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## NEW CHALLENGES TO SECURITY STUDIES\*

### I

Security is essentially a matter of perceptions. The security outlook of a nation is built up largely on how and where it perceives the threats to her security to be coming from. Other things that go into shaping a nation's security perspective are, of course, the geo-strategic imperatives and geo-political environment in which it has to operate.<sup>1</sup> In post-War bipolar world where two power blocs got locked in a protracted cold war and lived under the shadow of a nuclear confrontation it was only obvious that the bulk of contemporary security debate was dominated by the central strategic balance of East-West conflicts. Inevitably thus security had come to be identified, as in the past, with military oriented definition in terms of 'absence of threats and conflicts' and accumulation of instruments of power to ensure it. The scope of security deliberations in the West where most of its literature proliferated was, in the process, narrowed down to traditional militaristic strategies for security against external threats. All security debates in post-War time has revolved round two superpowers and their allies giving an impression that the prob-

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1. Jasjit Singh, "India's Strategic and Security Perspective", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XIII, No. 5, August 1990, p. 475.

lems of security pertained exclusively to those of developed world where these countries lie. Perhaps such security orientation was an appropriate response to the needs and concerns of the advanced industrialised countries. Because through a prolonged period of trials they reached a stage of socio-economic, political and, in fact, civilizational developments where their source of insecurity, if any, could emanate only from an external source and military, among other things, was indeed important to combat it. Thus two security paradigms—the centrality of East-West frame and excessive emphasis on military had been the hallmark of all post-War security thoughts. Although the relevance of East-West frame has waned substantially with the change of context the military emphasis however persists. What has however been a serious lacuna in conceptualisation of contemporary security debate is an overwhelming systemic bias and an inadequate comprehension of component-whole relationship. It is conventionally and conveniently assumed that the security of the whole or system would ensure the security of the components. Empirically however this has not always been the case.

Although divided into opposing camps through separate sets of values and ideologies the developed world maintained at the worst a state of 'stabilised conflicts' for over forty years through a balance of nuclear deterrence. Today with a thaw in East-West relations and cold war giving way to a new detente there prevails a cautious but distinct complacency at least in the 'First World' over the positive signals of an 'enduring peace at long last'. With the main contenders convinced that a global nuclear war cannot be fought and won there is also a sense of relief from its holocaust. Compared to this, in post-war time the epicenter of crises and conflicts shifted to what has so far been known as the 'Third World'. Paradoxically it is this part of the world which contained greater potential for conflicts. It is evident from the occurrences and the frequency of intra-state and regional conflicts with violences taking different manifestation in many parts of the Third World. It "became almost the exclusive

threatre of inter-state wars in the second half of this century. Of the total 64 wars that have taken place since the end of the Second World War 61 occurred in the Third World areas".<sup>2</sup> By another account in the period after the Second World War there were 150 instances of major intra-and inter-state violences in the world. Of them less than 10 occurred in the developed and rest in the developing world".<sup>3</sup> As a result there is an overall sense of insecurity among the developing nations of the world. The situation is likely to persist and even exacerbate with possible nuclear proliferation and development of missile technology in several Third World countries.

## II

This spectrum of insecurity in the developing world is not without a reason. The conflicts in the Third World are fundamentally rooted in the socio-political and historical developments of the countries in the region. The forces and factors that influence the conflict situations in these countries are generated right within the boundary of the country or the region concerned. The newly emergent Third World countries are, in fact, in the process of nation state building with accompanying traumas and upheavals common in the formation stage. Most of them are still grappling with the uphill task of national integration in highly plularistic social settings. Symptomatic of this process the intra-state violences are rampant and they have reached a peak on parochial, religious, linguistic and ethnic differences with their effects spilling over national boundaries and at places turning them into inter-state conflicts. Political unrest has

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2. See, K Subrahmanyam, "International Peace and Security and Its Impact on India's Security Development", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, June 1984, p. 249.
  3. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Security of Small States in the Third World*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, Canberra, No. 25, Australia, 1982, p. 2.

soared demanding democratic government, regional autonomy or equitable economic opportunities. Moreover, the region is fragmented into large number of states with boundaries arbitrarily drawn or poorly defined in the wake of rapid decolonisation thereby sowing the seeds of irredentism. All these are potential sources of conflicts in the Third World.

