

FLASHPOINT SYRIA

The rhetoric of human security and a reality check

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STEADY rise of intra-state conflicts, enormous civilian sufferings, emerging trends of non-traditional security threats and increasing roles played by the non-state actors led the analysts to view the security matters from a fresh perspective since the end of World War II. One of the earliest references to such renewed outlook can be traced in the speech delivered by Edward R. Stettinius, US Secretary of States, in the inaugural meeting of the UN on June 24, 1945. He said, "The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace." The 'freedom from fear', "freedom from want" and a latter inclusion 'freedom to live in dignity' became the key components of what was to be later known as the concept of Human Security (HS). The concept advocates a people-centric approach towards comprehending security instead of the traditional state-centric one. The ultimate victims of any conflict are the common people. And threats to security do not always originate from the sources external to a state; they could emerge from within. And sometimes even the state policies and actions could also cause unlimited sufferings to its citizens. So the concept proposes that the individuals and their communities should be the referent object in any study of security.

Besides, security threats do not necessarily relate to military alone. Threats to individual security could originate from political upheaval, sectarian violence, economic downturn, endemic diseases, environmental disasters, so on and so forth. The sources of insecurity are also interconnected and those often complement each other. Therefore, the concept of HS suggests a holistic approach towards identifying and preventing the whole range of threats individuals are exposed to.

The concept looks fine. Instead of just focusing our concerns on the external military threats, we now have a concept that encourages us to follow a multidisciplinary approach to critically examine each possible factor affecting our security as individu-

als. So long the individual States retain the supreme authority to judge the standard of HS among its citizen and act appropriately to enhance it, things remain perfectly alright. However, when other states tend to complain about the standard of HS within a particular State, things start taking a different shape. The very essence of the concept denies the state's absolute monopoly over the security of its citizens and assigns a collective responsibility to the civilized world to proactively set things right especially when the state itself tyrannizes its people. And exactly that is the point where the opinions diverge. The opponents of the concept smell conspiracy, a subtle endorsement of the interventionist attitude of the powerful nations, in the approach. They argue that since their interests essentially guide the states' actions, the more powerful nations might be tempted to intervene into the domestic matters of weaker ones, not in response to some overarching humanitarian needs but in quest of securing their own interest, under the pretext of HS.

Viewed from the perspective of mass crime against humanity committed, for instance, in Rwanda in 1994, the concept of HS provides a very pertinent and humane approach to heal human sufferings by regional or global intervention. But any premature exploitative intervention by external actors into the delicate domestic affairs of the victim state on silly grounds would only add to the suffering of common people and severely undermine the spirit of HS.

As the debates over the issue continue, so does the intervention of powerful nations into the affairs of weaker ones, sometimes on moral ground and some other times on material. In today's globalized world, each of our actions produces a cascading effect on many others. We find a candid mention of this reality in the report of the UN Commission on HS published in 2003, which reads, "We share a planet, a bio-



sphere, a technological arsenal, a social fabric. The security of one person, one community, one nation rests on the decision of many others- sometimes fortuitously sometimes precariously." Right at this moment, nothing could probably validate the statement better than an insight into what is happening in Syria.

What initially looked like the whiff of Arab Spring spreading into the neighborhood is now sending alarming signals. Unlike the popular uprising in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, Syrian revolution is taking much too long to produce any visible progress. Egyptians took 17 days, Tunisians 28 days, Libyans 8 months and Yemenis 9.5 months to bring the change. To the contrary, the Syrian case is lingering more than 23 months now without any visible sign of conflict termination. Analysts and commentators around the world have attributed a host of internal and external factors to this prolonged conflict. Offering another view will only add to the list. Therefore, it looks more pertinent to rather identify the causes underlying the human sufferings and examine whether or not the application of the HS approach could help the ordinary Syrians overcome the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

If the state's internal mechanism is considered inadequate to ensure HS and external intervention is deemed essential for any meaningful application of the concept, then one has to begin with the assertion that the

state monopoly in Syria has already been challenged, albeit ostensibly. A good number of external actors or their representatives are already in action on battleground Syria. The very fact that the anti-Assad factions are offering considerable armed resistance to the government forces is a manifestation of external role-play. Given the decades long suppression of freedom of expression, it was not quite possible for any anti-government sentiment to develop in an organized manner. The role of 'Mukhabaraat', the secret

police, must have dissuaded the ordinary Syrians from thinking or talking, let alone organizing, any kind of revolution since the time of Bashar Al Assad. How could then the movement receive such potent momentum over the night? The domino effect of Arab Spring might have had some contribution to the uprising. But how would anyone explain the arming of the movement? Apart from the defected 'Free Syrian Army' (FSA) the other factions must have been supplied with arms from external sources. Such surreptitious intervention connotes nothing but moral low ground of the external actors and could be termed as anything but a HS approach.

