

Human security and cities in the Greater Near East¹

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With the shift of populations to urban centres, the world is entering the "Urban Century." In particular, demographic shifts in the string of cities that arc from Lagos, Nigeria north to Cairo, Egypt, then east and southeast to Karachi, Pakistan and Jakarta, Indonesia — an area broadly referred to as "the Greater Near East" — will be significant. As populations dramatically increase in emerging countries' urban areas, much of that growth will take place in the Greater Near East.

Urbanization in and of itself, of course, is neither necessarily a good nor a bad thing. It is unlikely, however, that Dhaka, Bangladesh — which has grown from 400,000 inhabitants in 1950 to 10 million in 2000, and is projected to top 19 million by 2015 — will be able to sustain such growth rates without significant impacts on the safety and security of its population.²

In the same vein, Lagos offers a prime example of the challenges of urban agglomerations and the critical emphasis these human security themes should receive. Nigeria's governmental structures are simply unable to deliver public services or to ensure public safety to the current urban population. Adequate sewage and water services

are lacking, as almost 10 million urban Nigerians are without a reliable water supply and more than seven million are without sewage control.³ Lagos is officially referred to by development agencies as "very dangerous", particularly at night. Rampantly high rates of crime are indicative of inadequate public safety services. Similarly, more than half of Karachi's population resides in shantytowns, communities where virtually no public services are provided. Law enforcement and public safety are in scant supply.

Yet many cities of the Greater Near East, for all their anarchy and dysfunction, will retain direct and indirect commercial links to the rest of the world, and their inhabitants will be able to travel to other cities and will have access to the world's most modern communication and computing technologies. Some of these urban agglomerations may well become what some have referred to as "feral cities": urban centres, acting as a kind of "super nest", attracting resources — both positive and negative — from rural centres, including human capital and labour, skills, food, water and raw materials.⁴ The term itself is admittedly provocative, yet represents a phenomenon already taking place

(Opposite:) **Police clash with slum inhabitants in Jakarta, Indonesia while trying to evict them from a slum on government land. (August 2006)**

around the globe. Cities in this condition will pose a particularly serious security threat because they will have substantial pockets of insecurity within their municipal boundaries and extensive commercial, communications and transportation links to the rest of the world.

For those who inhabit urban spaces of the future, security may depend on how states cope with the broader human dilemma. Sustainable development and security intersect and are mutually reinforcing in cities; one cannot occur without the other. And yet, it remains likely that in the Greater Near East, in particular, more and more people will be compelled by economic or environmental pressures to migrate to cities that lack the infrastructure to support the rapid, concentrated population growth they induce, thus threatening increasingly negative urban human security outcomes.

Anarchy, governmental collapse, ethnic rivalry, cultural grievances, religious-ideological extremism,