It is thus evident that unlike developed countries the internal or domestic dimension as well as regional factors of insecurity assume much greater importance in case of these countries. Particularly the internal threats of destabilisation in the countries which are at best the nation states only in the making loomed larger than ever due among other things to lack of national cohesion, problems of identity and crises of political and historical legitimacy. Such threats are also due to the reduced flow of external resources retarding the pace of development while sharpening the competition between defence and development needs. So the traditional approach to understanding of security or insecurity without a socio-political and economic content is simply inapplicable to the developing countries where security "is complex and the links between its various dimensions are a further complicating factor".<sup>4</sup> Even when security means the "protection of the core values" of a nation these values in case of developing countries in their particular material circumstances widely differ from those of advanced countries. For the developing countries these values need to be defined in more tangible term like even ensuring the organic survival of their population.

It took quite some time for the security communities particularly in the West to grasp the local or regional dynamics of conflicts in the Third World. Now there is however a consensus that they (developing countries) are 'seen as not belonging to the central

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4. Yezid Sayigh, *Confronting the 1990s : Security in the Developing Countries*, *Adelphi Papers*, No. 251, Summer 1990, p. 1.

East-West arena'.<sup>5</sup> In recent time a greater awareness has been evident about the special characteristics of security in the developing countries, yet the intellectual resources needed to be devoted to it is still inadequate. True, the security atmosphere has substantially eased following the collapse of communism in the Eastern Europe and sharp decline of Soviet Union as a superpower. There might have also been positive politico-strategic developments in some parts of the world like withdrawal of alien troops from Afghanistan, Kampuchea and Angola, independence of Namibia, Sino-Soviet rapprochement as well as some progress on South Africa and Palestinian issue but the perennial ethnic and communal strife as in South Asia, continuing civil war in Afghanistan and Lebanon as well as ever present tension in the Middle East and many more should not be lost sight of. These unresolved issues are not as yet addressed in their proper perspectives. Neither are their great potentials to spark off wide conflagration correctly assessed. Consequently they are not accorded their proper weightage in global security. Thus when the security community was about to debate strategy for a 'threat-free security environment' they had the rude shock of Iraqi invasion in Kuwait. An overwhelming importance given to developments in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union as determinants of Peace and Security in the world is, as a matter of fact, a clear pointer to how insignificant the conflict situation in developing countries are in the overall security assessment of the Western security community. Now the Iraqi adventure in Kuwait and subsequent developments in the Gulf clearly spell out how fragile still are the prospects of peace in the world and how elusive its attainments are unless the problems of security of this small planet is addressed in its entirety irrespective of whether the threats pertain to developed or developing world.

A serious contradiction in the Third World conflict situation is an ever increasing military build-up. Whereas the best security

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5. *ibid*, p. 14.

for a developing country lies in its development with, of course, a reasonable quantum of military to provide deterrence for a time enough to receive international response in the event of any crisis. Internal threats can best be countered by good domestic managements. For security in developing countries there is virtually no alternative to building up the nation bit by bit till it is strong enough to ward off insecurity both internally and externally. McNamara aptly observes, "Security means development. Security is not military hardware though it may involve it. Security is not military activity though it may encompass it. Security is development and without development there can be no security".<sup>6</sup> But in great majority of the countries in the Third World they are still led to rely more on traditional military security. The vassitude of 'false security' that these countries are in can be gauged from the extent of arms transfer that has taken place to the Third World in last two decades. Even when we talk of achieving security through development compounding the problem is the fact that the developing countries must cope in a highly competitive world market in which they start from an in-built disadvantage of underdevelopment and technological backwardness".<sup>7</sup> The question of salvaging these nations from vicious poverty trap and putting them on the track for joining the competition is closely linked with making the world peace work on the basis of international cooperation.

### III

While such fallacies and inadequacies persist in security studies particularly in relation to developing countries for last couple of decades this is by about the same time that the world has quietly

6. Robert McNamara, *The Essence of Security*, (Harper and Row, New York, 1968), p. 149.

7. Yezid Sayigh, *op. cit.* p. 44.

moved and come to stand on the brink of a new peril. When we are yet to adequately deal with the internal dimensions of insecurity peculiar to the developing countries the international community is rudely awakened to yet another dimension of insecurity : the environmental degradation spelling disaster for entire mankind with threats equal only to a global nuclear war. One of the significant political events of the post-War time was the emergence of a large number of nation states to be latter known as developing countries in Asia and Africa. As most of them came into being with their inherent vulnerability and enormous difficulties, almost simultaneously an accelerated pace of industrial expansion and technological progress in the West as well as other human activities were inadvertently hastening an environmental degradation even if the process started much earlier right from the time of Industrial Revolution.

