PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: TOWARD A NEW POLITICS OF NATURAL DISASTER IN ASIA

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Abstract. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami ended as quickly as it appeared, but its devastating aftermath will not be easily forgotten. Millions of human lives were affected, with entire communities swept away. As the tsunami revealed, natural disasters represent a significant challenge for human security. No one can feel secure when nature is so unpredictable and natural threats are left unmanaged. What the tsunami also showed was that some governments are ill-equipped to assist disaster victims. Unfortunately, some countries do not fulfill their promises to provide relief funds to victims and endanger both people's living conditions and the state's overall performance. Discussing the 2004 Tsunami and other natural disasters' impact in Asia, this paper will propose some suggestions to devise a better politics of natural disaster that puts people and state interests in proper balance and perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main purposes of development is to promote security. This implies that it the responsibility of governments to keep the land and the population secure. Natural disasters, however, give rise to insecurity. The greater the disaster, the more likely the impact may spill over a given area's boundaries and even across generations. Further problems arise when state and market interests compete with common people's interests.

2. SECURITY AT A GLANCE

In the post-Cold War era, discussing and reconstructing the notion of security has become commonplace. In this regard, Caballero-Anthony (2004) notes three schools of thought. The first school seeks to widen the scope of security beyond military security, to include among others, political, economic, and ecological security concerns. The second school aims to maintain the status quo, bringing security back within the realist/neo-realist school. The last school hopes to broaden the security paradigm beyond state and military threats, also seeking in the process to achieve the goal of human emancipation.

To some extent, the third school of thought would seem apropos. The concept of security has been stretched horizontally, embracing issues beyond military security; and vertically, embracing concerns over regional and global structures as well as local and individual identities.

Proponents of human security have argued that the concept of security must change in two basic ways: from an exclusive stress on territorial security, to a much greater stress on people's security; and from security through armaments, to security through sustainable development. In foreign policy terms, human security requires "a shift in perspective or orientation … taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on … territory or governments" (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, April 1999: 1). Human security puts the individual at the center of debate, analysis and policy. The person is paramount, and the state is a collective instrument to protect human life and enhance human welfare (Thakur, 2006).

Capie and Evans (2002) state that most conceptions of human security do not deny a role for states or for traditional concepts of national security, but rather see human security as complementing them. One definition argues that "human security efforts will not replace na-

tional security arrangements – the protection of territory and the life and property of people remain the responsibility of government," but adds that "national security is a prerequisite for ensuring security – that is, the survival and dignity of the individual – it is not the only requirement.… The role of government is to provide a foundation or environment that will enable individuals to take care of themselves and to develop their capabilities without undue restrictions."

Thakur (2006) found that the fundamental components of human security – the security of people against threats to personal safety and life – can be put at risk by external aggression, but also by factors within a country, including "security" forces. The reformulation of national security into the concept of human security is simple, yet has profound consequences for how we view the world, how we organize our political affairs, how we make choices in public and foreign policy, and how we relate to fellow-human beings from different nations and civilizations.

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) *Human Development Report 1994*, threats to human security can be classified into seven main categories: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. A Canadian report identifies "a wide range of old and new threats … rang(ing) from epidemic diseases to natural disasters, from environmental change to economic upheavals."

Acharya (2005) found that recent challenges to human security in Southeast Asia have been marked by three common features (pp. 2-3). First, they are transnational in nature. While initially originating from within the boundaries of one state, they also affect the security and well-being of entire regions and beyond. Second, these threats arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. Value declines in Asian currencies in 1997 and SARS outbreaks are examples worth mentioning. A third common feature is their link with globalization. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis would not have taken place without the free flow of investment and electronic financial transfers that lie at the core of economic globalization. The SARS epidemic spread when individuals sharing the same elevator in a Hong Kong hotel that had carried a Chinese national infected with the virus transmitted the disease to Singapore and Toronto.

According to all of the above arguments, natural disasters are one of many possible developments that must be considered when discussing human security. The Indian Ocean Tsunami, for example, affected millions of human lives without altering the physical boundaries of states. It took a heavy toll on societies, causing environmental damage and economic upheavals as well as endangering food security and people's health, among many other consequences.

