Greater exposure to violence is not limited to people in situations of armed conflict. It is also directly related to the erosion of state control. This decline is most evident in failed states, where governments are simply incapable of providing even basic security for people threatened by warlords and bandits. Challenges to state control can also be seen in the expansion of organized crime, drug trafficking, and the growth of private security forces.

Security for people is also affected by a broadening range of transnational threats. In an increasingly interdependent world we routinely experience mutual, if unequal vulnerability. Opening markets, increased world trade, and a revolution in communications are highly beneficial, but they have also made borders more porous to a wide range of threats. A growing number of hazards to people's health – from long range transmission of pollutants to infectious diseases – are global phenomena in both their origins and their effects. Economic shocks in one part of the world can lead rapidly to crises in another, with devastating implications for the security of the most vulnerable.

These broad trends are clearly not new to the 1990s; each has been intensifying over recent decades. During 40 years of superpower rivalry, however, nuclear confrontation and ideological competition dominated the security agenda. As a result, these other challenges have only been widely acknowledged in more recent years. Outside the confines of the Cold War, the opportunity exists to develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to enhancing the security of people.