The unprecedented economic development and technological change over the past few generations have not been without great costs. One of the great paradoxes of human civilization is that the machine of progress has also put enormous pressures on nature's life support system. Other human activities also have engendered directly or indirectly alarming environmental imbalance. Deforestation, soil erosion, acidification, desertification, global warming induced by 'green house effect' resulting in rising sea level, depletion of ozone layer, loss of biological diversity due to destruction of tropical forests are some of the principal manifestations of deteriorating environments. No part of the world can be insulated from their consequences although the effect may be staggering. For instance much of the ecological problems of the world are due to the profligate style of living only in the advanced countries, leading to the generation of 85 percent of green house gases, acid rain, and industrial effluents polluting seas and water supply. Yet, hardly any country will be spared of the effects. Similarly the impact of rainforest destruction in distant lands are directly linked with future of all nations because it threatens the lives of

over a billion people by drying up their water resources, turning their croplands into dustbowles and causing subsequent agricultural decline. For mankind, it is warned by environmentalists, the effect of forest depletion alone "could be as severe as those of nuclear war. In many ways the threat is greater".<sup>8</sup>

With the increasing use of fossil fuel in modern times Carbon dioxide emission into the atmosphere has increased manifold. Only during post-War industrial boom it has increased over 300 percent. This build up which is popularly called 'green house effect' is considered to be most ominous and intractable of all and has led, among other things, to global warming. At the present rate of warming the global temperature will rise three degrees celsius in next forty years which is greater than temperature rise of past one million years. The result will be the melting of ice caps in the pole and frightening prospects of the rise of the sea level. This will "seriously affect approximately 50% of earth's population that inhabits coastal regions. Entire countries, such as Maldives, could disappear".<sup>9</sup> A rise in sea level of only 3 feet could flood an area of the Nile Delta constituting 12-15% of Egypt's arable land. In Bangladesh it "would inundate 11.5 percent of the country's land area and displace 9% of its 112 million people in this densely populated country".<sup>10</sup> In the USA, rise of sea level is likely to be severe permanently inundating heavily developed low-lying coastal plains, accelerating the erosion of shore lines and beaches, increasing the salinity of drinking water equifers and enhancing the susceptibility of coastal properties to storm damages.

Another environmental threat is the depletion of stratospheric ozone layer which absorbs 99 percent of the incoming ultra violet

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8. Brian Johnson, *The Paradise Lost*, (Earthlife Foundation, London, 1986). p. 6.
  9. David A. Writh, "Climate Chaos", *Foreign Policy*, (No. 74, Spring 1989), p. 8.
  10. *ibid*, p. 9.



radiation from the sun. Ozone destruction has recently been detected in the Antarctic as well as Arctic. It is feared that the life of many plant and animal species, otherwise required as nature's support base, will be threatened by the higher dose of ultraviolet radiation if the depletion of the ozone layer can not be reversed. Yet another potential source of environmental challenge is the dumping of hazardous and redioactive industrial waste of the industrialised nations. In the past couple of years the Third World resource-poor nations have become favourable dumping ground of hazardous waste almost at no cost. The issue of the dumping of environmentally unfriendly refuse may as well become an issue of contention between the industrialized and developing countries.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV

All these environmental hazards "augur political, economic and social disruptions on an enormous scale ... . The accompanying strain and upheaval on the international scene could have serious foreign policy consequences for all countries".<sup>12</sup> The security implication of all these will be tremendous. It will also, to an extent, tilt the balance of power both regionally and internationally because, though all countries are losers in an environmental disaster, the loss may be disproportionate. The effect of green house warming will be felt in various parts of the world potentially fueling turbulent regional conflicts that could upset the existing global balance of power. For example, maintaining threatened shore lines just on American East Coast by measures such as diking cities could cost \$10-\$100 billion for a 3 feet rise in sea level. Seven out of 10 most populous cities in the United States are located either on the coasts or on coastal estuaries that would be severely affected by sea level rise.