3. DISASTERS, GOVERNANCE, AND LEGITIMACY

About 75% of the world's major natural catastrophes between 1970 and 1997 occurred in the Asia and Pacific region, mostly in poverty-ridden developing countries (UNESCAP & ADB, 2000). From 1971 to 2000, China experienced more than 300 natural disasters and recorded more than 311,000 deaths; India, with more than 300 disasters, suffered more than 12,000 deaths; the Philippines, with nearly 300 catastrophes, lost about 34,000 people; Indonesia experienced about 200 disasters with more than 15,000 lives lost; and Bangladesh, with 181 events, witnessed more than 250,000 people killed (UNEP & Earthscan, 2002).

Within the period of these two years, we have experienced some "mega disasters." The Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the 7.6 magnitude earthquake and landslides in the Kashmir region in 2005, and the unprecedented flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina along the US Gulf Coast in the same year are a few catastrophes that come to mind. Some smaller scale but relatively serious earthquakes, tsunamis and floods devastated many disaster-prone areas of Asia, especially Indonesia throughout 2006-2007.

In terms of estimated fatalities, the deadliest natural disasters mostly occurred in Asia. The

Indian Ocean Tsunami ranks among the world's worst natural disasters (see Table 1).

Table 1: Deadliest natural disasters

Year	Location	Events	Death toll
1931	Huang He River, China	flood	3.7 million
1970	Bangladesh	cyclone	300,000
1976	Tangshan, China	earthquake (7.5)	255,000*
2004	Indian Ocean	earthquake (9.0)/tsunami	250,000
1920	Ningxia-Kansu, China	earthquake (8.6)	200,000
1927	Tsinghai, China	earthquake (7.9)	200,000
1923	Kanto region, Japan	earthquake (7.9)	143,000
1991	Bangladesh	cyclone	139,000
1948	Turkmenistan, USSR	earthquake (7.3)	110,000

Official death toll. Unofficial estimates range as high as 655,000.
Sources: *CRS Report for Congress* (2005); Pickrell (2005).

However, the estimated death toll is not the only indicator of a disaster's impact. Also important to consider are the people affected and economic losses. An earthquake in Kobe, Japan in January, 1995 turned into one of the world's costliest natural disasters. Although 5,502 people perished, more than 1,800,000 individuals were affected, with the damaged estimated at US$131.5 billion. The Super Cyclone in the eastern state of Orissa India in 1999 killed 10,000 people, left 15 million people homeless and without food and water, damaged 1.8 million hectares of agricultural land, and uprooted more than 90 million trees (UNEP & Earthscan, 2002).

Figure 1: Map of the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami
Source: Margesson et al. (2005).

Triggered by a magnitude 9 earthquake, the fourth largest since 1900 and the biggest since a magnitude 9.2 earthquake struck Alaska's Prince William Sound in 1964, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami wreaked havoc upon 13 countries (see Figure 1). At least 226,000 were left dead, including 166,000 in Indonesia, 38,000 in Sri Lanka, 16,000 in India, 5,300 in Thailand, and 5,000 foreign tourists.[1] Over 500,000 people were injured and up to 5 million people lost their homes or access to food and water. One million people were left without a livelihood. Around a third of the dead were children, and 1.5 million children were injured, displaced or

lost families (Pickrell, 2005). The tsunami brought chaos just eight to nine hours after the initial shock but the longer-term social and economic impacts were incalculable (Vervoorn, 2006).

Of the 199 inhabited islands in the Maldives, 53 suffered severe damage and 10% of the islands were totally destroyed. In Aceh and Sri Lanka, whole communities on low-lying coastal areas were largely erased by the tsunami waves. Aceh was the worst affected region in the tragedy, with the impact felt across the province. More than 600,000 people gathered in relief camps established for them by the authorities and international organizations. For this reason, the UN Secretary-General described it as "the largest natural disaster the UN has had to respond to on behalf of the world community in the sixty years of its existence" (ADB, 2005).

The sheer scale of the tragedy hampered reconstruction efforts, as whole communities and large infrastructure networks were destroyed. Some communities may need to be moved inland as coastlines have been altered by the tidal waves up to 3 kilometers and as people may be reluctant to rebuild and relocate along the sea. The impact of the disaster raised difficult questions regarding reconstruction as different spatial planning may give rise to conflicts among survivors.

