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Is Human Security our Main Concern in the 21st Century?

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Abstract

'The idea of security is easier to apply to things than to people' (Buzan, B.)[1]

The question of how to achieve, manage, and study security is old and contentious, and 'for much of the intellectual history of the subject a debate has raged between realists and idealists, who have been respectively pessimistic and optimistic in their response to this central question'[2]. Different types of security can be considered, such as political, military, economic, environmental, social, informational and human, and at different scales, from national, through regional, to global, although as Buzan's quotation above shows, its application to humans is not unproblematic. 'For much of the Cold War period most of the writing on the subject was dominated by the idea of national security, which was largely defined in militarised terms'[3], in a bipolar context, and rested on the old assumptions of the Peace of Westphalia, 1648, that states were the most powerful actors in the international system. As such, there was little concern for the security of the individual and other 'peripheral' threats.

Realists such as E.H. Carr argued that power revealed the basic patterns of capabilities, and highlighted the prime motive for the behaviour of actors; security appeared to come from citizenship, as the state provided

protection for people and property. Critics of this, such as B. Buzan, noted the western-centric view this provided, and that the state has two faces, it is a major source of both threats to, and security for individuals. Accordingly, the new millennia has produced a markedly different security environment, in which Human Security has been considered by many to offer an alternative means of analysis and policy, in response to changing threats. In considering the question, one must ask who is being referred to; individuals; academics; Third World countries; regional hegemons; or Non-Governmental Organisations. Concern about Human Security in the 21st Century is likely to be dynamic, varied, and dependent on *who* is considering it.

'A redefinition of the security concept started in the 1970s when due to the oil shocks economic issues entered the national security debate'[4].Keohane and Nye[5] noted that interstate relations consisted of complex and multiple issues arranged in no consistent hierarchy, therefore military security no longer dominated the agenda; protecting borders no longer protected markets and people's livelihoods. As the case of AIDS/HIV will demonstrate, 'threat perceptions have been generated that are different from traditional ones, and mechanisms to cope with them seem antiquated'[6].

Health has not traditionally been considered a security issue, yet on 17 July 2000, the UN Security Council passed a resolution on AIDS, stating 'if unchecked, the HIV/AIDS pandemic may pose a risk to stability and security'[7]. AIDS is the fourth ranking cause of death in the world[8], and its effects destroy social and economic development and break down social and governance structures. It also has a more traditional element, in that it affects the ability of armed forces to function where infection rates are high. Threats such as this have caused new, or more correctly highlighted old and developing security concerns.

In short, 'traditional notions of state security and inter-state security have failed to make the world a safer and more democratic place to live in. The notion of Human Security has thus emerged as an alternative'[9]. Before considering definitions of the term, it is noteworthy that the concept is not as new as it may appear. Households have always been concerned with 'Human Security', and the evolution of Western states was closely tied with the desire of groups of people to ensure their own Human Security. In many ways, the movement is a return to ideas of old. However, 'a consideration of Human Security in the contemporary era requires us to consider humanity embedded not simply within discrete sovereign states, but within a global social structure, the capitalist world economy'[10]. Human Security is now reliant on, and embraces other types of security.

Human Security is the 'latest in a long line of neologisms – including common security, global security, cooperative security and comprehensive security – that encourage policymakers and scholars to think about international security as something more than military defense of states interests and territory'[11]. The intellectual origins of Human Security have been shown to have a long history, although most people refer to the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report as 'the publication which really

promoted the new concept'[12]. This report states that Human Security 'understands security first and foremost as the prerogative of the individual, and links the concept of security inseparably to ideas of human rights and dignity to the relief of human suffering',[13] and it presents seven components of Human Security.

Economic security
Food security
Health security
Environmental security
Personal security
Community security
Political security[14].

In many ways, Human Security considers many of the elements of 'traditional' security, but from a different perspective, and criticisms often centre on the inclusiveness of such concepts; nothing appears to be excluded! This is similarly true of definitions such as Nef's fivefold classification. Human Security moves the referent object from being the state, to the individual or groups of people, so 'the world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives'[15], or on the other hand, broadens the security agenda so far as to become meaningless.

Canada, Norway and other 'middle-power' countries have also supported the Human Security concept, and developed the concept, emphasising the desire for 'freedom from fear, freedom from want' first used at the Dumbarton Oaks conference of 1944. In 1997, Lloyd Axworthy, the then Foreign Minister, called for an extension of the security framework, to increase the peacebuilding capacity of his country, and address issues such as anti-personnel mines, and child soldiers. A Human Security Network was set up, with countries such as Japan and Norway, as well as NGOs. The intention of this was to develop a new form of diplomacy which could encourage stable democracies to develop on a sound basis of Human Security. The assumption was that this would create a more stable and secure world. The emphasis of the Canadian school of thought was on a 'responsibility to protect' before, during and after conflict, yet again no precise definition was provided.

It is possible to think of the development of Human Security in two ways. In figure one, Human Security develops as a sub-discipline of security studies, invoking NGOs and general cooperation. On the other hand, it is possible to foresee a more idealistic situation as advocated by countries such as Canada, presented in figure two. Here Human Security becomes an 'umbrella concept' for dealing with all security considerations. It is not yet possible to predict in which way the field will develop, but it is important to note the way in which Human Security can consider aspects of other types of security.

