

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum: November 11, 2003
Addressing Non-Traditional Threats to Security

**Notes from the comments of Carla Koppell, Chuck Woolery, Sonal Shah
& Stewart Patrick**

Carla Koppell began her remarks by introducing a recent report by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholar's Conflict Prevention Project, titled *Preventing the Next Wave of Conflict: Understanding Non-Traditional Threats to Global Stability*. The report was based on the deliberations of a working group convened by the Wilson Center that brought together a wide range of experts and representatives of governments, research institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations and Congress. The working group had two primary objectives, 1) to characterize and assess the seriousness of non-traditional threats to global stability and national security, and 2) to understand how foreign and national security policies should be adapted to respond more effectively to emerging non-traditional threats. The findings and conclusions of the working group focused on assessing the causes and reducing the risks of conflict faced by the U.S. and the global community, and particularly regarding U.S. engagement in conflict. It developed a series of conclusions regarding how emerging threats can be reduced in five topic areas: economic and social disparities, political and economic governance, demographic shifts, natural resources and environment, and health. In addition, the working group examined the interactions among the different sources of instability within these topic areas and considered how conflict prevention and sustainable development strategies can be developed to address these interactions.

Ms. Koppell highlighted three key findings and conclusions drawn from the deliberations of the working group. First, globalization impacts significantly on both the national security of the U.S. and global stability. Global integration has had some important negative consequences. For example, increased capital flows have contributed to debt defaults and crises. Globalization has also facilitated the transfer of disease and the movement of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced peoples.

Second, the impact on security of most non-traditional threats is still indirect. However, the AIDS epidemic, the growing global freshwater shortage, and the potential for terrorism originating in states with weak or unaccountable governments demonstrate that security and global stability can be directly affected. Even when the connections are less direct, non-traditional threats are increasing the risk of broad instability.

Third, because non-traditional threats are insidious and hard to quantify, it is necessary to cultivate a long-term vision when thinking about security. A general change in attitude, as well as a change in the mentality of the security sector, is necessary to understand the interconnections between non-traditional threats and to build the capacity to deal with them. Organizational structural changes are also crucial. The creation of a strategically coordinated means for assessing and addressing the full panoply of long and short-term threats to stability would help clarify priorities and better target resources.

Chuck Woolery explained that global health threats have always had significant impact on conflicts and national security. During the First World War, for example, the 'Spanish flu' eventually claimed far more lives than the war itself. As much as ninety per cent of the Aztec

population was eliminated by smallpox. During the Gulf War, the U.S. bombed Iraq's water treatment facilities believing it's lethal health impact on Iraqis would facilitate a revolt against Sadaam Hussein's regime. In addition, the existence and characteristics of biological weapons will undoubtedly change global security perceptions and reality.

Mr. Woolery suggested that in order to restructure the world to deal more effectively with global health threats, we must first change our thinking and focus on prevention. First, it is important to recognize that there is little difference between the impact of infectious disease and security. For instance, the CIA has stated that infant mortality is the primary key indicator for nation state breakdowns. Terrorism can perhaps be defined, albeit unconventionally, as the loss of a child and the implications of that loss for a parent. Second, it is important to recognize the profound nature of the global health threats we face today. Another devastating outbreak of a 'Spanish flu' like agent is an inevitable prospect. The extremely rapid rate mutation of the HIV/AIDS virus raises a remote possibility of developing into an airborne or waterborne disease and hinders the development of an effective vaccine. Powerful advances in biotechnology yield both a risk of abusing the technology as well as finding new cures for diseases. For example, recombining gene segments from HIV/AIDS virus and an Ebola virus could yield a cure for cystic fibrosis or an unimaginably catastrophic pandemic. In addition, controlling the potential for abuse of biotechnology will be impossible.

Mr. Woolery argued that our thinking about global health threats, and non-traditional threats more generally, should be viewed through "Mundell's Impossible Triangle." Mundell's impossible triangle states that the free flow of capital, independent monetary policy and currency stability are incompatible. When applied to conflict resolution and governance, Mundell's triangle offers a "global trilemma" implying that freedom, security and independence are incompatible and that there are always trade-offs to be made between them. Mr. Woolery suggested that an appropriate solution to this "global trilemma" allowing us to maximize both our freedom and our security is to enforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The importance of basic human rights was recently recognized by other conservatives after Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld acknowledgement that nation building is crucial to the war on terrorism. Mr. Woolery also noted that the key to successful nation building is, in fact, the provision of basic education and primary health services. The cost of prevention strategies, will be far cheaper than Pre-emption.