Besides the 2004 Tsunami, the May 27, 2006 Earthquake surrounding Yogyakarta and February, 2007 Flood striking Jakarta gained international exposure. Both disasters were smaller in scale than the 2004 Tsunami. Meanwhile, Yogyakarta and Jakarta have strategic positions in international relations. Yogyakarta is a center of education where many scholars come from around the world. It is also one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Indonesia, besides Bali Island.

Meanwhile, Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia and thus a place where other nations send representatives. The flood not only struck Indonesia, but other states' properties and citizens in the city as well. Unexpectedly, peoples in affected areas were not given sufficient warning to make preparations. Jakarta is also the center of Indonesia's authority and economic activity. There are around ten million people inhabiting the city in the daytime. Many commuters who depended on Jakarta's economic activities lost their income. Others all around Indonesia also paid the price of the disaster. Some local governments could not issue resident cards or enact the administrative requirements to arrange reconstruction assistance for the victims of the earthquake because the forms and registration numbers needed could not be located or approved without word from Jakarta. In the end, the two disasters revealed the limits of the Indonesian government's actual powers (Wonoadi, 2007).

Before May 27, 2006, no earthquake as devastating as the one that day had ever been encountered or even imagined by Indonesians. In the midst of the confusion expressed by local government and the people of Yogyakarta, the fastest emergency responses came from military as well as nongovernmental stakeholders. They were able to move quickly because some of them had been waiting for months in anticipation of Mount Merapi's eruption in the northern part of Yogyakarta. In the days following the quake, many local and international NGOs gravitated toward damaged areas to assist victims.

Meanwhile, Nugroho (2006) found that until the first week after the earthquake, local governments were slow to react because many government officers and employees were also victims of the disaster. Moreover, to respond the government also had to deal with complex bureaucratic procedures. That is why the role of nongovernmental entities – ranging from individuals, religious and/or ethnic organizations, corporations, social movements and nongovernmental organizations – were crucial in aiding victims. In fact, the important role of these groups became clear during the recovery period and not just during the initial emergency response. While the government was still formulating its Recovery and Rehabilitation (RR) Action Plan, non-government stakeholders began applying their much-needed recovery program in disaster areas.

Facing the immense flood of Jakarta, observers demanded the government declare it a na-

tional disaster, but Yudhoyono's administration declined. From the perspective of national interest, it was a rational choice. Jakarta is the face of Indonesia. To declare the flood a national disaster would have made the Indonesian government appear incapable of coping with this matter. To some extent, it is seen as Indonesian diplomacy to nurture a positive image of Indonesia (Wonoadi, 2007). However, as discussed earlier, many Indonesian people felt desperate and suffered greatly because of the flood.

As Pelling and Dill (2006) found, a state's incapacity to respond adequately to a disaster can create a temporary power vacuum, and potentially a watershed moment in historical trajectories. This generates (albeit temporarily) a window of opportunity for novel sociopolitical action at local and national levels. Interventions may include maneuvers to entrench or destabilize current power-holders, to change power-sharing relationships within recognized sectors, or to legitimize or de-legitimize new political groupings. That is why disasters are undeniably political and raise questions concerning whether to strengthen the government or civil society.

4. HEALTH INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC INTEREST

Natural disasters also contribute to public health calamities. After the tsunami, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that water-borne infectious diseases were spreading through contaminated water supplies. Three to five million people were thus unable to meet their most basic requirements to survive (WHO, 2004). The *Guardian* cited Boseley's findings, reporting that "Public health experts say that cholera, typhoid and diarrhea, which were already present in some of the countries hit by the tsunami, could spread rapidly in crowded camps with poor sanitation. And there are fears that mosquitoes carrying malaria and dengue fever will breed in stagnant pools left in the wreckage and spread potentially lethal sickness."

The people who suffered from Jakarta's flood also found themselves in the same circumstances. Roberts (2007) reported diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, fever and itchy skin as common complaints. At least three cases of leptospirosis, a bacterial disease spread by rat urine, were reported. Leptospirosis can cause serious illness, including liver failure, if not treated. There were also many cases of dengue fever, an illness transmitted by mosquitoes.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami and other disasters drew the world's attention to catastrophes that, unfortunately, were in the making for decades. "Development," when narrowly defined, tends to destroy the environment.[2] A focus on economic growth compelled many nations to "race to the bottom," sacrificing their people and their environment. Poor infrastructures in impoverished regions and the policies of international financial institutions ensured that natural disasters turned into public health nightmares (Roberts, 2007; Sridhar, 2006).

