

Mahbub ul Haq

### HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA<sup>1</sup>

It is a great privilege to address you in this conference today. I am really delighted that the Toda Institute has recently launched a collaborative research project to study Human Security and Global Governance. This is a very timely initiative since, in the post-cold war world, the concept of security is changing and changing rather dramatically. Security is being increasingly interpreted as:

- security of people not just of territory;
- security of individuals, not just of nations;
- security through development, not through arms;
- security of all the people everywhere - in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities and in their environment.

It is time to recognize that most conflicts are now within nations, not between nations. Of the 82 conflicts in the last decade, 79 were within nations and 90% of the casualties were civilians, not soldiers. When most conflicts are between people, not between states, and when these conflicts are often over diminishing income and employment opportunities, not over territorial disputes, why is the United Nations still landing peace keeping forces in these countries? Isn't it better to land development today than troops tomorrow?

We are still fighting the battles of tomorrow with the concepts of yesterday. But I have not the slightest doubt that many perceptions about human security are likely to change fairly quickly.

To begin with, human security will be regarded as universal, global and indivisible. The same speed that has brought many modern products and services to our doorsteps has brought much human misery to our backyards. Global human security is closely linked today. Every drug that quietly kills, every disease that silently travels, every act of terrorism that destroys life senselessly - imagine for a moment that they all carried a national label of origin, much as traded goods do, we will then realize with a sudden shock that human security concerns are more global today than even global trade. No nation

---

<sup>1</sup> Keynote address of Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, President Human Development Centre, to the HUGG Asia-Pacific Conference on "Human Security and Governance in the Asia-Pacific" in Honolulu, Hawaii, on 6th June 1997.

can protect the security of its people without some global understanding and agreements. That is why I am convinced that the Toda Institute is right in linking human security with global governance.

Another perception will change. It will be recognized that poverty cannot be stopped at national borders. Poor people can be stopped, but not the tragic consequences of their poverty. These consequences travel without a passport - and in many unpleasant forms. Drugs, AIDS, pollution and terrorism stop at no national frontiers today. They can strike with devastating speed in any corner of the world.

On more perception will change. It will be recognized that it is easier, more humane and less costly to deal with the new issues of human security upstream rather than face their tragic consequences downstream. Did it make much sense to incur a staggering cost of \$240 billion in the past decade due to HIV/AIDS when even a small fraction of the amount invested in primary health care and family planning education in the developing world could have prevented such a fast spread of this deadly disease? And was it a great tribute to international diplomacy to spend \$ 2 billion in a single year on UN soldiers to deliver humanitarian assistance in Somalia a few years ago when such an amount invested a decade earlier in increasing food production might have averted the final tragedy not for one year but maybe permanently.

It is sometimes argued that military expenditure is vital for national security, that what is the use of development if the country loses its very independence to external aggression. No one will deny genuine needs of national security. The trouble arises when there is a serious imbalance between national and human security. We have recently witnessed the economic and social disintegration of the former USSR: despite possessing enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world ten times over, it could not feed its people or provide them with productive jobs and decent social services. And we have seen that, in 1980, military to social spending rate was the highest in Iraq (8 times), Somalia (5 times) and Nicaragua (3.5 times), and yet all these three countries could not protect their national security or national sovereignty or their people. On the other hand, Costa Rica spent nothing on its military, having abolished its army in 1948, and spent one-third of its national income on education, nutrition and health: it is the only prosperous democracy in a troubled Central America.

We need a new concept of security today - reflected in the lives of the people, not in the weapons of their country. We must move away from arms security to human security and use the emerging peace dividend to finance the lengthening social agenda of humankind.

Let us face it. The cold war is not over yet. The job is only half-done. We have only phased out the cold war in East-West relations, not in the third world. No leader from the third world participated in the disarmament talks in Geneva, even though 22 million people in poor lands have died in more than 120 conflicts since the second world war. The main casualties of the cold war were in the third world, yet 80% of humanity was forgotten when peace was finally made between the East and the West. There is no UN forum or Third World forum today discussing issues of peace and disarmament in the developing world.

Isn't it time to ask the leaders of the Third World:

- why do they insist on spending 2 or 3 times as much on arms as on the education and health of their people?
- why do they have 18 times more soldiers than doctors?
- how can they afford air-conditioned jeeps for the military generals when they lack even windowless school rooms for their children?

And isn't it time to ask the leaders of the rich nations to stop the continuing arithmetic of death and destruction in the Third World and to fix a concrete time table - say, the next three years - to:

- close all foreign military bases in developing countries?
- convert all existing military aid into economic aid?
- accept a new code of conduct for arms transfers, particularly to trouble spots and to authoritarian regimes?
- eliminate subsidies to arms exporters and retrain their workers for jobs in civilian industries?
- accept greater transparency in revealing information about arms trade and military debts?