11. Yezid Sayigh, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

12. David A. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

By contrast the USSR which has relatively less exposed shore lines and considerably less investment in inexpensive coastal infrastructure, would suffer less damage. Moreover, the Soviet Union could benefit greatly from improved navigability in its polar coastline as Arctic ice melts.<sup>13</sup> It is also stipulated that the US mid-west can become arid and Siberia could become more livable and agriculturally more productive.

The loss of low-lying territories can create refugee problems of an unprecedented scale. 'Environmental refugees' are very common in several parts of the world, 10 million of them are currently fighting their tragedies in sub-Saharan Africa. Competition over territory and natural resources launched by those displaced by sea level rise alone could create or exacerbate regional conflicts. Famine created by green house driven crop failures may also generate regional clashes. If we turn to the conflict of Horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Somalia, the roots of hostilities can be traced in the agricultural decline of Ethiopia affected by environmental degradation of that country. Swelling food prices and loss of topsoil induced agricultural migration to border lands in Ethiopia which aggravated the existing tension between the two countries. The hostilities resulted in military conflict. Ethiopia spent an average of \$225 million on military between 1979-80. A recent UN report observes that much of Ethiopia's agricultural decline could have been averted with an annual expenditure of \$50m for environmental improvement.<sup>14</sup> Even at national level, the domestic political instabilities are frequently the product of environmental impoverishment.

In much of the Middle East water presents an environmental source of conflict. One reason that Israel went to war in 1967 was that Syria and Jordan were trying to divert the flows of the Jordan

13. *ibid.*, p. 12.

14. Norman Myers, "Linking Environment and Security" *Bulletine of the Atomic Scientists*, (June 1987), p. 46.

river. Israel still occupies the Golan Heights and the West Bank in parts because it wishes to safeguard its access to the river's water. Plans for the Yarmuk, the Euphrates and the Tigris which run through Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Iraq could mean further trouble in the region. It is not inconceivable that after the squabbling over the oil the future inter-state violence in the Middle East might arise from the water—the region's scarcest resource. These frictions over the river flows in the Middle East suggest the scope of water related conflicts around the world. Tension and violence over water use river diversion projects have already erupted in the river basin of the Mekong which is shared by Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. An Egyptian dispute over Nile water with its upper riparians particularly Ethiopia led President Sadat to declare ominously, "If Ethiopia takes any action to block our right to the Nile waters there will be no alternative for us but to use force".<sup>15</sup>

The linkage between environment and security has however been best exemplified in case of South Asia—a perennially conflict ridden region of the world. Both inter-state violences and inter-state conflicts on ethnic, religious and historical misperceptions wreck the progress of a region which is the home of one-fifth of the human ity. The environmental factors have aggravated the already strained inter-state relations in South Asia. The environmental balance of South Asia has long been maintained by what has come to be known as the "Himalayan ecological system". The dense forest in the mountain region of Nepal, India and Pakistan, mighty river systems, all originating from the Himalayas and sea washing its coasts from three direction—all these taken together controlled the ecology of South Asia for ages. The population growth and increased demand for food and fuel have resulted in the destruction of half of the Himalayan forests in Nepal, India, Pakistan and Tibet in recent years. The forests used to regulate water and prevented soil erosion. If the

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15. Norman Mayers, "Environment and Security", *Foreign Policy*, (No. 74, Spring 1989), p. 32.

present rate of deforestation continues it will take only 25 years for the Himalayas to be totally barren. It has eroded fertile soil from the hill which in turn triggered landslides and river cloggings. The soil erosion has caused unprecedented siltation in the Ganges and the Brahmaputra—two mighty rivers of the region. It is estimated that the two rivers carry over 2.2 billion tons of sediment causing a rise in the riverbed by 6-12 inches high each year.<sup>16</sup> An ever rising river bed and decreased drainage capacity of the river along with diminished capacity of uphill countries to hold monsoon waters (due to deforestation) caused devastating floods in recent years particularly in low lying deltaic Bangladesh.