International financial institutions contribute to ongoing public health disasters in two ways. First, their penchant for water privatization restricts access for vulnerable communities. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund's so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy initiatives force developing countries to adopt Structural Adjustment Program policies. Overall, loans to the poorest countries are designed to enable the repayment on older debts to commercial banks, governments, and a variety of official lenders. These policies distort economic priorities in developing countries and tend to undermine social sector spending, including education, healthcare, and other social services and subsidies that the poor heavily rely upon.

Interestingly, the countries devastated by the tsunami, receiving attention for clean water distribution relief efforts, are also embroiled in water privatization controversies. Proposed water services reform legislation in Sri Lanka met opposition in December 2003 by a powerful coalition of nongovernmental organizations who contended that private control over water distribution would deny the nation's poor of their basic survival requirements and discriminate against farming communities. In Indonesia, a US$300 million World Bank loan relies upon continued privatization despite negative experiences in Jakarta where water quality is poor, water service unreliable, and poor communities face discrimination due to unaffordable

connections charges and informal tenure arrangements. In India, the World Bank funded private sector has effectively phased out cross-subsidies and increased tariffs, making it impossible for the poor to access water without any purchasing power.

Sridhar said that privatized water distribution would only be able to reach 17% of India's poor at most, yet loans from these lenders are allegedly for poverty reduction. While the recent tsunami seriously exacerbated the problem of water and sanitation management in South Asia, access to water is clearly denied to the region's majority on a daily basis.

Second, pressure from powerful countries and transnational corporations can also threaten public health in Asia by pressuring governments to repeal progressive healthcare policies for Western commercial benefit. For example, US and European transnational pharmaceutical corporations and the US and European governments are pressuring India to forgo protections for public health available to it under the WTO's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement as it revises its Patents Act of 1970, which covers patents on medicines, chemicals, and food. Gupta, as cited by Ajinkya (2005), found if the revisions to the act are approved by parliament, these so-called "TRIPS plus" provisions will drive healthcare costs up severely.

5. HOPE AND PROMISE

After the 2004 Tsunami, the image of Earth in some ways changed. Instead of a beautiful, blue, fragile planet, it came to evoke terror and power (Vervoorn, 2006, p. 187). Many efforts have solved problems and highlighted the importance of giving attention to emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and prevention and mitigation. While it is true that earthquakes can neither be stopped nor accurately predicted, warning systems can be put in place to alert people about impending disasters. The Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s pledge of US$1 million to support such system development was one of many technical offers, aiming to ensure that the lessons of this tragedy can be applied to prevent similar events in the future.

The ASEAN Leaders' Summit was held to consider the impact of and response to the December 26, 2004 Earthquake and the devastating tsunami that the earthquake unleashed. The summit brought together the heads of state and senior officials from countries directly hit by the tsunami, and of nations providing assistance, such as Singapore, Australia, the US, G8 nations, and the EU. The heads of international financial institutions were also present, including the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the UN.

The longer-term efforts, to begin after the relief operations, were recognized by the summit as requiring coordinated efforts by the international community. The international financial institutions, including specifically the ADB, the Islamic Development Bank, and the World Bank, were asked to ensure funding for the "viability and sustainability of those programs" (ADB, 2005).

Summit participants pledged over US$4 billion in support of relief and future reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Pledges were quite generous. For example, Japan offered US$500 million; Australia pledged AUS$1 billion (equally split between grant and concessional funds); the United States committed an initial US$350 million, part of which was to be channeled as bilateral grants and some through multilateral institutions, in addition to the cost of relief work being undertaken by US military forces; and the European Union collectively committed around 1.5 billion Euros (ADB, 2005). These pledges ranged from specific contributions for medical relief to more general support.[3]

The G8 members proposed a moratorium on debt repayments from affected countries. The IMF also pledged to provide financial assistance through its Emergency Natural Disaster Assistance Facility. This financing, which could be in the order of US$1 billion for the most affected countries, could be made available quickly and without an IMF program.

Regionally, the President of Indonesia called for revitalizing the ASEAN Regional Program on Disaster Management and formulating an action plan for the establishment of an ASEAN Security Community, to provide for coordinated use of military and logistics in rescue and relief operations.

