

The linkages between international, national and human security

Human security is not an alternative to national security, rather they are complementary concepts in that the former is one of the means of achieving the latter. It is important to highlight the effects on human security of the US occupation of Iraq as well as its influence on politics, the economy and culture in Arab countries. It is clear that two things are indispensable for addressing the roots of human security problems in the region: action by civil society organisations and a transformation in institutional policies.

Arab NGO Network for Development

Ziad Abdel Samad¹

"In its most simple expression, human security is all those things that men and women anywhere in the world cherish most: enough food for the family; adequate shelter; good health; schooling for the children; protection from violence whether inflicted by man or by nature; and a State which does not oppress its citizens but rules with their consent."

Louise Frechette, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General

"Human security refers to the quality of life of the people of a society or polity. The core element of human security is human rights."

Ramesh Thakur, United Nations University

These quotations summarise the concept of human security as it is understood today. It has shifted from focusing on the State (public security), to focusing on the individual, as a human being and citizen (private security). This shift in meaning was brought about by the advance of neo-liberal globalisation and all that it implies, for the new global perspective has minimised the importance of borders and prompted recognition that state security is essential, but not sufficient, for ensuring individual well-being.

However it is important to note that human security is not an alternative to state security, rather they are complementary concepts in that state security should be seen as one of the means to an end, which is human security. The concept of human security "may even require protecting people from their states"² in situations where ruling groups do not serve their people but serve undemocratic interests that perpetuate their power. Democracy implies a process towards a more responsible and aware society, where common and individual security are both provided and respected.

At the beginning of the century the notion of security was articulated by relating the concepts of international security, state security, and human security.³ International security, which is primarily identified with globalisation, is directed at protecting the interests of transnational corporations, and is linked to the weight of international organisations and state actors, interdependent markets, and stability as a public good. Although state security is principally linked to sovereignty and border issues, it tends to prioritise investment security. Human security, therefore, is linked to both international and state security, which are the means of achieving higher standards of human security.

This paper discusses human security in the Arab region with reference to factors relating to international and state security and the linkages between them. It signals the links between the threats to human security that are affecting the whole region and those that are country-specific. It also considers the role of NGOs and social movements in the struggle to achieve human security.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraqi occupation

In the case of the Arab region it is essential to highlight the effects on human security produced by the foreign occupation of Iraq and US expansionism, expressed in its desire to influence the region's politics, economies and culture.

There are two major conflicts in the Arab region, the Palestinian-Israeli and the Iraqi conflicts. These are two of the most complex conflicts in the world today, representing a major source of global instability and political division, and threatening security beyond the borders of the countries directly involved. These conflicts not only lead to loss of human life and damage to property, but are the main causes of an instability that is hindering social, economic and political development, and depriving Arab countries of opportunities to attract foreign investment, as well as adding to the factors prompting highly qualified human resources to emigrate.

The realities of Arab states

Arab countries have been governed by a succession of undemocratic regimes which have frustrated the development of democratic movements and respect for human rights. Arab states and their repressive political regimes are good at controlling and oppressing their own people, but perform poorly as global partners, negotiators, and decision makers. This situation will continue as long as Arab leaders fail to realise the importance of empowering their people in order to empower themselves. The Arab Human Development Report,⁴ published by UNDP in 2002, highlighted the lack of democracy in the region and the need for democratisation of Arab states as a main condition to securing sustainable development and preventing further conflicts and instability in the region.

The realities of Arab economies

Whether in terms of its insertion in international markets or of regional trade agreements, it is clear that the Arab region is not as advanced as other regions of the world. Arab economies' share of total global GDP is between 2.8% and 3%. Arab nations have been slow to join global trade agreements, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and most countries in the region have made little progress in strengthening local capacities to meet the challenges arising from such integration. Arab countries have not been flexible enough to implement the changes needed to restructure their economies and open up to global partnerships.

Even the steps they have taken towards privatisation and market opening did not include appropriate measures to protect local markets, products and labour from foreign competition. Most of these processes have taken place under undemocratic regimes lacking the most basic transparency. Arab countries' influence in global and regional organisations, like the WTO and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, as well as in free trade agreements (FTAs) and the global economy in general, is still marginalised and they are far

1 Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development. The author is grateful to Kinda Mohamdieh for her assistance.

