2005: a watershed year for global security

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Collective security in an interdependent world demands real political will and far-reaching reform of the multilateral system

There is every reason for this G8 Summit to focus, as it will, on the two key themes of Africa and climate change: both are huge problem areas, desperately needing new momentum for their resolution. But just two months later, at the Millennium Review Summit in New York, the world will be wrestling with an even larger agenda of interrelated security, development and human rights issues – essentially the whole range of threats to state and human security that we face in the 21st century – and it is critical that the Gleneagles G8 should not drop the ball in the messages it sends out on this wider front as well.

Security issues, particularly counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism, have loomed large on G8 agendas since 2002. They demand attention again in their own right this year, not least because some of them seem further away than ever from solution. The long-feared nuclear weapons breakout seems closer now than it has been for decades, with Iran and North Korea showing the hollowness of existing constraints and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference collapsing in May: there was no sign whatever of agreement on any of the four big activities crying out for shutdown by mutual consent – nuclear testing, new and continuing weapons programmes, reprocessing or uranium enrichment – if a new cascade of proliferation is to be avoided.

Deadly terrorist attacks continue with alarming frequency, and nobody can be confident that one or more of the world’s major cities will not be laid to waste by nuclear, biological or chemical weapons some time soon. Major regional conflicts and tensions, not just in Africa, remain unresolved: the risks and horrors of new and ongoing war, not only within but between states, are very real in many other parts of the world. And all of this is occurring in a wider human security context in which – above all in Africa but not only on that continent – there are still over a billion people living in extreme poverty, with life expectancy closer to 40 than the rich world’s 80, and with 100 of every 1,000 children dying before their fifth birthday, compared with fewer than 10 in high-income countries.

Make or break time for global governance

What has been missing in the global response to these threats – including the reactions of the G8 itself – has been any real sense of how they are woven together, and how crucial it is that we urgently revitalise the institutions of global collective security, above all the United Nations, if we are not to face a rapid deterioration in the global security environment. There is a very real sense around the world, not fully acknowledged by all the G8 countries, that not only are poverty, malnutrition, disease and environmental degradation not being tackled as effectively as they can and should be, but that the whole multilateral security system on which the world order was rebuilt in 1945 is once again at the crossroads. Almost strangled at birth...
though it may have been by the Cold War decades, the idea of a rules-based collective security system imposing universal constraints in the common interest flowered again in the first heady years of the 1990s, but has since lapsed into considerable disarray, with ineffective responses to major challenges in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and Iraq, and an accompanying resurgence of unilateralism and exceptionalism by major powers reluctant to accept those constraints and disciplines.

In this environment, it is not an exaggeration to say that 2005 is emerging as a make or break year for global governance. Three factors have come together to make it so: the recognition of a need for change, as just described; the emergence of an agenda for change more comprehensive and well argued than ever before, with the reports of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the Sachs Millennium Project now welded together brilliantly by the Secretary General in his In Larger Freedom blueprint; and the occasion for change created by the UN's 60th Anniversary and all the high-level summitry associated with it.

What is most obviously missing, as so often, is the fourth and most crucial ingredient of all, the political will to make it all happen – the spark, the catalyst, the leadership necessary to stare down the spoilers and make it all happen. The G8 summit offers the opportunity for the leaders of the developed world, if they can rise to the occasion, to provide just that spark. They need to show not only their willingness to respond, constructively, intelligently and generously, to the central issues of the development agenda – poverty, disease, malnutrition and environmental catastrophe – but also to those which are at the heart of the more traditional security agenda, aimed at strengthening the multilateral security system and above all the UN's own institutions and processes.

The G8 Summit needs to embrace and articulate the core notion at the heart of the agenda-setting reports now being debated – that the threats to state and human security in the 21st century are interconnected; that there are inextricable links between development, security and human rights; and that collective security in the 21st century means above all else that all members of the global community have a shared responsibility for each other’s security. It is not a matter of a North agenda being weighed and traded against a South agenda: in the interdependent, globalised world in which we now live, threats to one are a threat to all, and we must act together to meet them all.

