

UN SECURITY ACTIVITIES: MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPEN

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Sumario: I. INTRODUCTION. II. THE HUMAN SECURITY CONCEPT. III. THE UN OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR SECURITY. IV. NEW WORLD REALITIES. V. THE UN REFORMS. VI. CONCLUSION

I. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, former Minister of Foreign Affairs from South Korea has just started the implementation of his mandate as the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations. As usually happens in moments of leadership change, much has recently been written about the Organization, its successes and failures, as well as about the challenges to be faced by the new Secretary-General. The quantity and diversity of expressed opinions is so wide that at times it is difficult to see the real issues behind this thick fog of words.

Through this note I will try to shed some light on two core issues shaping the approach the UN is currently following in the implementation of its peace and security mandate.

The first issue is that of the UN doctrine on human security. Best elaborated by the UNDP's Human Development Report on Human Security, it equates security with people rather than territories, with development rather than arms. The focus on threats to individuals whatever their nature, rather than on States, has implied, in my view, a radical transformation in the understanding of the situations at which the UN should be called upon to act, and the manner in which it should do so.

The second issue is that of the UN's operational role in preserving security. The UN leadership of the global security system has significantly advanced in the past ten years. I would submit that the changes in the UN's operational activities are sustained by true transformations of international relations and therefore respond to the new world context. At the same time, important shortcomings in the performance of the United

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Nations persist, which if un-addressed could jeopardize the renewed legitimacy of the UN multilateral system to lead global peace and security.

The way the new Secretary-General leads and manages the Organization on these two issues, namely the human security doctrine and the UN's operational approach to security, will largely determine the perceptions of his contribution to the world's security when, once again in 2016, press editors and political analysts rush to assess the legacy of what will then be the former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The focus of this note is on the UN as an Administration entrusted with a mandate to maintain security. Therefore, no mention is made of the extremely important UN role as an inter-governmental machinery for avoiding and responding to security concerns. I am of course referring to the decisions and deliberations of the Member States of the United Nations in the context of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

II. THE HUMAN SECURITY CONCEPT

The new UN human security doctrine is best explained in the words of the former UN Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, who said (quote):

”Human security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human and therefore national security.”

Simply put, to be secure is to be free from human rights violations, including violations of the right to a healthy environment. Several implications derive from this concept:

- **First**, many actors other than the state security administration have a role in ensuring human security. Human security appears associated not only with personal security and political risks as it was traditionally understood, but also with socio-economic, environmental and random hazards ones;
- **Second**, in addition to security competences, institutional and organizational capacities, the ability to integrate excluded groups in the mainstream of society or the ability to reach consensus, are also important for increasing human security;
- **Third**, high significance is attributed to the ability of the society and its elites to identify (preferably at an early stage) the potential threats menacing human security; and;

- **Fourth**, predictability and control over one's destiny is also associated with human security. This association highlights the importance of not having to worry about the future of our children and family, as well as of not being dependent for survival on the arbitrary and unpredictable behavior of institutions which we do not control and can't influence.

III. THE UN OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR SECURITY

Over its life-time the United Nations has changed from being principally a conference-servicing Organization to become a truly global service provider working in virtually every corner of the world. The transformation has become a true explosion during the past decade and is more clearly illustrated in the UN operational activities for human security. For example, more than 70% of the UN's \$10 billion annual budget now relate to peacekeeping and other field operations, compared to about 50% of a budget less than half that amount 10 years ago. As important, the United Nations staff carrying out humanitarian and human rights activities in support of victims all around the world has also grown exponentially.

Let us now look closer at the evolution of the peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights activities of the UN operational activities for global security.

1. Peacekeeping Operations

Peacekeeping is at the core of the UN mandate. The purpose of peacekeeping operations is to introduce the UN as a third party in a conflict, aiming to positively impact political processes which influence the prevention or resolution of the conflict.

While there have been peacekeeping missions since the UN's foundation, the last decade has seen a radical transformation of peacekeeping. In 1995 there were 13,000 UN troops deployed worldwide. Today there are almost 80,000 "blue helmets" in close to 20 countries and territories. If civilian personnel is added, the total number of peacekeepers is 100,000.

The transformation is not only numerical. The United Nations' traditional role of monitoring ceasefires remains very important, but the UN is now deeply engaged in facilitating political processes to give countries and territories the opportunity for legitimate government. Mission mandates are gradually adjusted to recognize that insufficient troops or absence of permission to "hit-hard" if needed cannot be sustained in a high risk environment. After the recent drama of East-Timor, awareness that there is not such a thing as a short-term peacekeeping is on the rise. Through the new Peace Building Commission, a longer and deeper commitment in the period of recovery after conflict, particularly addressing economic and employment concerns, will have to be ensured by UNDP and other partners.

