more secure. They argue that it must be seen for what it really is – an attack on American values.

As one article states: "This is a dramatic and fundamental distortion of the right to be secure. The effort to 'broaden our view of what is meant by peace and security' obscures and runs counter to the long-standing right of nation-states to secure their own territories and populations from external threats—a principle upon which international legal traditions and treaty organizations such as the U.N. are based. The human security agenda has the potential to undermine not only the nation-state model on which the U.N. was founded, but also the principles of sovereignty, accountability, and national security that the United States holds as fundamental" (Carafano).

The human security framework is not an attack on the "values" of any nation. It

is an attempt to respond to security needs in the dramatically different world of the 21st

Century. However, it is not primarily concerned with the security of the nation state in

isolation from the security of people inside and outside the confines of national

boundaries. Terrorism, crime and war are all examples of violence that destabilize the

security of people. But their security is also affected by deprivation – whether it is the

result of poverty or unemployment or environmental pollution or disease and

malnutrition or illiteracy or all of them combined.

If we stop for a moment to consider the just consequences of the economic

collapse in the US alone, what do we see?   For many in this country, their security has

been directly affected. More have been plunged into poverty – including over 2.8 million

children whose family income is less than $2 or less per individual per day. (National

Poverty Center) Unemployment climbed and job security fell. Millions lost their homes

and schools across the country closed. Despite the US spending $2.6 trillion in health

care in 2010, which is more than the entire economy of England or France, Kaiser Health

reported in September of that year, that 50.7 million people, 16.7%, in the US were

uninsured. (Cohen; Kaiser) Millions of Americans are not "free from want." Nor could

they be considered particularly "secure."

Piecemeal and scattershot responses to individual problems and crises will not

address the root causes of violence and conflict or enhance global security. Since the

human security framework looks at the myriad of problems that have an impact on

security, effectively enhancing security means attempting to take an integrated approach to addressing the problems.

Those who advocate that a human security agenda enhances the security of us all generally do not necessarily see human security and national security as mutually exclusive. The two, instead, can be complementary parts of a whole. But to meaningfully carry out a human security agenda would require, for example, significant reallocation of the billions and billions of dollars spent around the world annually on war, on "defense" and preparations for war, and for the equipment of war.

All of the aspects as described in the section above must be pursued coherently in order for such a human security agenda to make sense and to change lives. Security, development and empowerment, and human rights are mutually reinforcing and if all do not advance together, no one aspect will prevail ultimately.

To make human security really work requires a major shift of policies, institutions and choices about global resource allocation to address the basic needs of people everywhere rather than providing for the security of the relative few who make those policies and control those resources. This obviously is a huge challenge in today's world.

Is there a Future for a Human Security Framework?

The Role of Governments & International Institutions

Even if one accepts human security as a viable approach to global security, why hasn't it had more traction? Considering the launch of the Human Security Network, it can convincingly be argued that the same governments that promoted and sang the praises of the landmine ban movement and the civil society-government partnership that is its hallmark wanted to limit the reach of such partnerships. While not likely wanting to return to status quo ante, when governments did meet in Oslo to discuss and launch the Network, NGO involvement even in the discussions about the concept was minimal at best.

The situation appears much the same in the work on human security at the UN. Neither the UN's Commission on Human Security nor the subsequent Advisory Board on Human Security have either NGO/civil society involvement or even informal mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with them regarding this "people centered" framework. For example, the report of a February 2006 workshop on human security organized by the government of Mexico in cooperation with the government of Japan seems to underscore this disconnect.

In the section of the report entitled "Civil Society and Human Security," it states that the role of civil society in "making the concept of human security operative consists mainly in assuming the challenges of building human capacity through education and the promotion of renewed perceptions, as well as in pursuing new strategies to safeguard the security of people…." The "strategies" put forward essentially refer to documenting

abuses and promoting human rights and public security in the post 9/11 world (Report of the Workshop).

While human rights are an area of intense work by civil society and NGOs, it is not the only issue of the broad human security agenda that NGOs address. If, as the report of the workshop says, the "concept of human security is a response to the needs of civil society throughout the world….," surely civil society and NGOs have a much larger role to play than just in dealing with various aspects of human rights (Report of the Workshop).

The Role of NGOs and Transnational Civil Society

But it is not just governments and international institutions -- both NGOs and civil society in general have done little to connect the dots on human security and promote it. Even though the words "human security" appear more frequently, the concept does not yet really resonate for many NGOs, let alone for the general public. NGOs must actively promote the concept of human security as the appropriate framework for global security in a globalized world. People must be educated to understand that by advancing human security, the security of the globe is advanced.

