Global Security and Human Security

Michael D. Intriligator

An overwhelming array of threats

Our planet, its many nations, and its billions of people all face a vast and sometimes overwhelming array of threats, an increasing number of which are existential. These threats include:

1. International trans-border wars (e.g. Iraq/Kuwait 1990 - 1991, US/Iraq 2003 - present);
2. Internal or civil wars (e.g. the current conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has led to millions of military, guerilla and civilian deaths);
3. Genocide and large-scale human rights abuses (e.g. Darfur);
4. National and international terrorism (e.g. Aum Shinrikyo and the Tokyo subway system in 1995, the Islamist attacks on the transit systems of London and Madrid);
5. Paramilitary groups and crime organizations that can facilitate terrorist strikes (e.g. the IRA, FARC, and right-wing extremist groups in the US);
6. Proliferation of nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons;
7. Pandemic threats due to infectious diseases (e.g. the 1918 - 1919 flu pandemic and the current possibility of a H5N1 strain of avian flu pandemic);
8. Other widespread diseases, especially AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria;
9. International financial instabilities, such as the 1997 - 1998 East Asia financial crisis that spread from Thailand to many other nations, including the Philippines, Indonesia, and even to Russia;
10. Protectionism, especially the EU Common Agricultural Policy and US subsidies for cotton and other crops that have had devastating effects on developing nations and their populations;
11. Global climate change, global warming, and other environmental threats;
12. Natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornados, and tsunamis;
13. Poverty, hunger, and malnutrition;
14. Imbalance of energy supply and demand, particularly with the emergence of nations such as China and India as major demanders of energy at the same time that some energy supplies are being depleted or exhausted;
15. Failed and failing states.

Current threats require cooperation

Some of these threats existed when the UN was created in 1945, while others are new. They represent immediate and major threats to the planet or the human species and thus endanger global security. Furthermore, they are interrelated. Because of globalization, a threat to one nation or region is a threat to all, with all mutually vulnerable. Indeed, many of these threats feed on one another in a deadly cycle.

A common feature of all these threats is that they cannot be addressed by one nation, no matter how powerful, acting alone. Rather they require international cooperation, with increased reliance on existing but revitalized international institutions, including the UN and its affiliated bodies, and the creation of new international organizations. Many of these problems have regional or global significance and do not respect national boundaries. They demand coordinated remedial measures at national, regional and international levels - involving governments, NGOs, other international organizations, and the private sector.

For a system of global governance to deal effectively with fundamental threats to security, whether it be the UN or some successor organization, we will need to approach security from a global perspective rather than merely a
national one. Our world is now so highly connected and interdependent that it is impossible to confine security to arbitrarily defined national frontiers.

Defining global security
In an address in 1993 I defined "global security" as the absence of threats to the vital interests of the planet, and I argued that this new concept should replace that of "national security." Furthermore, the idea of security must extend well beyond its traditional military dimension to encompass the interrelated military, political, economic, environmental, health and other threats I list above. Now is an opportune time to build global consensus on these issues, and the logical party to take the initiative would clearly be a revitalized UN. International cooperation will become increasingly important in achieving our shared global security goals. We will need new theories and analytic frameworks for global security to replace traditional theories such as containment, balance of power, deterrence, and hegemonic stability.

Defining human security
"Human security" will be defined here as the absence of threats to the vital interests of individual people on a worldwide basis. In the words of the UN Development Programme, which originated the concept, human security is "freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives," involving both "safety for people from violent threats, such as organized conflict, gross violations of human rights, terrorism and violent crime" and "safety from non-violent threats, such as environmental degradation, economic crises, illicit drugs, infectious diseases and natural disasters." These two concepts of security, global security and human security, are not inconsistent; rather, they are both complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The role of the UN
There has been much recent discussion of globalization, which is, of course, a reality in the current world system (see Intriligator, 2004). It should not be forgotten, however, that the current age of globalization is just the latest manifestation of this phenomenon. An earlier period of globalization, extending over the 19th Century, from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, ended with four blows. The first was "The War to End All Wars," World War I; the second was the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919; the third was the Great Depression starting in 1929; and the fourth was World War II starting in Europe in 1939 and even earlier in Asia. The UN system today must be prepared to deal with comparable challenges in the future, including wars, pandemics, economic depression, and other threats.