The UN is now also emphasizing the preventive role of its peacekeeping mandate. In recent years the lower human, financial and political costs of preventing conflict, rather than addressing it, have become apparent with the successes of some preventive interventions, such as the one of the UN Preventive Mission in Macedonia, UNPREDEP in 1993.

2. Humanitarian Assistance activities

Civil wars and natural disasters are the central cause for today's UN emergency operations. Since the humanitarian relief operations after the Second World War, the United Nations has been increasingly relied on to respond to disasters that are beyond national capacities.

In the last decade, there has been an upsurge in the number, intensity and complexity of internal conflicts, upon which the UN has been called upon to provide humanitarian relief. I am referring, for example, to the assistance required by the millions of refugees and internally displaced in Angola -1.2 million, Kosovo – 850,000, Ethiopia and Eritrea – 750,000 and many more other victims from the conflicts that took place in 1999 alone.

The costs of emergency assistance to address natural disasters are also on the rise. In 1998, the latest year for which information is available, the costs were over \$90 billion, which exceeded the costs for addressing disasters during the entire previous decade.

The United Nation's architecture to address complex emergency situations was strengthened in 1991 consequence of the seemingly uncoordinated, insufficient and at times even chaotic humanitarian response displayed by the international community when conflict first broke up in the Balkans. Its capacity has now been upgraded to respond more quickly and effectively. An important element of it is enhanced coordination both within the UN agencies and with other organizations engaged in humanitarian response, whether governmental or from civil society.

The **United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator** is now the Organization's focal point for this endeavour, acting as the system's principal policy adviser, coordinator and advocate on issues pertaining to humanitarian emergencies. In 2005 alone his Office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) raised more than \$4 billion to assist 30 million people in 29 countries and territories.

Four United Nations entities -- UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP -- have a primary role in protecting and assisting civilians during humanitarian crises, as well as in supporting States in developing and implementing strategies to prevent emergencies from arising in the first place.

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** provides international protection and assistance to people fleeing war and persecution. Only in 1999, UNHCR assisted some 22 million refugees, returnees and internally displaced. It has also been increasingly called upon to aid people living in refugee-like situations, such as the

victims from the Tsunami in South Asia two years ago. Today refugees comprise just over half of the people of concern to the UNHCR.

In emergencies, the **World Food Programme** (WFP) provides fast, efficient and self-sustaining relief to millions of people who are victims of disasters, including refugees and the internally displaced. Only in 1999, WFP assisted 29 million victims of conflict, and 41 million victims of natural disaster. Today the WFP delivers one third of the world's emergency food assistance, saving millions of lives.

Children and women constitute the majority of civilians who become refugees and displaced persons when conflict or a disaster occurs. In humanitarian situations, **UNICEF** works alongside other relief agencies to help re-establish basic services such as water and sanitation, set up schools, and provide immunization services, medicines and other supplies to uprooted populations.

The **United Nations Development Programme** (UNDP) is the agency responsible for coordinating activities for conflict and natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. When emergencies occur, the UN Resident Coordinator leads international relief and rehabilitation efforts at the national level. Often governments call on UNDP to help design rehabilitation programmes and coordinate donor aid. A concern for long-term development is present in all its relief operations.

3. Human Rights activities

For many years, the international community failed victims of human rights violations in its great 1948 promise to establish an international system to protect and remedy human rights abuses. The past decade has seen a gradual and welcome elevation of the importance of human rights in the work of the Organization.

Perhaps the most important step in this direction has been the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002. The International Criminal Court is the realization of a long effort to end impunity and undertake through the rule of law that those who commit the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes will no longer be beyond the reach of justice. Since 2004 the Court has opened investigations into situations in Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur and Uganda.

The reforms initiated in 2005 at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN branch responsible for human rights protection activities, are focusing on enhancing the UN's operational response to victims of human rights violations. Last year the office saw a doubling of its budget and staff, and its country presences grew from 14 in 1996 to 40 in 2005, including some large missions engaged in human rights monitoring and protection. The Office is also engaged in strengthening the effectiveness of the Special Mechanisms of the Human Rights Council which provide individual human rights protection throughout the world. Only in 2005, they have undertaken fact-finding missions to assess allegations of human rights situations to over 40 countries

and have appealed to Governments in 125 countries to respond or urgently address human rights abuses affecting more than 2,500 individuals.