Besides the ASEAN Leaders Special Summit, there were other international discussions and efforts. Unfortunately, according to the United Nations Department for Aid and Development database released by the BBC, about half of the billions of dollars donated by individuals, companies and governments worldwide to help the victims of the Southeast Asian Tsunami two years ago has still not been dispersed. Several foreign governments have also only given a small proportion – and at times none – of the money they promised. Of the US$6.7 billion pledged, about a tenth has yet to be delivered, and only US$3.4 billion has been spent (*Terra Daily*, 2006).

It was revealed that China, Spain, and France have just given US$1 million each to Sri Lanka, from their promises of US$301 million, US$60 million, and US$79 million, respectively. The Maldives has not received even a penny from Kuwait, who pledged US$10 million. The United States has just given 38% of its total pledge to the United Nations. The European Commission still owes US$70 million. The British still have to pay US$12 million. The Red Cross worldwide has not distributed US$1.3 billion from US$2.2 billion in assistance funds. The organization promised to build 50,000 houses, but only 8,000 were constructed by December 2006.

Bureaucracy, poor planning and the cynical withholding of money by some governments and charities are believed to have caused inordinate delays in the four countries most affected – Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Maldives. Some rebuilding projects have started late and need years to complete, but there is growing frustration at the delays.

The Congressional Report Service (Margesson et al., 2005) concluded that impediments to aid appear to be particularly challenging for several reasons. There are the obvious logistical difficulties. The destruction of transportation infrastructure has made it difficult to extend assistance to all of the affected areas. The coordination of national and local level governments with the military and relief groups presents problems. In Indonesia and Sri Lanka, conflicts between secessionists and governments have also complicated relief efforts. There is also the issue of national pride. Indonesia was, like India, a leading member of the non-aligned movement. This may be, in part, a reason for Indonesia's decision to ask providers of foreign military assistance to leave the country by March.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, there is still an assumption in many countries that disaster relief is essentially "charitable" work. However, this is far from the truth. Agencies can make mistakes, be misguided and sometimes deliberately misuse the trust that is placed in them. Disaster relief is no longer a small-time business. It often leads NGOs unwittingly to put pressure on themselves, which leads to short-sighted and inappropriate work.

6. WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

Vulnerability to disasters is closely linked with population density and economic resources (UNEP & Earthscan, 2002). It is also likely to worsen in countries with bad governance (Pelling & Dill, 2006).

Most societies and countries hold core values in addition to maintaining their territorial integrity. As well as trade-offs, there are opportunity costs concerning governance: the allocation of resources to cope with military security threatens socio-economic security, while underlining economic (business) interests undervalue human security.

One possible solution to the dilemma is to focus on security policy in relation to crises, short of which it is more accurate to assess welfare gains and losses rather than increased se-

curity and insecurity. Even if we limit "security" to anything that threatens the core integrity of individuals' lives, many nontraditional concerns merit the gravity of the security label and require exceptional policy measures in response. Traditional security threats are not necessary to destroy the lives and livelihoods of very large numbers of people. The annual mortality correlates of poverty – low levels of life expectancy, high levels of maternal and infant mortality – are almost unfathomable in certain cases. When thousands are killed by floods resulting from a ravaged countryside and hundreds of thousands are killed by an earthquake and the resulting tsunami, and when citizens are killed by their own security forces, the concept of national security is policy-irrelevant.

To insist on national security at the expense of human security would be to trivialize the concept of security in many real world circumstances and rid it of any operational meaning. The primacy of the goal of state security does not withstand rigorous scrutiny, for it does not have a privileged claim over other needs of human beings such as food, water and air. Instead, it is more satisfactory to conceptualize security in the terms Baldwin (1997) states: "security is only one of many policy objectives competing for scarce resources and subject to the law of diminishing returns…. Rational policy-makers will allocate resources to security only so long as the marginal return is greater for security than for other uses of the resources" (pp. 19-20).

Nowadays, it is difficult to envision a clear pattern of politics concerning natural disasters in Asian countries. It is hard to find countries that look ready to serve their people with an appropriate blueprint for natural disaster management. Japan is only one nation that contributes to disaster awareness research in accordance with its geographic interests along the Pacific Rim.