The situation has been further compounded by the construction of dams and barrages at upstream points by neighbouring India. The obvious result of these constructions for Bangladesh are serious floods when the sluice gates are open in the monsoon and prolonged drought in dry season when the flow of water is choked by keeping the gates closed. The long term result is a total collapse of the environmental balance of the country. In order to restrain seasonal flood water, and yet provide a reserve for times of drought Bangladesh suggested earlier that Nepal construct series of dams to regulate the Ganges flows. The proposed cooperation of Nepal put neighbouring India in anxiety reportedly for security reasons and led her to propose a link canal with the Brahmaputra through Bangladesh. Apart from the fact that such a canal would take a big chunk of Bangladesh's productive agricultural land Bangladesh resisted the proposal also for the reason of security as regards the part of the country to be sliced off by the proposed canal. Security thus impinged on a matter primarily of environmental consideration. On sharing of water of the international river, the Ganges, there is a stalemate, if no deadlock as yet. However, to keep Bangladesh's agricultural economy going and to stop the spectre of desertification a fair and un-interrupted share of the the Ganges water is indispensable for the country.

16. M.G. Kabir "Environmental Threats to the Security of Bangladesh" *BISS Journal*, (Vol. 10, No. 1, January 1989) p. 101.

The environmental disputes are not necessarily confined only to the developing countries. The acid rain generated by the US power stations destroying forests in Canada and marine life in Canadian lake must be creating murmur of dissatisfaction among the Canadians. The sulphur dioxide fumes from British power stations have an adverse impact on Scandinavian and central European forests and marine life. A spillage of chemicals in Sandoz plant in the Rhine river and in Basle in Switzerland killed marine life in the Rhine flowing through Germany and Holland. The issue was rather critically debated in affected countries. The reaction to Chernobyl disaster contaminating part of Western Europe was far from friendly.

Broadly speaking, the threats from the environment are two-fold : the threats from its degradation itself and conflicts arising out of such degradation. While the first affects mankind as a whole in varying degrees, the later compounds the already existing problems including also those of security in the developing countries. Its effects can be pervasive on mankind. Not only that it affects the human society, its economy and polity in all its ramifications, it also strikes at the physical structure or certain developing countries putting at stake the mere physical survival of or a part of its population. "The deepening and widening environmental crisis presents a threat to national security or even survival that may be greater than well armed ill-disposed neighbours and unfriendly alliance".<sup>17</sup> The new sets of threats unleashed by environmental degradation are extraordinarily complex and national defense establishments are believed to be useless against them. Lester Brown, a leading world resource analyst maintains that blocking 'external aggression may be relatively simple compared with stopping the deterioration of life support system'<sup>18</sup> of the environment.

17. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987), pp. 6-7.

18. Lester R. Brown, "Redefining National Security" in Brown *et. al.* eds., *State of the World - 1986*, (W.W. Norton and Co., 1986), p. 210.

The World Commission on Environment and Development in its report, *Our Common Future* (1987) underscored the urgency of understanding the issue of environmental crisis.<sup>19</sup> The "Dagomy's Declaration" adopted at 38th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs in Dagomy, USSR in 1981 made a clarion call on all scientists of the world to expand their "concerns to a broader set of inter-related danger; destruction of the environment on a global scale and denial of basic needs for a growing majority of humankind".<sup>20</sup> It also clearly recognised that the environmental problems "exacerbate tensions and increase risk of future conflicts". There have lately been attempts to establish "environmental dimension to security issues in view of environmental nightmares threatening the prospects of the survival of our civilization. This leads us to a need for reconceptualization of the term security all over again. As aptly noted by World Commission on Environment "the whole notion of security as traditionally understood—in terms of political and military threat to national sovereignty—must be expanded to include the growing impacts of environmental stress—locally, nationally and globally. There are no military solutions to environmental insecurity".<sup>21</sup> The pertinent issues have also been addressed by the Oslo workshop on the linkage between environment and security in 1986. It warned: "If a nation's environmental foundations are depleted, the idea goes, its economy may well decline, its social fabric may deteriorate and its political structure may become destabilized. The outcome, all too likely, is conflict, whether in term of disorder and insurrection within nation or tension and hostilities with other nations".<sup>22</sup> So the theorists as well as practitioners must move beyond traditional thinking about security concepts because the linkage between environment and conflict—both domestic and inter-state—is an undeniable fact with which today's policy makers will have to grapple.

19. "Pugwash Declaration", *Bulletine of the Atomic Scientists*, November, 1988, p. 11.

20. *ibid.*,

21. WCED, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

22. Norman Myers, (1987). p. 46.