Except for the unified demand 'Bashar must go', the warring factions bear no commonality whatsoever. So if and when Bashar goes, the inevitable aftermath is likely to be a more fierce, ill-organized and poorly led series of violence among the warring factions each disparately seeking to materialize its individual agenda or those of their patrons. At the end, it is the ordinary Syrians who would suffer.

The failed attempt of Kofi Annan to seek a negotiated settlement of the issue must have made the Syrians skeptic about the outcome of the ongoing diplomatic efforts of Lakhdar Brahimi. The only other overt measure, the sanctioned imposed by the international community, has rather worsened the HS condition in Syria. Sanctions hardly ever

bring a regime change. It did not work in Cuba, China, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran or elsewhere. It does not seem to be working in Syria either. As a matter of fact, so far the interventions of external stakeholders, overt or covert, political, military or economic, do not seem to have taken any serious account of the HS in Syria.

According to the latest report of UNOHCHR, the total number of documented conflict-related killings in Syria from March 2011 to November 2012 was 59,648. The internal displacement triggered by violence has created 6,37,958 registered refugees. The WFP finds it increasingly difficult to extend emergency help to the victims due to frequent attack on their aid trucks. The food price has shot ever high. The 'Mazot' fuel, used for room heating had become unavailable at a time when Syria was experiencing the severest bite of winter in the recent history. Breads, the staple food of ordinary Syrians, have become one of the rarest commodities to be found in the bakeries. Sanctions, rebel sabotage and the ever expanding black market, all combined are delivering telling blows on the innocent civilians. The recent Israeli air strike inside Syrian territory bears the potential of broader regional escalation of the conflict. Any such escalation would only add to the sufferings of ordinary Syrians.

At the moment, the ordinary Syrians are not at all 'free from fear' as they are being mercilessly slaughtered by the regime and rebels alike. They are not 'free from want' as they are starving into death due to the ever strangulating sanctions. They are not 'free to live in dignity' as their womenfolk are being forced into prostitution to earn a piece of bread. All the three basic components of HS have been absolutely undermined by both internal and external actors. The only way forward could be a non-violent intervention by the world body not with the intention of securing the interests of powerful external actors but to save the humanity. Everyone must remember that Syria is not simply a land mass of geopolitical importance; it is also the home of millions of peace loving people. The international community has a collective obligation to help them live in peace.

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When security measures work

SCOTT STEWART

ON Feb. 1, a Turkish national named Ecevit Sanli walked up to the side entrance of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara like many others had done that day. Dressed inconspicuously, he waved a manila envelope at the man inside the guard booth as he approached the entrance. The security guard had no reason to distrust the man approaching the checkpoint; the entrance is used to screen packages, and perhaps the guard assumed Sanli was dropping off a document or was a visa applicant at the wrong entrance. What the guard did not know, perhaps, is that Sanli was a person of interest to the Turkish police, who suspected that he was plotting an attack.

The guard opened the door of the access control building -- the outermost door of the embassy compound -- to speak to Sanli, who took one step inside before detonating the explosive device that was strapped to his body. The explosion killed Sanli and the security guard, seriously wounded a journalist who was visiting the embassy and left two other local guards who were manning the entrance with minor injuries.

The embassy's local security personnel, as designed, bore the brunt of the attack. They are hired and trained to prevent threats from penetrating the embassy's perimeter. The low casualty count of the Feb. 1 attack is a testament to the training and professionalism of the local guards and the robust, layered security measures in place at the embassy -- factors for which those responsible for the attack apparently did not sufficiently plan.

Layers of Security

Sanli apparently had hoped to breach the outer perimeter of the compound and to detonate his device inside the embassy building. Reportedly he carried a firearm and a hand grenade, and the way he approached the access control point likewise suggests he hoped to gain entry. Had he wanted to kill Turkish citizens, he could have done so simply by hitting the visa line outside the embassy.

At embassy compounds, secondary access control posts for vehicles and pedestrians typically are staffed with fewer guards than more heavily traversed access points, such as the main entrance or the entrance to the consular section. This particular

access point had two guards at the vehicular entrance and a third guard to receive and screen packages and pedestrians. Since there was no drop slot for packages and envelopes, the guard inside the access point had to open the exterior door to receive deliveries. It is likely that the plotters knew about this procedure, which probably factored into their decision to breach the perimeter at this entrance. Moreover, the attack happened around lunchtime, so it is also possible that attackers thought the guards would be inattentive.

Though these smaller access control points have fewer people guarding them, they still boast at least two heavy security doors that all visitors must pass through. Many embassy compounds, including the one in Ankara, have a third door located inside the building. This multiple-door configuration, referred to as a sally port by security officers, provides an additional level of security at perimeter security posts. Sally ports equipped with magnetic locks and reinforced doors can also serve as effective traps for intruders.