2 Heinbecker, Paul. "Peace Theme: Human Security". Presented at the Lysoen Conference, hosted and chaired by the Norwegian Foreign Minister, 19-20 May 1999. www.peacemagazine.org/9907/humsecur.htm

3 Rojas Aravena, Francisco. *Human Security: Emerging Concept of Security in the Twenty-First Century*, 2002. www.unidir.ch/pdf/articles/pdf-art1442.pdf. Aravena is Director of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), Chile.

4 United Nations Development Programme. *Arab Human Development Report. Building a Knowledge Society*, 2002. www.undp.org/rbas.

from being able to defend their own interests and the rights of their people.⁵

In addition, Arab states have so far failed to enter into regional economic partnerships or develop effective co-operation policies as a strategy to strengthen their position and meet the challenges of a global economy. As a result, inter-Arab economic exchange does not exceed 8% of the region's total exchange on the global market.

International financial institutions in the Arab region

The involvement of international financial institutions (IFIs) in the Arab region has grown over the last two decades.

The (conditional) support and aid programmes proposed by IFIs are a major challenge, especially given the lack of local and regional strategies and development policies.⁶ Inappropriate macroeconomic policies and structural adjustment programmes have often led to economic recession. During the last three decades, economic growth in the Arab region has been around 4%, which is close to the population growth rate, thus leading to stagnation of per capita growth. Moreover, the policies implemented have led to high inflation rates, which exceeded 12% in the 1990s, and a 51% drop in foreign direct investments.⁷ The exposure of local investors and producers to competition from transnational companies is also presenting a significant challenge and threatening national sovereignty.

Economies in transition from socialism, such as Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and Algeria have implemented structural adjustment programmes over the last two decades, but these have produced poor results and did not respond to local needs.

Following the end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1990, the National Economic Rehabilitation Plan, basically recommended by Bechtel⁸ and implemented by Lebanese governments during the last decade, had disastrous results. The country ended up with a huge budgetary deficit of over 40% (and as high as 55% in some years) and debts exceeding 180% of GDP. At the conference on Lebanon in

Paris in November 2002 (Paris II), the IMF was delegated to monitor the implementation of a further structural adjustment programme.

Despite this evidence that IFI-sponsored measures are in fact adding to the challenges facing the region, IFIs are expected to play a major role over the next few years in Iraq, Syria and Libya.

The United Nations in the Arab region

Although Arab states have ratified the UN human rights charters and other related conventions, they have stated many reservations and have not formulated effective policies to implement their recommendations. Moreover, the region is expressing a growing mistrust in the effectiveness of the UN system.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the double standards of certain countries with respect to international law. While the United States led the war to disarm Iraq of its purported weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), the entire world knows for a fact that Israel possesses its own WMDs, which are a threat to the stability of the entire region. After nearly a year of occupation, the world is now aware of the misleading information that the United States spread in order to justify its occupation of Iraq. Furthermore, UN resolutions on Palestine are not implemented while other UN resolutions are implemented immediately - in Iraq and in other parts of the world.

Anti-globalisation and the rise of fundamentalism

In the context of social, political and economic inequalities and double standards in international law, the accelerated process of globalisation is threatening people's identities, cultures, religions and social traditions in the region. This in turn has resulted in the rise of anti-globalisation movements, a fact which has led Arab countries to espouse different kinds of isolationism. Various forms of extremism have evolved, and religious fundamentalism has become more vigorous. Religious fundamentalism has been primarily related to Islam,⁹ and consequently to the Arab region, where Muslims make up the highest proportion of the population. For this reason the Arab region has been identified as a major threat to global security, and Arabs have been subjected to biased judgments and prejudiced stereotyping.

External vs internal threats

At state level, the security of Arab nations could be measured by their degree of sovereignty and border protection. The permanent threats to sovereignty from the Arab-Israeli conflict have introduced major challenges in the development agendas of Arab countries. Yet among the many factors impeding progress on these agendas, the main one has been that almost all countries were governed by military juntas which took power through coups. Thus, priority was given to external threats under the slogan "the sole cry is the battle cry", thereby marginalising the social and economic needs of the people. Moreover, the allocation of a major part of national budgets to militarisation and arms purchases, as well as the lack of democracy and the restrictions imposed on participation by civil society organisations, meant opportunities were lost to make progress in different fields of development and weakened the structures of government and decision-making processes.