In 1905, before these four blows materialized, the philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The world system of the 21st Century could travel the same disastrous route that the 20th Century charted. We should consider the possible repetition of these earlier disasters and how they could be avoided through effective reform and revitalization of the UN system.

Indeed there are disquieting similarities between 1913 and now: the unprecedented threat of extreme nationalism then and that of global Islamist terrorism today, the Spanish flu pandemic lurking then and a potential avian flu pandemic lurking today. Therefore, I consider it vital that the UN take the global initiative on today's issues and major threats to the international system. In fact, when comparing 1913 and 2006, the presence of the UN as an institution is the major difference in world affairs and the global system.

Restructuring the UN system: the role of international agencies, NGOs, multinational corporations, and others
One important example of global insecurity is the threat posed by the avian flu H5N1 strain. This virus has the potential to surpass even the 1918 - 1919 pandemic, which killed tens of millions of people worldwide. Are the
World Health Organization and other international agencies affiliated with the UN as well as various national and multinational institutions able to deal with this threat? If not, should these agencies be reconceived or should new institutions be created to replace them?

I propose that the UN cooperate more closely with major institutions at the global or regional level. Many of these did not exist when the UN was created and are thus not part of the Charter; others play too small a role in "business as usual" at the UN. Among these institutions are non-governmental organizations or NGOs, particularly the international NGOs that are accredited to the UN and its constituent bodies (especially the Economic and Social Council).

These international NGOs are action organizations with global constituencies and reach. For example, without the involvement and active participation of NGOs there would be no Landmines Treaty; nor would many of the various environmental conventions and treaties exist.

More could and should be done, however, to involve the NGOs in the operation of the UN and its various affiliates. As one example, my own NGO, Economists for Peace and Security (http://www.epsusa.org), regularly participates in the Disarmament Week organized every October in New York by the UN Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs. This meeting provides an excellent opportunity for the UN to announce its plans in this area and to receive suggestions on new programs and initiatives by the participating NGOs. All UN agencies might follow this example and establish a regular time and place to meet with those international NGOs that are accredited to the UN.

Other major institutions should also be regularly involved in UN programs, including major international corporations, multinational banks and other financial institutions, workers' associations, and other international organizations so as to deal cooperatively with the common threats that we all face. The last would include the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization, all of which operate independently of the UN.

Some connections along these lines already exist, but they are informal and haphazard. These organizations should schedule regular forums where these institutions can meet with appropriate UN agencies and officials both to receive information about their programs and to make suggestions for new initiatives. Attempts towards this kind of collaboration do occur, for instance at World Economic Forum or World Social Forum meetings, but the UN would be the more natural and better body to lead this cooperative approach to solving global problems.

In addition to standing institutions, ad hoc groups of organizations and nations can often focus productively on certain issue areas. A current example is the so-called "Quartet" of the UN, the US, the EU, and Russia in the Middle East peace process. Another is the EU3 of France, Germany, and Great Britain that has been negotiating with Iran to suspend enrichment activities.

Yet another example is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a practical response to the growing challenge posed by the worldwide spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), their delivery systems, and related materials. PSI aims to impede illicit WMD-related trade to and from states of proliferation concern and terrorist groups. President George W. Bush launched PSI in May 2003. Under the initiative, countries commit to disrupting the illicit trade in WMD by interdicting vessels, aircraft or other modes of transport in their territory or territorial waters that are reasonably suspected of carrying suspicious cargo. For example, in October 2003, the US, UK, Germany and Italy, acting under the auspices of the PSI, stopped an illegal cargo of centrifuge parts for uranium enrichment destined for Libya.
The goals and objectives of the United Nations remain as important and relevant today as at the time of its establishment. Through sixty years of evolution, the UN structures are more streamlined, its working methods more effective and its various programs better coordinated. However, it remains an organization built for a different era. To meet the challenges and priorities of the present, the UN must modify its practices and strengthen its structure.