In recent years significant efforts have also been undertaken to secure that human rights are the foundation, and the limit, for all UN operational activities, whether in the political, humanitarian or development areas. For example, the UN development agencies have adopted operational approaches that integrate human rights in their policies and programmes, with a view to promote, or at least not to unintentionally harm, the enjoyment of human rights through their activities.

IV. NEW WORLD REALITIES

The evolution of the UN operational system for human security briefly described-above reflects and responds to the transformation of the world in two important ways:

First, the gradual emergence of the human being as the limit to the absolute concept of sovereignty that previously characterised international relations. This is more clearly represented by the genuine progress in the universal recognition of the existence of inalienable human rights and of the international responsibility to protect victims from the gravest human rights violations. The world's outraged public opinion calling for action at the atrocities in Darfur, for example, show how people throughout the world now expect that in cases where individuals do not receive protection and a space to exercise their human rights from their State, the international community has a moral obligation, which is now becoming a legal one, to act timely and decisively;

Second, the new realities posed by globalization. International relations have evolved from being nearly exclusively bilateral relations among sovereign member States to complex networks of interconnectivity among people, States and other groups. As the number of issues that affect all countries and world actors grow, so does the need for closer cooperation. They range from global warming to the eradication of infectious diseases or to international criminality. They also include much less heralded technical protocols which are very important in our everyday lives, such as those enabling the security of cross-country phone calls or international aviation. We have become familiar with the new term coined to define these common interests, the "global public goods", of which security is the product "par excellence".

It is now general wisdom that the supply of global public goods is insufficient. The view that increasing the supply of global public goods needs a multilateral approach, working through the existing multilateral institutions, is also emerging. Moreover, the call is now for reforms to nudge national governments and multilateral institutions into more decisive action.

It is also important to note that, as the sole Organization founded in the name of "We the peoples", the past ten years have also shown that in many situations, the UN was the

ONLY legitimate actor to intervene with chances of success. Even if at times this was a default conclusion.

V. THE UN REFORMS

The UN institutional framework for a changed world has been laid out. The reforms of the United Nations embodied in the 2005 UN Secretary-General's report "In larger freedom" were meant to transform the Organization, outlining the vision, the future agenda and the necessary reforms to adapt the UN to these new realities. As proposed by the Secretary General and agreed by the General Assembly, development, security and human rights are the three inter-related cardinal purposes the UN should now aim for. By affirming that the Organization should focus on the indissoluble linkages between security, poverty reduction and human rights, the agenda fully reflects the new human security doctrine. It is also unequivocally stating that there is a space for UN security activities in situations where gross violations of human rights occur or where large segments of the population are so poor that they die of preventable diseases, even in the absence of armed conflict. Therefore, the UN strategy against absolute poverty - the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Organization's human rights and humanitarian protection and assistance activities are also a central pillar in the reformed UN security strategy.

These bold reform efforts do not, however, leave room for complacency. As the former UN Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, recognized in his last *Annual Report of the Work of the Organization*,

"...there is much (the United Nations has done in the past ten years) that we can be proud of. But I am also fully conscious of the alarming extent to which, on all fronts, our capacities fall short of the challenges we face. That is why I am convinced that the task of strengthening the United Nations is no mere book-keeping exercise, but an imperative that directly concerns the interests of all member states and should, much more than it appears to do at present, engage their urgent attention".

The nature of the challenges influencing the UN's performance cannot be underestimated.

Some of the shortcomings are of a complex managerial nature. They are related to its sometimes irrational structure, cumbersome procedures, understaffing, insufficient funding and lack of proper and clear authority lines, which at times make it impossible for it to live up to the expectations and demands of the world public at large.

Much more difficult to address, will be the zealotry of some of the 192 United Nations member states in preserving their interests. Internal considerations at times hinder rather than harness the Organization's capacity to deliver. For example, the current North-South divide is already impeding the bold decision-making required to complete the reform process. Moreover, a worst case-scenario where the influence of

boosted nationalism and parochialism become an obstacle to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization has unfortunately happened several times in the past and cannot be excluded for the future.

VI. CONCLUSION

The recent UN reforms in the security doctrine and the operational approaches designed by the United Nations to maintain security around the world have adapted the Organization to deal with pressing world security challenges. But the job is far from done. Mr. Ban-Ki-Moon's wish to concentrate on the goals already set for the UN, rather than find "new frontiers to conquer" is, therefore, necessary and wise. His ability to do so will depend not only on his leadership skills but also on the extent of cooperation he manages to receive from member states and on the ability to stay course in light of the multiplicity of "unknowns" that will emerge in the course of his tenure. History will judge his success in what has been called as the most necessary "Mission Impossible".