The next major challenge is to reduce the huge arms spending of over \$ 170 billion a year in poor nations and to invest the money instead in the welfare of their people. Nowhere this challenge is more acute as in South Asia today.

While people starve in South Asia, modern arms accumulate. When military spending is falling all over the world, it continues to rise in South Asia. There is a disturbing imbalance by now between the imperatives of human security and territorial security.

A recent Report on Human Development in South Asia 1997 has pointed out quite graphically that South Asia (with a population of 1.2 billion people) has emerged by now as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished, and the least gender-sensitive region in the world. It is home to more than half of the world's illiterates and over 40% of the world's absolute poor. South Asia started side by side with East Asia in 1960 but East Asia's per capita income is now 27 times higher than South Asia's. What is more, South Asia has now fallen behind even Sub-Saharan Africa in per capita income, adult literacy, child nutrition and many other social and human development indicators. In South Asia, 830 million people lack elementary sanitation, 340 million people have no access to safe drinking water, 400 million people are illiterates, two-third of them women, and over 500 million people survive in absolute poverty. But South Asia's poverty has not inhibited the affluence of its armies. The military spending is currently running at \$ 14 billion a year in nominal prices - or at around \$ 50 billion a year when converted in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) dollars to obtain a better international comparison.

There are three rather disturbing trends in military spending which must be noticed. First, military spending in South Asia is largely independent of its poverty. India ranks 142 in the world in terms of real per capita income (PPP dollars), but it ranks first in total arms imports. Pakistan's rank is 119 in real per capita income and tenth in arms imports. Both countries spent twice as much on arms procurement during the 1988-92 period as did Saudi Arabia even though Saudi Arabia is 25 times richer. Second, South Asia is sailing against the prevailing global winds. While global military spending went down by 37% during 1987-94 period, military spending in South Asia went up by 12%. While the total number of soldiers have been reduced by 16% globally during the same period, they have increased by 8% in South Asia. While the military holdings of combat aircraft, artillery, ships and tanks went down by 14% in the world, it went up 43% in South Asia. South Asia is the only region in the world where military expenditures have continued to rise even after the end of the cold war. Third, there is a major risk involved when two desperately poor nations, like India and Pakistan, have nuclear arms and are locked into a bitter confrontation for the last 50 years. There is a further risk of a social explosion when modern jet fighters are parked on their runways even as poor people are parked on their city pavements.

The human cost of military confrontation between India and Pakistan is becoming quite prohibitive by now. For instance, around \$ 1 billion was recently spent by Pakistan for acquiring three Agosta 90B submarines from France which could have financed for a year primary school education for all the 17 million children now out of school and safe drinking water for all the 67 million people lacking this facility at present and family planning services to an additional 9 million couples. India's contemplated purchase of \$ 4.5 billion worth of modern military equipment can finance instead primary

education for all the 45 million children denied such education, safe drinking water for all the 226 million people with no access to such facility and family planning services for an additional 22 million couples.

The pay off from reduced political tensions and military spending can be quite dramatic in South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan. If South Asia were to reduce its military spending by about 5% a year, on par with what has already happened in the rest of the world in the last ten years, it can reap a peace dividend of around \$ 125 billion in the next 15 years. This would be enough to provide universal basic education and primary health care, safe drinking water to all, adequate nutrition to the malnourished, family planning services to all willing couples, and credit facilities to the poor and the deprived for obtaining sustainable livelihoods. In other words, a 5% annual cut in military spending can finance the entire agenda of South Asia for basic social services and credit to the poor and position these nations for accelerated advance in the 21st century. The economic frontier has slowly moved from Japan to East Asia to China - based on low wages, extensive basic education, high skills and open economies. This is a winning combination for taking over the global markets and leapfrog several decades of development. South Asia can also manage this miracle if it can rescue itself from the dark shadows of military confrontation and turn its policy attention to issues of human security.

What are the chances of a detente in South Asia, especially between India and Pakistan which together accounted for 93% of the total military expenditure in the region? While nothing can be predicted with any certainty, the environment for peace has certainly improved recently. Partly this improvement has resulted from a rising demand from the people for better social services and more employment opportunities, growing international pressures for reduced military expenditures, and the increasingly vocal role of civil societies which are far ahead of their governments in demanding peace and development. At the same time, political climate for negotiation of outstanding disputes has greatly improved both in Pakistan and in India. In Pakistan, the new Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, with a strong political mandate, has set out to seek a peaceful resolution of all outstanding issues with India. In India, I. K. Gujral, has also turned his energies towards peace in the region. If both these countries make a breakthrough in the current dialogue and if the world community helps them by nudging them gently towards the peace table each time that the talks get bogged down, there is a real chance that South Asia could emerge out of its current poverty trap and provide real human security to its teeming millions.