Defining the challenges
In policy terms there are five touchstone security policy issues emerging as crucial, as defined by the High Level Panel and refined in the Secretary-General’s own report. They are being greeted initially with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the G8 countries, but all are crucial in the mix, if the credibility and effectiveness of collective security is to be restored.

The first is improving conflict prevention and resolution capability: this means better peacemaking capacity (through better prepared and supported mediators and negotiators), far more readily available reserves, both military and civilian, for peacekeeping and other peace operations; and a far more systematic and coherent approach to post-conflict peacebuilding – the failure to follow through on which is the most depressingly familiar reason for the recurrence of avoidable conflict.

The second is disarmament and non-proliferation: this means action on the supply side to constrain the availability of fissile material; on the demand side to reduce the motivations for acquiring weapons of mass destruction; improved international verification machinery; and more effective public health defences, in particular to cope with the ravages of biological weapons, whose use is the hardest of all to prevent.

The third is confronting terrorism: the need here is to embrace a broad-based policy response going beyond intelligence, policing and military co-operation to addressing root causes, including political grievances; and to make common cause at last on an international
The whole multilateral security system is once again at the crossroads

definition of terrorism, making attacks against civilians and non-combatants as indefensible as piracy and slavery.

The fourth is responding effectively to genocide, ethnic cleansing and similar massive human rights violations within states. The prime need here is to give further momentum to the emerging international norm of the responsibility to protect in all its dimensions, both preventive and reactive – our starting point being the responsibility of the international community to step in when a sovereign state, through incapacity or ill-will, fails to protect its own people.

The fifth is redefining the rules governing the use of force, both to clarify the scope and limits of what is legal under the UN Charter and, beyond that, to set some guidelines, especially for the Security Council, as to when the use of force is legitimate – the key criteria being seriousness of threat, right intention, last resort, proportionality and balance of consequences.

Next steps

The institutional reforms on the table in 2005, many of which are also up for endorsement in the Millennium Review Summit, are equally crucial if the multilateral system is not to lapse into irretrievable disrepair and irrelevance. Five reform areas are particularly crucial.

- **Reconstruction of the Security Council.** If the Council does not come better to represent, in terms of its permanent or usual membership, the world of the 21st century rather than that of 1945, it will not fall apart immediately. But the powers of the present Permanent Five will be steadily diminishing assets. A Security Council without any guaranteed presence of the major African powers, or India, or Japan or Brazil simply cannot remain credible in perpetuity.

- **Creation of a Peacebuilding Commission.** Creation of a new institutional structure to deal effectively with the endemic problem of failed, failing and fragile states, particularly in the context of post-conflict reconstruction, is the most immediate need in the international system at the moment, and one that is widely recognised.

- **ECOSOC and the General Assembly.** Both these crucial norm-and direction-setting global debating chambers have become conspicuously dysfunctional, and must be restored to pre-eminence – much of which is achievable simply through better agenda and process management.

- **Secretariat Reform.** The central issues here are empowerment and accountability – the Secretary-General, probably the most impossibly micro-managed chief executive in the world, needs much more freedom of action to choose and deploy resources where and when they are needed, subject to full accountability. Those who are committed to an effective multilateral system do it no service by leaving it inefficient and ineffective – but change cannot happen without member states allowing and encouraging it.

- **A new Human Rights Council.** Probably, the most counterproductively dysfunctional of all the present institutions of global governance, a new body of higher stature, preferably smaller numbers, more credibly elected, and with fewer highly politicised procedures is critically needed to match with achievement some of the global lip service now paid to human rights.

As we approach the critical decision-making period of this critical year, the need above all is to change our mindset as leaders, as policymakers and as those who influence them, to recognise that we stand together or we fall apart, and that it really is in everyone’s interest to move forward simultaneously on all elements – peace, development and human rights – of the security reform agenda now before the international community.

That kind of change is what great leaders have shown themselves to be capable of delivering at great moments in history. If that leadership is not forthcoming – starting with this year’s G8 summit – we run a grave risk, all of us, north and south, of living in a vastly more dangerous world in the decades to come.

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