Natural disasters always exhaust huge resources during recovery efforts. To implement more flexible and more rapid assistance, it is a must to introduce as much procedural simplification as possible into loan processing coordinated disaster responses at all levels (local, national, and international), embrace external funding agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups – professional, religious or ethnic – and intentionally promote disaster prevention and mitigation activities along with regional cooperation.

Technology has moved forward. Unluckily, the numbers and consequences of natural disasters have been increasing. Increases in knowledge and technology have not reduced disaster losses, and in some cases have worsened matters. Thus, the proposition that the set of constructs used to prevent, mitigate and manage disasters is flawed appears accurate.

The International Early Warning Program brings together UN agencies and other organizations, with the aim of creating or building on existing warning systems for hazards including droughts, wildfires, floods, typhoons, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides, as well as tsunamis. About 250 to 300 million people are affected by such natural disasters every year (IFRCRCS, 200). Global hazard warning programs will benefit from the intergovernmental Global Earth Observing System of Systems initiative, established in 2002 and due for completion within the next 10 years. The aim of GEOSS is to integrate satellite and ground- or water-based observations of oceans, the earth, the atmosphere and ecosystems (Young, 2005). It is an expensive but necessary initiative.

Asia, as a vulnerable region of disasters, can learn and maintain many best practices that were visible during the disasters discussed in this paper. Among the successes were the following:

- Parties/agencies – military and civilian – pooled their skills toward relief efforts according to their specialization, i.e. as planners, field managers, fund raisers, physicians, counselors, etc.
- NGOs and leaders cooperated, enabling survival during the "vacuum of governance."
- Local wisdom made people stronger.
- To support victims' basic needs was the best choice.
- Outsourcing reconstruction assistance proved beneficial

On the other hand, many obstacles remain to be surmounted, such as those below:

- Early warning systems cannot be built instantly. To prevent the worst outcomes, the newest technology, supported with exchange data among countries, is essential. It should rely on local knowledge and promote sustainable development.
- Local bureaucracies cannot cope with extraordinary situations, especially when government workers are victims, too. A governance back-up system must be formulated as part of the blueprint of natural disaster management.
- Transparency and accountability still matter, both on the volunteer and government sides. Crosschecks should be performed and the people should be able to monitor those who provide relief.
- The "commodification" of natural disasters cannot be understood without regard to political and economic interests. "Sophisticated" support does not always match with needs, field conditions, etc. The international community needs to embrace a more philanthropic spirit and the world's citizens must think more globally as well as focus on local, national, and regional problems.

7. CONCLUSION

The best guarantee of human security is a strong, efficient, effective, but also democratically legitimate state that is respectful of citizens' rights, mindful of its obligations and responsibilities, and tolerant of diversity and dissenting voices. States that are too strong or, at the other end of the spectrum, too weak and failing, cannot provide human security to their citizens. At the same time, states by themselves cannot provide the full measure of human security, but instead must act in partnership with robust market forces and a resilient civil society.

If every challenge is also simultaneously an opportunity, then the enormity of the challenge posed by the devastating 2004 Tsunami offers a window of opportunity to reshape regional relations within the cooperative conceptual framework of human security. In this case, an earthquake in one country caused catastrophic loss of life in so many others around the perimeter of the Indian Ocean. It reminds us that we are indeed one human family: We inhabit the same planet Earth and there is no other alternative. Hence, artificially constructed enmity and rivalry based on the competitive and exclusionary concept of national security or legitimacy can be irrelevant in securing citizens against genuine and serious threats to their security. It offers a rare opportunity too for smaller nations to think of powerful neighboring nations as allies and not potential threats (Thakur, 2004).

Furthermore, the tragedy is proof that development and security are two sides of the same coin. A consistent sustainable development that at the same time is people-centered and ecologically viable should be pursued as much as possible.

NOTES

[1] Two months after the disaster, the total number of victims was estimated at 300,000. Current official estimates indicate that more than 250,000 people are dead or missing. The final toll likely will never be known with any accuracy given the number of countries involved, the long, populous coastlines that were struck by the tsunami and the number of villages completely destroyed. See Vervoorn (2006); McNeil, Jr. (2004).
[2] Discourses of nature, environment and development are analyzed in Escobar (1995, p. 192-211) and George (1992, pp. 1-33).
[3] For the complete arrangement see (ADB, 2005).

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