
20. A view from the League of Arab States

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I. Introduction

Against the background of the current threats and the ‘security agenda’, the following issues have been defined for reflection in this volume: (a) how can the private sector cooperate with governments in order to arrest the progress of ‘the bad’?; and (b) do governments need to make a greater effort to protect ‘the good’? To address these questions properly it is necessary to pose others. Is the task limited to tracking down ‘the bad’ and ‘the terrorists’ and punishing those who resort to violence regardless of their motivations? Or is it also to fight the causes of terrorism and violence and thereby tackle the roots of the problem?

What often leads to erroneous answers, and consequently to ineffectual (and at times counterproductive) solutions, is recourse to generalizations that leave the issues even more confused. The correct approach is to characterize the objective and then to define the task. It is prudent to agree first on terminology and to determine who the enemy is before we open fire and end up shooting ourselves in the foot.

Before the collapse of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war, the ‘enemy’ was confined within known borders and had specific characteristics. At times the enemy was encountered outside those borders, in other arenas, but at least the enemy and the way to contain the enemy were known. Now these circumstances have changed. The enemy is no longer confined within borders and has no discernible features. The enemy has no physical form to shoot at. In this elusive state, an enemy has emerged to threaten the security and safety of humans throughout the world. The enemy has become ‘a meaning’ without a visible structure and ‘a description’ without an evident corporal form. The enemy has become fanaticism, rejection of the other, hatred and violation of human rights. It is also the anger and the frustration of those who have lost faith in the legal system of justice and decided to take the law into their own hands through violence.

It is important, when determining the terminology, to avoid confusion: it must be clear what is meant by ‘terrorism’ and care should be taken not to confuse it with the legitimate right of peoples and nations to resist occupation. It is important to be consistent and avoid aiming at the wrong target. It is also essential to recognize that the principles of human rights must encompass all humans, without distinction or discrimination.

In some cases, especially in the Middle East, the right to citizenship and to settle in a given country has been conferred on foreigners who arrive without

even having visited the country before, without any family roots there. They may become citizens of the new country, while others have been forced out of their homes. We are continuously faced with double standards and a profound confusion as to the definition of the right to self-defence. This happens even in countries with established systems of democracy, justice and security, where there is still strong opposition to the disarming of individuals on the ground that citizens have the right to self-defence if the systems of justice and security fail them. At the same time, these very people oppose the right of other peoples to resist occupation and demand that the resistance be disarmed prior to the commencement of peace negotiations.

The question is: How can we construct a just system with any fair notion of good governance in the world—a world which has become very small thanks to impressive scientific and technological advances, a world where all parts are affected by occurrences in any single part? Who sets the rules? Who will enforce or implement them? Are there any exceptions to the set rules? The situation today does not evoke much optimism in the Arab and broader Islamic world because of the deep sense of anguish and fear felt by many there about the shape of the future. Nor are such fears confined to the small countries of the developing world. There is also a growing European sense of concern regarding certain developments: concerns recently reflected in the positions of some countries in Europe vis-à-vis certain international events. Within many intellectual circles shaping public opinion, a movement has developed which strives to shape a global system of governance based on justice and the acceptance of a form of globalization that would be in the interest of all.

II. Obstacles to a just system of collective global security and governance

The obstacles in the way of this endeavour start with the current tendency towards marginalizing the United Nations, especially after it ‘failed’ in 2002 to provide a mandate for a war based on unsubstantiated doubts—since proven groundless—regarding threats to international peace and security. Many fear that this reflects the determination of the most powerful to impose their views on the world and their reluctance to submit to international legitimacy. The powerful have decided to lay down their own criteria for the application of legitimacy and the law.

More dangerously, the United Nations, under pressure, has concluded international conventions while making exceptions for certain nations. By openly exempting them from abiding by the criteria governing responses to the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which endanger international peace and security, it has created a precedent for selective application. The mere suspicion that some countries might have military nuclear programmes was sufficient to point fingers of accusation, launch wars and start an effective state of occupation. Meanwhile, the fact that other countries do have such pro-

grammes was overlooked, the only apparent justification being that those countries could be described as democratic. Thus the noble quest for democracy was distorted by making it a justification for the acquisition of WMD. All of the above constitutes a threat to the universal aspiration for global peace and the strengthening of international security through cooperation.

