

by Leila Ouardani

"No, most of our political elite have not realized that the world is flat. "

Thomas Friedman

As Thomas Friedman's "flatness" metaphor observes, the compression of time and space and the easy movement of people, weapons, toxins, drugs, knowledge and ideas have transformed the way in which threats emerge and challenged the traditional modes of obtaining security used by policymakers. The complexities underlying these transnational movements contest established International Relations theories of agency and scope and have made it increasingly difficult to conceptualize and measure security in this context. During the 1990s when the issue of transnational security first entered security studies dialogue, progress was further hindered by intellectual squabbles between realist, liberalist and constructivist agendas. It was, however, the events of September 11, 2001 that catapulted transnational security to the centre stage: academics and security studies professionals alike now found an attentive audience within international policymaking fora.

I: Widening Security: The 'transnational security' paradigm

The term 'transnational security', also referred to by some scholars as 'transstate security', has not attracted a clear and unambiguous definition as to its nature. Some scholars have gone as far as to suggest that the term 'transnational' should become redundant and replaced with what is considered a more accurate description: 'transsovereign'. For these scholars, in view of the fact that the term 'nation' is not synonymous with the term 'sovereign state', the word 'transnational' is argued to simply add needless confusion to what is an already complicated idea. However a workable definition has been provided in a 1997 outline of the emerging field, *Security Studies for the 21st Century*, written by Richard Shultz, Roy Godson, and George Quester. In the text, the term 'Transnational security' was referred to as a 'paradigm for understanding the ways in which governments and non-state actors—functioning within and across state borders—interact and affect the defence of states and their citizens.'

Underpinning the transnational security paradigm is the premise that as a result of globalisation, more specifically the growth in open markets, open societies and open economies—security has, in the words of Maryann K. Cusimano, moved to a situation 'beyond sovereignty'. Up until the end of the Cold War, in 1990, the globalizing phenomenon was to quite a considerable extent held in check. However there are some scholars that have voiced skepticism by suggesting that the elevation of transnational security concerns came as a response to find new external threats after Soviet collapse. Matthew and Shambaugh argue that transnational security issues of the level to which the world faces today while clearly being affected by the collapse of a bi-polar world are mainly a result of twentieth century advances in human mobility, communication and technology. It is, however, worthy of note that the emergence of what have been called 'weak states' and 'failed states', following the end of the bipolar geostrategic system, have considerably worsened the effects of transnational security issues.

Sovereignty as a political organization had dominated the international system from the time of

the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. From then on, the state had both exclusive and final jurisdiction over a territory and those resources and populations that were found within its territorial borders. This system acknowledges a single political authority which possesses both a monopoly over the use of force but also the role of sole defender and final arbiter of any problems that arise within the territorial borders. Attempts to restrict border and territorial access have long been a core state activity. Historically the vast majority of interstate wars concerned territorial defence and conquest and therefore it is unsurprising that borders were considered primarily in military terms. Nowadays, the marked reduction in interstate military conflicts has resulted in state borders being contested only on rare occasions.

On the other hand, globalisation processes that many commentators consider to contain 'good, progressive, and liberalizing international trends' have led to borders increasingly being penetrated by non-state actors. Indeed central to the transnational security paradigm is the involvement of transnational non-state actors which can affect the defence of states and its citizens. A number of commentators however have been keen to point out that transstate non-state actors have long been a historical reality. Indeed states have been subject to transnational pirates, mercenaries, contraband smugglers, and religious extremists for many centuries. However historically the transnational dimension of their activities were considerably limited without the financial, transportation and communication networks that are unique to our age.

The transnational security paradigm does not only challenge the traditional state-centric paradigm with its incorporation of non-state actors into its framework but also includes somewhat of a widening of the security agenda. Transnational threats often referred to as 'non-traditional threats' often do not pose an existential threat. As Buzan has argued the 'state is less important in the new security agenda than in the old one. It still remains central, but no longer dominates either as the exclusive referent object or as the principle embodiment of the threat'. This shift should be understood in the context of the emergence of concepts such as 'human security' that sought to encompass and recognize security at multiple levels from the global right down to the individual.

## II: The main transnational security issues

Statistics demonstrate that in the twentieth century a greater number of casualties have come about due to sub-national and transnational threats than traditional interstate wars. Globally in 1999, for instance, while 33,000 individuals lost their lives in major power conflicts, a staggering 2.8 million people met their death from AIDS, 40,000 through civil conflicts and approximately 1000 as a result of terrorist attacks. The range of non-traditional threats that we face in the twentieth century are considerable. Identifying the main transnational security issues however is not a straightforward task since some transnational security issues have a greater capacity to challenge the security of certain states than others. For instance, the closing of the United Kingdom's only human trafficking police unit in November, 2008 demonstrates that states often need to prioritise those transnational security threats that pose the greatest threat to them.

In recent years, more than any other transnational security issue, the existence of failing and destabilised states has attracted considerable attention from the international security

community. The worlds 'failed', and failing, states are widely publicised, they include: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, and Haiti, to name a few. Following these are those states that are considered to be on the brink of collapse such as Pakistan. It is now widely believed that in our highly globalized world the stability of any one state can critically affect the stability of the international system as a whole. Failed sources can act as sources, incubators, and facilitators of a whole host of transnational security threats such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, organized crime, infectious diseases, and environmental destruction. The severity of threats posed by failed and destabilised states led the Bush administration to move up 'failed states' to the same level of threat posed by hostile states. Indeed the international community is extremely concerned about Pakistan's stability due to its radicalized anti-Western elements, its use of territory as a base for al-Qaeda, and a weak central government's possession of launch codes for a whole arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) involves the planning and execution of illicit business ventures by networks or groups of individuals working in more than one country. Transnational organised criminal groups often use violence and corruption in order to meet their goals. Crimes can include money laundering, cyber-crime, human trafficking and smuggling, drugs, weapons, endangered species, body parts and nuclear material." TOC has over the last decade become a central security issue in western political economies, finding its way onto the agenda of key international for a including the United Nations, G7-8 elite industrial countries and the Council of Europe. This is mainly due to its capacity to weaken the financial and economic systems of countries and undermine democracy. In situations where weak governments are involved, they can find themselves up against these crime networks with out the institutional strength to counter them. While prospering in illegal activities these groups work against the peace and stability of nations internationally and often use bribery, terror, and violence to meet their goals."

Transnational terrorism has, since September 11, 2001, been considered one of the main (if not, the main by a number of Western countries) of the transnational security threats. Transnational terrorism is characterized by a non-state actor operating from one state and crossing borders to carry out terrorist attacks on another given state. Over the last decade there has been a marked increase in extremist Islamist terrorism operating from zones all across the world. Some commentators have questioned the high 'prioritization' of transnational terrorism due to the relatively little (when compared to other transnational security threats such as AIDS) of deaths associated with the phenomena. Indeed much of the international attention can be argued to have stemmed from the world's dominant power, the United States', interest and focus upon transnational terrorism as a major security threat. However this argument does not take into account a number of other issues. Perception has a fundamental role in security, and individual's beliefs that they are at risk from transnational terrorism has been arguably heightened in recent years. Moreover, whilst the deaths are relatively less than other transnational security issues, recent developments such as news that terrorists may have been experimenting with biological weapons demonstrates that the situation can change rapidly and lead to a greatly exacerbated threat.