Implications of the "war on terrorism"

The "war on terrorism" is shifting the concept of security in the region away from a focus on the individual towards a renewed focus on the state. In the name of individual freedoms and human rights, and thus in the name of human security, the war on terrorism has directed global efforts to counter the negative impacts of Arab societies' weak and undemocratic structures, manifested in the rise of religious fundamentalism. However, it does not address the causes of these extremist trends, which lie in the loss of individuals' sense of worth in Arab societies and the spread of undemocratic regimes that centralise state power.

Consequently, human security in the region faces huge threats in that the role of individuals in society is weakened and their ability to be productive and improve their living conditions is limited. However, it is essential to differentiate between three types of threats to human security in the region. First, the threats deriving from occupation and war which affect the region as a whole. Second, the threats that stem from FTAs and the consequences of corporate globalisation for development in general and human development indicators in particular. Third, internal threats specific to each Arab country, the roots of which are entrenched in the undemocratic practices of governing regimes, violations of human rights, and the deterioration in living conditions.

Internal threats to human security

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict and related security issues have been affecting the whole region for over 50 years. The challenges introduced by corporatized globalisation, whether economic, political, social or cultural, affect Arab states as much as they affect other developing countries. However, the prevalent tendency to explain all the ills of Arab states with reference to these contexts impedes the introduction of better human security conditions in

5 Twelve Arab countries are members of the WTO, five are observers, and two have applied for membership, while three have not yet applied. Seven Arab countries signed the Euro-Med partnership agreement, while the Gulf countries are negotiating an agreement with the EU. Morocco and Jordan have signed FTAs with the US, Egypt is currently in negotiation with the US and the rest have been invited to initiate negotiations with the US.

6 The Lebanese case is an excellent example of how the IMF is imposing reforms on borrower countries in order to consider debt restructuring.

7 Houbayka, Louis, "Globalisation and the Arab Economy". *An-Nahar* newspaper, 16 January 2004. www.annaharonline.com.

8 Bechtel is the engineering, reconstruction, and telecommunications company which has been contracted to rebuild the infrastructure in Iraq and has close links to the US Government. www.bechtel.com, www.bechteltelecoms.com

9 Religious fundamentalisms, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic are on the rise around the world, a phenomenon witnessed in the United States, where the ultra-right Jewish lobby, in alliance with neo-conservative Christian groups, have had a significant influence on US foreign policy. Moreover, Zionism, as an ultra-Jewish ideology, has been defending the killing of Palestinian civilians and children in the name of the Torah and their belief that they, as the "chosen people", have the exclusive right to live in the Holy Land. These groups, both in the United States and in Israel, are blind to the human rights violations that are taking place every day against Palestinian civilians in occupied Palestine. However, in the case of other religions the fundamentalist label is not applied indiscriminately to all their followers, as happens with Islam.

the region. For a better understanding of the essential aspects of human security in Arab countries a distinction must be drawn between threats that affect the region as a whole and threats internal to each state. It is crucial to realise that the security of the individual in Arab countries does not depend solely on the security of national borders and the finalisation of conflicts in the region.

Although many aspects of human security (respect for human rights, freedom from want and fear, sufficient and adequate food, shelter and education) are suppressed in conflict areas like Palestine and Iraq, this does not mean that they should be in other Arab countries. But the conflicts in the region generate significant obstacles for the countries surrounding Palestine and Iraq, by destabilising political decision-making and depriving them of many opportunities to attract foreign investment. So it is essential that Arab states and leaders realise that they have the power and capacity to work on strengthening human security in their countries. This process of empowerment that governments could initiate within their own countries and with the support of their people is a pre-requisite for helping the Palestinian and Iraqi causes and supporting the Palestinian and Iraqi people. An internally weak state cannot offer help to another, whereas one whose people are empowered can more effectively mobilise resources and consolidate its own sovereignty and national policies.

In the Arab region, the general opinion is that "state security will remain fragile as long as regional security is not achieved, which makes it difficult to speak of human security as an independent and complete concept; and the fact that human rights mechanisms are being subjected to double standards, undermines the concept of human security".¹⁰

It is evident from this approach that there is a generalised lack of awareness that state and regional security are not the only factors that determine human security standards in a country. Freedom from want and freedom from fear play a major part in strengthening a person's sense of security. Freedom from want starts with the implementation of sound economic policies and strategies that establish social justice as their goal. It can be further consolidated by governments through the fight against corruption and mismanagement of public resources. Freedom from fear depends on having one's human rights respected and consolidated, and on receiving support from one's government, instead of oppression and disrespect.

