

Human security comes first

David
USA 8/9/04

By Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti

TRADITIONAL and non-traditional aspects of security are figuring increasingly in the debate now unfolding in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, whose third anniversary will be marked in the next few days. Traditional concepts of security relate to the security of the state, which allocates sufficient resources to safeguard a country's security against external threats, as well as internal ones.

Non-traditional security concerns itself with the human dimension, and seeks to focus attention on basic human needs, as well as welfare. Since nuclear weapons were used in the concluding stage of the Second World War, the international community has sought to prevent wars and to resolve political disputes peacefully through the UN. Its primary purpose was to banish the scourge of war from the world, by providing a forum, as well as a mechanism, to resolve disputes between states peacefully. Arms control and disarmament have also figured prominently in the agenda of the UN.

The other basic objective of the UN is to address the social and economic problems of mankind. Since its inception, the main successes of the UN have been in the social and economic fields. The achievement of its goal to establish peace and security in the world has been patchy, and even questionable. The major powers, and the superpowers in particular, continued to build vast arsenals of weapons, and conflicts of all types went on, their number even growing as dissident movements emerged within states to claim autonomy, or a better share in governance.

National security, which is recognized as one of the main concerns of nation states, has continued to rely on military might, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty. Most of the twentieth century, that witnessed the two world wars in the first half, was marked by multiple conflicts, some relating to the Cold War, and others to bilateral or factional disputers. As the Cold War ended in 1989, a certain expectation developed, about the attention of the world shifting from the security of states to human security.

This essentially meant that the attention of governments, and of the intellectual elite would shift from reliance on engines of war to addressing the social and economic problems of mankind, especially in the developing countries, where levels of human security had been deteriorating.

The last decade of the twentieth century had witnessed general optimism that the world was heading towards a new age of peace and prosperity, in the 21st century. Expenditure on defence fell in European

countries, though it remained high in Asia where many political disputes continued to cause tension. With globalization moving apace, there was an atmosphere of hope that the economic order in the world would be managed in a manner conducive to development, and to the elimination of poverty. Human security was expected to prevail over national security, at the conclusion of the bloodiest century in human history.)

However, the transformation did not materialize. The US, now the sole superpower, saw an upsurge of national pride, based on the country's military and economic superiority, that made it an "indispensable power" for handling crisis situations in any part of the world. As the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia disintegrated, the European powers failed to prevent massacres in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the US felt obliged to inter-

As the US experience in Afghanistan and Iraq has shown, peace and stability cannot be established unless human security problems are given priority. Despite allocation of large sums for reconstruction in these countries by the US, the lot of the common people has not improved, and even American analysts point out that the principal beneficiaries have been major US companies, many of them linked to top men in the Bush administration.

vene. Major powers sought to bypass the UN, so that the anticipated increase in its role did not materialize. Frustration rose in many regions where UN resolutions were violated with impunity, such as Palestine and Kashmir. The number of conflicts going on in the world in the 1990s exceeded 70.

The entry of George W. Bush as the President of the US from January 2001, saw the US adopt a unilateralist policy, whereby it expected to get its own way on regional and global issues by virtue of its unchallengeable power. The Bush administration not only repudiated major accords the US had supported, such as the Kyoto Protocol on the environment, and the creation of the International Criminal Court but also launched its Ballistic Missile Defence Initiative without consulting allies and friends.

The terrorist attack of 9/11 initially prompted the creation of a global coalition against terror, but was later used to justify the creation of the Bush doctrine, empowering the US to launch pre-emptive attacks on countries suspected of endangering the security of the US. Iraq was attacked in March 2003, on the basis of assumptions that proved to be false: that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and had links with terrorist organizations.

Though the attack on Iraq was militarily successful and Saddam Hussein's regime

was toppled in three weeks, the continuation of resistance by the Iraqi nationalists has caused high casualties to the US and allied troops, as well as immense loss to the Iraqi economy, and oil installations. Indeed, the US experience with pre-emption is likely to discourage further ventures of this type, since the arrogance and hubris involved do not enhance the image of a country whose people want to be liked rather than feared.

The direct effect of the 9/11 attack has been a phenomenal rise in military expenditures, with the US defence budget likely to reach \$480 billion. The total world spending on defence is expected to exceed \$1 trillion during 2004. This at a time when over a billion people live below the poverty line, and problems of water shortage and disease are affecting many parts of the developing world. Even in parts of the developed world,

such as Europe, unemployment remains high.

Expectations and plans for greater attention to human security have not disappeared; they have simply been supplanted by the prevailing fear of terrorism. As the US experience in Afghanistan and Iraq has shown, peace and stability cannot be established unless human security problems are given priority. Despite allocation of large sums for reconstruction in these countries by the US, the lot of the common people has not improved, and even American analysts point out that the principal beneficiaries have been major US companies, many of them linked to top men in the Bush administration.

Unfortunately, the neo-conservatives, who have so far determined foreign and security policy in the US, continue to remain focused on fighting terror through force. While there is general recognition that terrorist groups must be neutralized, the long-term solution of this problem can be sought only by addressing the root causes. These lie in political injustice, most evident in Palestine and Kashmir, and an unfair economic order, in which the five billion people, who live in the developing countries, lack human security. Diseases like Aids and tuberculosis have caused enormous loss of life. Unemployment is rife and poverty has been spreading. The place of these countries in the UN Human Development Index proves that their basic needs must be urgently met.

China has shown the way by making economic development its top priority. Its GDP has grown at the rate of nine per cent per year since 1978, and its foreign policy has been devoted largely to creating an environment conducive to development. South Asian countries have also realized the need to give primacy to human security goals. Most scholars and a growing number of politicians in the US are realizing that the security of people deserves a higher priority, if the roots of terrorism are to be eliminated.