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The New Security Agenda

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IN THE WAKE OF the cold war, a host of "new" security problems have become the source of growing international concern. These include, in no particular order, transnational terrorism, ethnic conflict and civil strife, drug trafficking, organized crime, resource scarcity, environmental degradation, illicit or uncontrolled migration, and AIDS and other epidemiological threats. What distinguishes these issues from the dominant, if not exclusive, focus of security policy in the past is their essentially non-military nature. And unlike the traditional security threats, most if not all can not be considered "external" or "foreign" in origin. For this reason, they are often labeled "nontraditional" or "unconventional" security threats and grouped together as if constituting a separate and distinctive class of phenomena.

The increasing attention given to nontraditional security threats can be attributed to several factors. As the cold war confrontation wound down and the specter of a global nuclear conflagration diminished, many pre-existing problems began to stand out in sharper relief. Some of these have undoubtedly taken on more menacing qualities and proportions. Furthermore, the effects of globalization in making the world seem a smaller, more interdependent place have heightened the sense of exposure to what had previously seemed distant and inconsequential. That few countries have been spared or seem unlikely to escape the effects of some of these problems has added, moreover, to the shared sense of concern.

The emergence of these new security challenges has raised many fundamental questions that are prompting a broad reassessment of the traditional meaning and focus of security policy. While there have been frequent calls for broader, more comprehensive conceptions of security, few observers have translated what this means into practical guidance. What makes a particular problem a security issue as distinct from some other societal concern is extremely difficult to define or delineate. It is a problem that has been compounded, moreover, by ancillary arguments to the effect that the primary focus or referent object of security policy should no longer be solely if at all about the protection of the nation-state but first and foremost about safeguarding the well-being of its citizens and, for some, the planet as a whole. This conception of "human" or "global" security is tantamount, however, to accepting a still broader set of problems as security concerns: poverty, political injustice, natural disasters, crime, social discrimination, and unemployment, to name just some. In effect, these items are not merely additions to the list of traditional concerns; rather, they are the new security agenda.

Defining which issues are appropriate items for inclusion on the security agenda leads in turn to judgments about their relative importance and, with it, policy priority. Again, the adopted frame of reference is critical since a relatively narrow, national perspective can yield a quite different set of priorities from that produced by a broader global view. Similarly, a focus on immediate or short-term concerns can obscure or relegate the consideration of other problems, which left untouched may grow more acute and become more difficult and costly to deal with in the longer term. How to balance such considerations raises many difficult dilemmas, certainly more than was typically the case with military threats entailing a "clear and present danger."

These issues are in many respects just a prelude to the fundamental question of how best to address the challenge that nontraditional security problems pose. Are traditional security practices and instruments still relevant? If not, what should replace or complement them? Although there is a general recognition that many of these threats transcend the capacity of any one state to tackle them alone and that only through enhanced international cooperation can their effects be mitigated, this prescription can mean different things to different people. To some, it is a matter of more effective interstate collaboration and coordination, while to others it means something more fundamental, namely, the creation of supranational structures able to direct the actions of states and ultimately intervene in their affairs.

In an effort to take stock of how these new security concerns are perceived, discussed, and assessed, the Japan Center for International Exchange commissioned twelve papers by scholars around the world. Some of these focus on specific countries (China, Japan, and South Korea), while others survey entire regions (Africa, ASEAN, Western Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, the former Soviet Union, and the Southwest Pacific group of nations). What follows is a brief overview of some of their principal findings.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

It is readily apparent that the bulk of "new thinking" on the appropriate parameters of security, as well as active debate about the challenges presented by the new security agenda, is taking place in North America and Western Europe. This is not surprising given the size of the community of governmental and nongovernmental security experts in those two regions. Furthermore, North America and Western Europe were arguably the most directly consumed by the cold war military confrontation and therefore have had a more immediate reason to consider the meaning and impact of its passing.

It is clear, however, that the terms in which much of this debate is conducted have in many cases only a limited relevance to security conditions in other regions. This is most obvious with the above-mentioned distinction between "traditional" and "nontraditional" security concerns. Whereas a traditional security concern in the North American or European context typically refers to the threat of foreign aggression, this has not been the case for much of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, where ensuring the survival or stability of the regime from internal subversion and insurrection has long been the predominant concern.

Also, it was generally acknowledged that most if not all of the new security issues are not, in fact, very novel and have certainly not sprung up since the end of the cold war. This is certainly true for terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, ethnic conflict, and disputes over scarce resources. Nor, for some, is the argument that security should be viewed in comprehensive or holistic terms a revelation. Several countries, particularly in Asia Pacific, have long subscribed to such a view and, indeed, made it part of their official security policies.

Although most papers confirmed a rising sense of concern with many of the new security issues, traditional thinking about the purpose and

priorities of security remains deeply entrenched. The state and national security in general are still seen as the dominant organizing principles for debates on security. For those countries traditionally concerned with the business of defending national territory and associated vital interests from foreign military aggression, this is still the case despite such fears having dramatically lessened if not disappeared for many. This is evident in all the major international security issues of the day, such as NATO enlargement, revising the U.S.-Japan alliance, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as miscellaneous initiatives to bolster deterrence and stability on the Korean peninsula, in the Persian Gulf, in Southeast Asia, and on the Indian subcontinent. To the extent that nontraditional problems feature in national security planning, they typically remain on the margins or only move to the forefront sporadically, with international terrorism probably being the one exception.

For some countries and regions, it was also noted that traditional security concerns are if anything growing more salient. This seemed particularly true in East Asia. In Japan's case, this has resulted in an interesting juxtaposition in which the so-called new security agenda is in many respects now the old agenda and vice versa. Elsewhere, concern has been voiced that some of the nontraditional security concerns would ignite traditional military concerns in areas where these had been minor or had not even existed before. This was particularly evident in Latin America. In other regions, the situation is more complex because some of the new security issues are attracting high levels of concern but not necessarily as security problems. This is true to some extent in many parts of the former Soviet Union, while in China problems such as environmental degradation, resource scarcities, and population growth are all considered to be potential threats to economic growth and political stability but rarely to be security threats in the traditional use of the term.

Notwithstanding how the new security issues are discussed and packaged, considerable variation exists in the relative importance they are assigned from region to region: Western Europe (organized crime, drug trafficking, and illicit migration); ASEAN (migrant labor/immigration and economic security); the Middle East (water scarcity and terrorism); the Southwest Pacific (environmental change/natural disasters); China (population growth and resource/food scarcity); Southern Africa (demobilization, mine clearance, and water scarcity); the former Soviet Union (pollution, organized crime, and civil strife); and Latin America (drugs, organized crime, and civil strife). To the extent that common concerns

exist, they are general unease over economic security as well as threats from organized crime and civil unrest.

With the nation-state still viewed overwhelmingly as the primary referent for security policy, the need for new supranational structures and practices that entail loss of sovereignty does not appear to be attracting a great deal of support. Only in Western Europe, where the process of political integration is most advanced, are such ideas actively considered, but even in this region considerable resistance still exists. There does seem to be broad support in Western Europe, however, for regional and other forms of multilateral cooperation. In some cases, the need to encourage, engage, and otherwise harness the support of the nongovernmental sector was advocated.

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