To raise awareness and advocate for this change, NGOs must identify their individual work as part of a larger human security agenda when reaching out to the broader public. Everyone must understand that protecting and promoting human rights is

work that enhances human security. Efforts to advance sustainable development enhance human security. Every time the flow of weapons of war is limited – or weapons are banned outright, human security is advanced. Involving women meaningfully in all aspects of conflict prevention and peace building and in decision-making in general is enhancing human security.   Addressing poverty through debt repudiation, fair trade and better aid – coupled with promoting good governance and tackling corruption -- is enhancing human security.

Yet too often, opportunities are lost to make those connections. Too often NGOs limit their own work and a broader-ranging effectiveness by choosing to not make those connections. Every time those issues are de-linked, NGOs undercut collective efforts to promote a broader understanding and acceptance of a human security agenda as the framework to better prevent violent conflict. To effectively campaign and lobby, NGOs must find and use every opportunity to make the general public understand that our common security is increased by working together to meet the most basic needs of the majority of the planet – by working collectively to free women, men and children from fear and to free them from want. By providing that majority with a stake in and hope for their own future, the root causes of conflict can be diminished. The opportunities to move away from reacting to violent conflict and toward its prevention are increased and along with them, the development of a sustainable peace.

CONCLUSION

All of the changes in the world since 9/11 require open and public discussion about how we as a global community define security. Will it continue to be defined in terms of bigger weapons and more militarization or will it be defined in terms of international law and human security? Will democracy, justice and human rights continue to be eroded around the world to protect us from "terrorism," or can we step back from the collective brink and make hard and sober assessments of what framework will best ensure peace and justice and security in an increasingly globalizing world?

To really begin to move the world away from a national-security only view of global security, governments, international institutions and NGOs alike must work consistently and collectively to change the global mind set about what constitutes real global security and about what peace building really is – particularly in this post 9-11 world. But a fundamental element of effective campaigning and advocacy to change that mindset is setting the agenda. So far, it appears that neither governments nor NGOs have come anywhere close to setting an effective agenda to advance a clearly articulated human security framework and how it should be applied in today's world. Broad and deep and bold involvement by governments and NGOs and transnational civil society is also key to bringing about such change.

In his 2004 book, War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, Chris Hedges, a non-pacifist war correspondent for about 20 years, captures some of the difficulties inherent in changing the collective mindset about violent conflict – and therefore how best to counter it. He writes: "The effectiveness of the myths peddled in war is powerful. We often

come to doubt our own perceptions. We hide these doubts, like troubled believers, sure

that no one else feels them…The myths have determined not only how we should speak

but how we should think. The doubts we carry, the scenes we see that do not conform to

the myth are hazy, difficult to express, unsettling.…[W]e struggle uncomfortably with the

jargon and clichés. But we have trouble expressing our discomfort because the collective

shout has made it hard for us to give words to our thoughts. This self-doubt is aided by

the monstrosity of war" (Hedges).

As Hedges notes, the myths peddled in war are powerful. But perhaps the myths

peddled about war might even be more so. Moving beyond the collective shout that

insists that if you want peace you must prepare for war is a huge challenge. Moving

beyond the collective myth that creating a peaceful world is the fuzzy dream of "human

security idealists" is a huge challenge. Governments & NGOs must work together to

meet those challenges and raise our collective awareness about the rights and the

responsibilities of civil society in working to move beyond reacting to violence and

toward actively setting the agenda to prevent it.

Finally, thinking about violence must be demystified. People can no longer hide

behind the dismissal of violence with the commonly heard explanation that it is simply

"human nature" to be violent. Violence is a choice -- whether it is the choice of a man to

beat the woman he supposedly loves, or the choice of one nation to invade another in the

name of "freedom" or any other name, or the choice of terrorists of any stripe to attack

civilian targets anywhere in the world to make their political point. Violence is a choice.

The human security framework promotes the making of non-violent choices to resolve conflicts. It is a viable alternative to militarism and violence and war that can actively move the world beyond the collective myth that building peace is a fuzzy dream of utopian idealists.

A world increasingly dominated by the few, who give the perception of not caring much for the needs of the many, can only become increasingly insecure as the desperate and disenfranchised try to equalize the playing field. There is something wrong in a world that spends close to a trillion dollars on weapons and defense while spending a few billion on education globally. There is something profoundly unjust in a global economic system where a handful of billionaires have more income than entire regions of the world.

Until the global community works together to address the common threats to human security posed by gross political, social and economic inequalities we will not live in a secure world. But hope for a more secure world is not enough. Neither governments nor NGOs can abdicate our individual and collective responsibilities to participate in developing new strategies and policies to ensure our collective security. No one government, no one institution, can possibly provide for the needs of us all. New coalitions must seek new solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Change will not happen over night. But that can never be an excuse to not seek it.

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