Sonal Shah described economic and governance factors that influence conflict prevention, as well as conflict and post-conflict environments. Ms. Shah explained that these factors are not always taken into account when thinking about security. In particular, the implications of economic and governance institutions for security are often overlooked. The provision of educational institutions in a society where there has been no complementary job creation may, for example, contribute to instability. The judicial system is another institution that has profound security implications, especially when it is characterized by a lack of transparency and fair trials.

Ms. Shah explained that the financial industry and central banks are important traditional economic institutions. The monetary policy implemented by a central bank can contribute significantly to instability. In Indonesia, for example, an increase in the money supply caused a higher level of inflation and exchange rate depreciation. In Argentina, poor monetary policy was responsible for the collapse of the entire banking system. Inequality and inequity are also important economic factors, especially, for example, in Latin America where budgetary allocations

and tradeoffs are characterized by a lack of transparency and accountability. Inequality and inequity are not just measurable in monetary terms but also in terms of access to services. For instance, during the transition from closed to free trade there is often a lack of social safety nets for those adversely impacted.

Ms. Shah concluded that there is no cookie cutter approach to address non-traditional threats to security, especially those relating to economics and governance. It is therefore important to develop a toolbox for reducing the risk of instability and conflict from non-traditional threats.

Dr. Stewart Patrick began his remarks by emphasizing the importance of long-term and structural causes of instability and conflict. Unfortunately however, it is easy to lose sight of long-term issues and problems because the impact of most non-traditional threats on security is indirect, and can be overshadowed by immediate security demands such as the global war on terror. Dr. Patrick acknowledged that addressing non-traditional threats to security is a daunting and multi-faceted task. First, it demands integration of the intelligence, developmental assistance, diplomatic and military communities' thinking and capacities. Second, it requires new cooperative structures within government and the engagement of new actors as governmental partners, for example, NGO's and private corporations. Third, dealing with non-traditional threats to security means dealing with the human dimensions of security. Fourth, it demands patience and the costing-out of preventive action. Finally, addressing non-traditional threats to security calls for a new approach to sustainable development and, more specifically, a new focus on good governance.

Dr. Patrick examined the issue of non-traditional threats to security through the lens of national sovereignty. He argued that non-traditional threats challenge four qualities associated with national sovereignty. The first of these qualities is supreme political authority. Today, failed states present a greater threat to national security than conquering states. Some progress has been made in developing a structural prevention approach to prevent the emergence of failed states. USAID, for example, has developed the tool of conflict impact assessments and a new approach to fragile states. In general however, it is still difficult to generate the necessary political will and interagency mechanisms to prevent the emergence of failed states. In terms of reconstructing failed states, there needs to be greater recognition of the importance of developing local ownership and ensuring coordination of donor efforts. The second quality of national sovereignty challenged by non-traditional threats to security is the principle of non-intervention. There is an emerging consensus that national sovereignty is no longer a "blank check." States that commit atrocities against their own people, sponsor terrorism, or that have a history of aggression and developing weapons of mass destruction, are no longer assumed free from non-intervention. Third, non-traditional threats to security challenge state control of borders and movements across borders. Fourth, dealing with non-traditional threats requires sacrificing a degree of policy autonomy, for example, through engagement with vigorous multilateral institutions.

Dr. Patrick concluded that the various solutions and approaches available for dealing with non-traditional threats to security are challenged by, 1) the desire for U.S. freedom of action, 2) the impact of infringements on U.S. sovereignty on the U.S. constitution and U.S. exceptionalism, 3) Congressional prerogatives, and 4) perceptions that relevant multilateral institutions are inefficient and bloated. Therefore, it is important to focus on multilateral institutions as a means to an end, and to avoid their gravitation towards lowest common denominator principles and practices. It is useful to recognize different forms of multilateral institutions such as ad hoc coalitions, as well as

the U.S. approach towards multilateral institutions, which is often to rely on partnerships. Further, multilateral institutions should concentrate less on developing noble texts and treatise than on providing concrete aims and concrete results.