The problem now is that, because the East–West ideological clashes subsided during the last decade of the 20th century, there has been a persistent and precipitous move to ‘invent’ a ‘new enemy’. The parties to the classic conflict between East and West have been replaced by the parties to the conflict between the eastern and the western side of the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern and the western side of the Pacific, as seen at the United Nations and in the World Trade Organization. This is a matter of concern since it drives wedges between ostensible partners and allies. What is the lesson to be learned here by the South?

Relations between the North and the South have also undergone general transformations, shifting from a context of international and regional cooperation to one of a confrontation between classes, ideologies and interests. In the process of inventing ‘a new enemy’, there has been an egregious and outrageous confusion between violence and poverty, Arabs and oil, Islam and terrorism. A negative perception of the Arabs, the Muslims and the future of oil has been propagated, without due attention to some basic facts. Poverty is not the only source of violence: those who practice violence play rather on the strings of poverty and exploit the suffering of the poor. Oil is the most important of Arab riches, and it is in the interest of the Arabs that oil should flow and be sold. However, the Arabs have no intention of wasting their resources nor of allowing them to be plundered. The rest of the world should consider that their real aim may be to attain a just price rather than to disrupt the supply of oil.

Historically, there has never been animosity between Islam and Christianity as religions per se. This developed rather as a result of attempts by the North to invade the South, to seize resources and trade routes. The crescent and the cross were utilized merely as symbols to rally supporters on both sides.

Many of the writings of Western orientalists have contributed to explaining Islam and have made important contributions to its study. They have shown that the Muslim truly believes that Islam was revealed to complement the message of preceding monotheistic religions, not to oppose them.

III. Rich men’s and poor men’s agendas

By examining the real agenda of the ‘rich man’ of the North and the real agenda of the ‘poor man’ of the South, it should be possible to assess the chances of arriving at a common and unified agenda. The following issues are at the forefront of the rich man’s agenda.

Terrorism. The rich countries fear that their interests will be exposed to terrorist actions. There is growing common ground on what is meant by 'terrorism'. However, the world community still needs, as argued above, to agree on a definition and on the terminology to be used. There is, in fact, still no complete agreement on a definition of terrorism, even between the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. There is confusion between the definitions of terrorist acts of violence and what constitutes legitimate resistance against the illegitimate and foreign occupation of land and the denial of self-determination of peoples. A definition is needed which does not confuse those issues. Voices from the South were the first to draw attention to the dangers inherent in the rich men's countries giving shelter and asylum to terrorists and providing them with a protected status on the basis of some distorted application of human rights criteria.

Organized crime. The revolution in telecommunications has caused borders to fade, giving rise to new forms of threats including money laundering and narcotics (most of which are supplied by the South, particularly Latin America). The poor man's agenda can certainly encompass the fight against organized crime, as long as the rich North realizes that this fight involves development. The European Union (EU) should, for example, be commended for its initiative to expand the opportunities for Latin American farmers to gain access to markets for horticultural and floral produce, in an effort to encourage them to abandon the production of narcotics.

Illegal immigration. The USA and many European states have had to receive large numbers of immigrants to balance the decline in natural population growth. However, the issue of illegal immigration is causing a great deal of internal controversy in the rich countries. The argument revolves around whether it is preferable to challenge immigration or to challenge the causes of immigration, that is, the necessity to develop the South. It is worth noting here that the South is willing to cooperate unrestrainedly *if* this will result in the increased access of its products to rich men's markets as a substitute for the infiltration of its citizens into those countries.

Importing the disputes of the poor. The rich man fears the impact of regional disputes on his interests, and the possible threats they bring to transportation routes, oil and energy supplies. The South strives for Europe's acceptance by allowing it to participate in the construction of regional security in the form of cooperative (common) institutions. The EU has accepted that the Barcelona Process and the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation¹ cannot be completely divorced from the peace process in the Middle East; hence the EU is assuming a larger political role in the peace process and continuing its role as the major donor to the Palestinian economy.

¹ On the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Mediterranean Partners see URL <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed>.

An examination of the poor man's agenda may show that the common points it shares with the agenda of the rich man outnumber the points of difference. These may be summarized in the following list of priorities.