It must be recognized that not only security but also the very survival of our civilization is threatened by dangers as great as the danger of nuclear war, such as the threats to global security noted above. These dangers keep growing despite huge sums being spent on their containment. Meanwhile, modern basic science has created revolutionary possibilities to deal with these threats, and humankind cannot afford to ignore them. Their realization requires the same spirit of responsibility, excellence, and urgency as that which drove the defense-oriented projects in World War II.

Currently, a massive release of radioactivity from a nuclear waste disposal site, an earthquake in the middle of a major city, a large-scale outburst of violence, and any one of a formidable array of other quite possible disasters could cause millions of casualties, render a large part of the world uninhabitable, trigger a global economic depression, and even trigger a nuclear war. In addition, each country has become vulnerable to developments in other parts of the world that are outside its control.

Huge sums are being spent worldwide in an effort to contain these dangers by the massive application of existing technologies. These efforts may prevent a part of the potential damage, but, on the whole, they are ineffective. The factors destabilizing our civilization prevail, and the scale of possible catastrophes is rapidly growing. Ever-increasing spending is the usual, accepted response, whereas the actual solution is more effective scientific cooperation on a global scale.

We know from history and common sense that basic scientific research is pivotal to coping with these threats. Indeed, since ancient times basic science has time and again rescued humanity from major threats, and sustained its development by creating a springboard to entirely new technologies. Among twentieth century examples are antibiotics, transistors and integrated circuits, synthetic fibers, and the green revolution, to name just a few. Frontier research of the last years continues this tradition, revealing new possibilities to cope with many of the present dangers. In the area of disaster reduction, for example, they include neutralization of the time bomb contained in radioactive wastes; the prediction of natural disasters; geo-engineering stabilization of megacities; the control of the traffic in chemical explosives; the control of telecommunication networks; and the prediction of social, economic, and political crises. In the area of sustainable development, they include the discovery of new mineral deposits; the creation of new materials and sources of energy; the development of new forms of transportation; and the processing of waste products and their conversion into energy or other useful products.

Research of such significance, urgency, and difficulty would require wide international collaboration engaging the top scientists and research facilities of many nations. Such collaboration will make feasible the goals that no country can accomplish alone even if it controls large resources. The UN could play a central role in fostering these research projects through bold, innovative, and responsible leadership and new initiatives.

By way of summing up, we are already engaged in the Third World War against unprecedented common threats to humanity. The war has already started, but we have not yet recognized it, and the wake-up call may involve a catastrophe on a global scale. Basic research is among the decisive factors in this war. The UN must act as a
global catalyst in merging the international resources of basic science in a new type of war effort, not in a shooting war or a cold war but rather in joint defense of survival and sustainable development of our civilization and in support of global and human security.

Clearly there are serious threats today to global security and human security, and, equally clearly, the current UN system is not prepared to deal with these threats. At the same time, these threats can be addressed through global cooperation, and a restructuring of the UN system can create a basis for addressing them. This article proposes two aspects of this restructuring. The first is UN cooperation with other major world players, including NGOs, major international corporations, multinational banks, and other international organizations as well as greater use of ad hoc groups of nations to deal with specific threats. The second is the UN taking a major role in fostering scientific breakthroughs that can address these threats. It is vital that the UN take the initiative on today's issues through a cooperative approach with NGOs and other international organizations as well as fostering scientific programs dealing with the very serious threats that we face.

Michael D. Intriligator is Professor of Economics, Political Science and Public Policy at UCLA. He is also Vice Chairman of Economists for Peace and Security. This article was taken from "The Threat of Insecurity: Are We Meeting the Challenge?" originally presented at the New School of Athens (NSOA) conference held March 2006 in Athens, Greece.

REFERENCES
____, "Nuclear Arms for Deterrence or Fighting?" The New York Times, (March 11, 2002).
http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html
Economists for Peace and Security

http://www.epsusa.org