The authors proudly proclaim that “the world needs a paradigm shift in the way we think about security.” Their principal argument is that twenty-first-century security requires a sturdy and concrete definition that speaks to not only the everyday security of individuals and their communities but also the other, often neglected, dimension that deals with shelter, enough food and drink, adequate health care, and freedom from fear and want. They take pains to distinguish their own definition of security, which has nothing to do with contending states, borders, warfare, or hegemony. They cite UN studies, societal upheavals, and other data to support their views.

One significant flaw immediately arises as the book flows into elaborate descriptions of how enlightened nongovernmental organization (NGOs), governments, and military organizations can do something new. They cite the “era of persistent conflict” as the defining signature of the early twenty-first century, and they seem to forget that corrupt tyrants, terrorists, contending armed ethnic groups, and unsettled territorial claims are simply not subscribing to their notion of popular security. In fact, these primordial and perennial maniacs who unleash violence, mayhem, and death in almost every region of the earth explicitly use human disruption, deprivation, and victimization of the urban and rural poor as their foundation for ushering in chaos and strife to further their own agendas.

On the one hand, the authors argue that human security for the poor, voiceless, and powerless requires new tactics and strategy by advanced states and Western leaders to create a more powerful blend of NGO and military advantages to leverage greater resources for the general population. They point out that weak states, persistent domestic struggles, substandard economies, outside pressures, and the widening gulf between the new middle class and the dirt poor create ideal conditions for continued popular unrest and social
disintegration. As a result, their prescription is a bottom-up reconstruction of society and governance, wholesale campaigns to allow local communities to design and develop their own socioeconomic destiny, autonomy, and entrepreneurship hastened by the careful assistance of NGOs and experienced military personnel.

The authors openly acknowledge that this is "no small task and may be impossible," yet they outline a program that redirects efforts toward a general strategy of ongoing targeted local assistance to vulnerable communities. These new programs aim for rebuilding and establishing lasting institutions that evidently ensure that education, health care, clean water, ample food, and communal peace can be sustained at local village levels. This, in turn, gradually alters the terrain for marginal states and splintered societies by erecting a vast number of locally autonomous, self-sustaining hamlets. Following from that is the presumption that instability will lessen.

On the other hand, there is the nagging concern that despite the remedy the authors advocate, crime, corruption, civil disorder, ethnic discord, and tyrannical leaders are unlikely to run in the other direction when they witness this dramatic display of village bravado. To the authors it is not antidote enough to stem corruption and reduce crime. Their argument is that even ousting an abusive government will not by itself yield a social-political revolution until everyday respect and protection of human rights at the village level is an ongoing reality. How this is guaranteed and sustained does not seem to be deciphered very well in this book. The authors contend that the fundamental issues and problems that explain state instability cannot be fixed through conventional military approaches. Only a new way of thinking can do so.

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