Lack of secularism

The unregulated role of religion in Arab countries and the inability to strengthen secularism will continue to pose a threat to human security. Most of the wars in the last century had their roots in ethnic (Kurds, Amazigs, Saharai) and religious conflicts

(Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan). As long as religious matters are not separated from political and social life, they will add a major threat to the human security of Arab citizens.

The religious fundamentalism that is central to the concept of global terrorism in our time does not have its roots in a single source. However it is true that the situation in Arab countries and the conditions in which Arab peoples live have played a significant role in the rise of fundamentalism in the region. There is a prevalence of undemocratic practices among the regimes governing the Arab region. In most Arab countries elections are not free and fair, women's participation is very restricted, civil society organisations continue to face considerable constraints on their right to exist and their ability to play an active role, there is strict state control of civic associations, and there is a lack of an independent media. All these issues are internal to each Arab country, and could be addressed independently of the issue of conflict within the region. Yet a new addition to the agenda of world politics - the war on terrorism - has stalled progress by focusing on short-term coercive responses rather than addressing the underlying causes related to social inequality, exclusion, marginalisation and oppression by states as well as by individuals.¹¹

The agenda of the "war on terrorism"

Some would say that the agenda of the parties waging war on terrorism is to exert pressure on Arab regimes to introduce political reforms and promote democracy. In the case of the war on terrorism, however, these reforms are being introduced through the use of coercion, whereas in the context of the WTO and the Euro-Med partnership they have been advocated without resorting to threats of military action. As mentioned above, progress has generally been slow. Yet an unhurried process of integration into the WTO and the Euro-Med partnership can be considered a positive sign if it reflects a constructive approach to introducing the changes needed in a way that would benefit the whole nation and not just a few corporate interests. In this sense, the regulations imposed as a condition for joining these organisations are becoming major engines of change in the region, whether economic (creation of a free trade zone), social (cultural exchanges), or political (democracy and human rights).

However, as the Bahraini report notes: "Bahrain's accession to the WTO had a positive effect on the processes of democratisation and promotion of human rights. Yet the US strategy of combining the war against terrorism with the reform of allied regimes such as Bahrain, while positive in the short term, could prove to be negative in the long term."¹² Thus, adopting political and structural re-

forms in order to secure an enabling environment for multilateral corporations instead of the human security of the population will lead to the disruption of the whole process and have negative consequences on internal security in the long term.

Non-governmental organisations and social movements

The greatest violent conflicts of the 20th century were often waged in the name of religion, politics, ethnicity, or racial superiority.¹³ It is not just poor countries that are involved in wars - "the greatest conflicts in this century have been waged between some of its richest people. This means that political approaches in human security issues are necessary".¹⁴ Among the political approaches is the right of "non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to rebuild security".¹⁵ It is essential to recognise the vital role of NGOs in contributing to the strategies to meet human security standards and working towards a better understanding of the concept of human security among the public. NGOs could successfully take the concept out of the academic and political domains and into the arena of public understanding and awareness, and consequently apply the concept through means of a practical, change-oriented approach. "The more we focus our attention directly on the symptoms, rather than on transforming the institutions and values that cause them, the more certain we can be that the crisis will deepen because of the lack of appropriate action. Under the circumstance, the need for a theory of the causes of the breakdown is of more than academic relevance."¹⁶

The role of Arab civil society organisations is essential in the process of addressing the roots of human security problems in Arab states by working on issues of human rights, women's rights, children's rights, social security, food security, housing, etc. But such a process would require the transformation of institutional policies and values in Arab states, to enable Arab civil organisations to acquire legitimacy and autonomy, and an empowering legal framework for their work. ■

10 From a keynote speech by Dr Amro Mousa, Secretary General of the Arab League.

11 Bajpai, Kanti. *Human Security: Concept and Measurement*. www.nd.edu/~krocinst/ocpapers/op_19_1.pdf.

12 Bahrain Human Rights Society. "Bahrain: Progress and obstacles on the road to human insecurity", in this *Social Watch Report 2004*.

13 Bajpai, Kanti, *op cit*.

14 Heinbecker, Paul, *op cit*.

15 *Ibid*.

16 Korten, David C. *Getting to the Twenty-First Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. New York: Kumarian Press, 1990.