The need for development and integration into the world economy. The South needs to adjust to international developments with the aid of the North as a partner, committed to supporting its economic capabilities, modernizing its scientific research and infrastructure and developing its human resources. The South is appreciative of the development assistance that it receives from the donor countries. It must be noted, however, that the donors also benefit through trade promotion for their exports and the creation of stability, peace and security through aid. The goal should be the further opening of markets accompanied by corresponding assistance and the restriction of short-sighted protectionist policy practices. Those who call for international free trade must accept the same principles when dealing with the exports of the South to their countries. It is worth noting here the increasing comparative significance of the EU and its trade with the Arab world, where Europe is now regarded as the main trade partner.

A more active role in the settlement of regional conflicts. World security, especially security in the Middle East, relies on a just and peaceful resolution of disputes accompanied by a narrowing of the differences in income levels between the North and the South, where unemployment and poverty add to the pressure for population movements and immigration to the North. The problem is aggravated by the absence of an effective common EU foreign and security policy. Related to this are the Arab–Israeli conflict, the Western Sahara dispute, and the Cyprus and Balkans issues, which are primarily European concerns.

A better understanding of the political and social conditions in the South. This should teach the North to avoid excessive criticism of features and characteristics which are the product of a certain cultural heritage and specificities possibly not shared by the North.

IV. The way to a common agenda?

The way should be open for a common agenda between the poor and the rich, focusing on the following priorities.

First, a North–South dialogue needs to be launched. The North needs to acquire a deeper knowledge of the culture and the traditions of the South. People in the Middle East are adherents of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. These religions form our historical and confessional foundation. We reject the theories that posit a clash of civilizations. We believe that we belong to the same human civilization. The dialogue must be initiated on the basis of a realization of world relations in the form of values and principles which add up to a more just and more balanced international organizational framework. The framework must be one in which the rules of the game would apply to every-

one, and in which all accept that the existence of conflicts in interest or in cultures must not constitute an obstacle to the continuation of dialogue with the participation of all.

Economic and social development is essential to achieve a balance between classes, to close the gap between rich and poor, and to encourage movement towards a widely drawn democracy, both regionally and internationally. Dialogue on democracy must be characterized by inclusiveness and openness among the societies of the South and the North. All must be committed to dialogue and persuasion, not to coercion or the denial of the rights and interests of others. Otherwise, democracy will become a tool for organizing the internal affairs of the rich states but will be left aside when it comes to relations with other states.

The creation of any peaceful, stable world system has to be based on the realization of benefits for all players without one losing out to the other. Inequalities must be reduced, notably by developing institutions and a system of international trade which assist developing countries by increasing their export potential; by drawing upon the regional cooperation experiences of the North to encourage development initiatives between the states of the South; and by reaching the Official Development Assistance targets,² reforming international financial institutions, and harnessing political and economic resources to eradicate extreme poverty.

The United Nations system and international financial institutions need reform to serve all parties in a more equitable manner. The UN must be encouraged to play its part in peace processes, since the small powers of the South will choose to draw apart from the rich world to protect their national interests unless the world system takes their interests into consideration. Vigilance is needed to ensure that the growing role of the international system does not lead to a concentration of power in the hands of a single superpower which can then control the system. A 'world democracy' must be designed to take into consideration the interests of all in order to avoid double standards which ultimately lead to, among other things, terrorism.

It must be recognized that there is a crisis of faith in the South on the subject of the work of international economic organizations, as well as a strong sense that the international trade and financial institutions do not operate to benefit the poor. There are also justified impressions that the world is being governed unjustly to serve the interests of the larger powers. These perceptions exist due to the unbalanced decision-making process on international issues, which may lead the poor states to follow inferior choices.

² See, e.g., United Nations, 'Millennium indicators: goals, targets and indicators', URL <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_dict_xrxx.asp?def_code=468>.

Last but not least, a shared agenda for rich and poor must include the combating of terrorism through various means. The most important of these is development assistance using methods which respect the law, and which recognize that poverty does not create violence but rather that violence exploits the poor. The rule of law, conditions of democracy, human rights and human development must be guaranteed. Otherwise, financing and poverty problems will continue to increase in the South even while the North becomes more affluent.