The access control point constitutes just the outer perimeter of the embassy. There is also another layer of external security at the entrance to the embassy building itself. It is possible that Sanli thought he could somehow use his weapon or grenade to penetrate that layer once he got through the access control center, but the forced entry/bullet resistant doors and windows on the embassy's exterior would not have been quickly or easily penetrated by such weapons.

Whatever his plan, Sanli never had the opportunity to fully execute it. He was stopped immediately inside the access control center by the security guard and detonated his suicide device just inside the door. The force of the blast blew the outer security door off its hinges and cracked the reinforced concrete exterior wall of the access control building. But the embassy perimeter was not breached, and Sanli never got near the embassy building.

Security designs

Embassy security measures are designed with specific threats in mind. Sanli, for example, executed precisely the type of attack that embassy security was meant to counter: an isolated terrorist strike that circumvents a host country's police and security services. Ankara is an older embassy office building, but it has received security upgrades over the past few decades that have given the facility decent access control and concentric layers of security meant to stymie intrusions.

Like most older embassy buildings, how-



A security officer runs after an explosion at the entrance of the US embassy in Ankara.

ever, it does not meet the security requirements put in place in the wake of the embassy bombings of the 1980s. The U.S. Consulate General building in Istanbul, which was completed in 2003, exemplifies a building that meets those requirements. Not only is it constructed to specifications, it is also appropriately far enough from the street to help counter threats, such as those posed by Sanli, and to help withstand the damage of a vehicle bomb.

But even the most modern embassies cannot withstand all types of threats, including those posed by long periods of mob violence. On Sept. 14, 2012, a large mob overwhelmed the outer security perimeter of the U.S. Embassy in Tunis -- a newer facility with a robust security design -- causing millions of dollars of damage. Tunisian authorities responded quickly enough to prevent the mob from entering the main embassy building, but with sufficient time the mob could have breached the facility.

Such was the case at the newly built and occupied U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Libya, in May 2011. After U.S. diplomats were ordered to leave the country, the local security force was unable to prevent a large mob, which constituted security forces and Moammar Gadhafi supporters, from ransacking, looting and burning the facility. The attack rendered the building uninhabitable.

Embassy security measures are also not designed to prevent prolonged assaults by militant groups armed with heavy weapons. Security measures can only provide a delay against a persistent attack by a mob or militant organization. They cannot withstand an indefinite assault. Without extraordinary security like that of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in the 1980s and 1990s, embassy security only works when the facility enjoys the support and protection of the host country as mandated by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The attackers' weakness
Sanli's method of attack played right into the strength of the embassy's security measures. Perhaps he and his colleagues in the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front

believed Sanli could threaten or shoot his way through the embassy's concentric rings of physical security. If so, they underestimated the physical security measures in place and the dedication and bravery of the local guard force.

Notably, attack planning is not a strength of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front. Over the past decade, the group has conducted several attacks, including five suicide bombings, but their attacks have been famously poorly planned and executed. Often they fail to kill anyone but the suicide bomber. They also have had problems with the reliability of their improvised explosive devices, such as the suicide vest that failed to detonate during the suicide bombing attack against the Turkish justice minister in April 2009.

The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front's Sept. 11, 2012, suicide bombing against a police station in Istanbul killed

the bomber and one police officer. In that attack, the bomber threw a grenade at the security checkpoint at the building's entrance, but when the grenade failed to detonate he was unable to get past security at the building's entrance. Only then, in a move similar to the Feb. 1 attack, did he detonate his device.

Following Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Devrimci Sol, the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front's parent organization, conducted a spate of attacks in Turkey that targeted the United States and NATO. Because of the timing, U.S. terrorism investigators believed that Saddam Hussein's government sponsored these attacks. Currently, some leaders of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front's factions live in Syria and maintain close connections with the al Assad regime. Some of the group's militants have fought with the regime forces, and the group has published statements supporting the al Assad regime. They have also fomented pro-Assad and anti-intervention demonstrations inside Turkey. This pro-Syrian sentiment, or perhaps even financial enticement from the Syrian government itself, could explain the motive for the attack against the U.S. Embassy. Therefore, it is possible that there could be other anti-U.S. or anti-NATO attacks like those seen in 1991.

The Feb. 1 bombing serves as a timely reminder of several facts that tend to be overlooked. It reminds us of the underlying terrorist threat in Turkey. It also reminds us that not all suicide bombers are jihadists, let alone religious. Indeed, there is a long history of secular groups engaging in suicide terrorism. Last, it reminds us that not all threats emanate from al Qaeda and the constellation of groups and individual actors gathered around its ideological banner.

Perhaps most important, the incident highlights the heroism and dedication of the local guards who serve at U.S. embassies around the world. In the Feb. 1 attack, the embassy's security equipment functioned as designed, and the guards performed as they were trained, undoubtedly saving many lives. These local guards are often criticized when they make a mistake, but they are too frequently overlooked when security works.

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