Figure One: Human Security Plays a Potentially Larger Role in the Field of Security Studies. (Peripheral agendas are examples only, other areas also influence the field of Security Studies) Author's own.
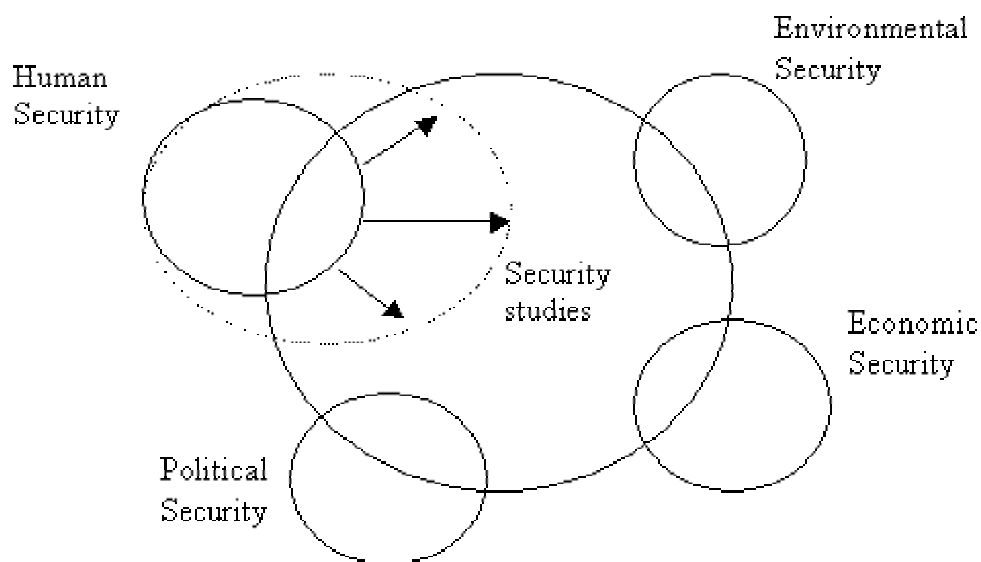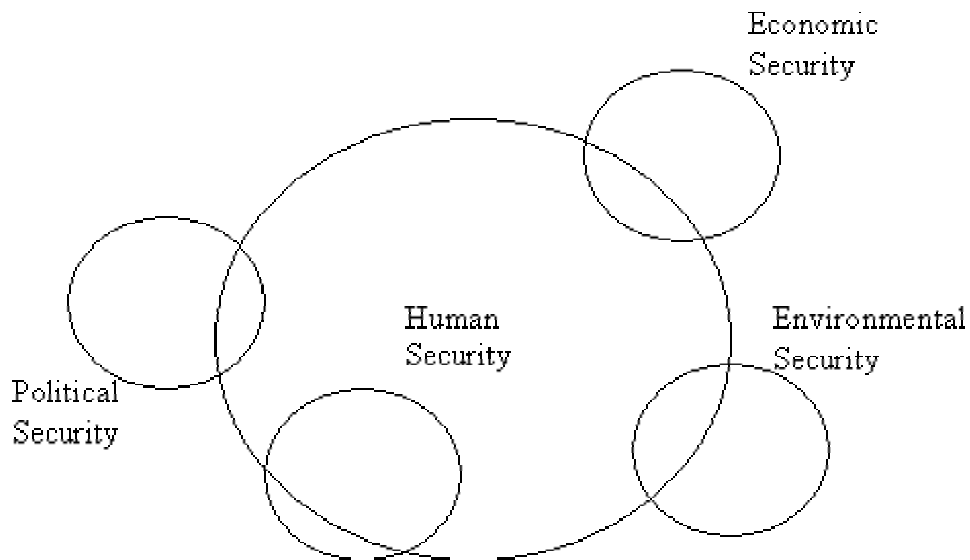

Figure Two: Human Security Becomes the Focus of Study and Policy. Author's own.

Despite the different approaches and definitions, 'the axiomatic assumption of the Human Security concept is that the referent object should be individual persons rather than the state'[16].

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Lack of a single, precise definition creates a significant stumbling block in considering the importance of Human Security in the 21st Century; 'the contemporary definition of Human Security is ambiguous and vague, encompassing everything from physical security to psychological well being'[17]. Why is this? The diverse coalitions that have been formed in 'Diana/Geldoff diplomacy', such as that formed to create the Ottawa Treaty on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines, have an interest in maintaining the vagaries of the definition in order that they are not weakened by infighting over their goals[18]. The Ottawa treaty had been signed by 140 countries by 2005, and the development of the International Criminal Court demonstrate that 'the political coalition that now uses Human Security as a rallying cry has chalked up significant accomplishments'[19], yet this does not mean that the agenda has universal utility. The emerging concept can only be articulated on relating a diverse array of concepts, linking international, state and Human Security under one umbrella.

In the face of non-state threats, such as Al Qaeda, and an increasingly integrated, globalised world, 'only the ability to act jointly will enable states to recover their abilities to generate a legitimate order capable of building a world free from threats and fear'[20]. Statements such as this reflect the new concern for Human Security amongst some 'statesmen' and policymakers, not only emphasise the idealism Human Security, but also the inherent paradox that one has to move down a scale, whilst simultaneously forming more transnational coalitions in order to provide a perceived level of security comparable to that provided by more traditional approaches in the Cold War period. In this paradigm, security and development are now closely linked; 'there can be no development without security, and no security without development'[21].

It is indisputable that the state was the referent object of security in the 'traditional' phase. However, despite Human Security's apparent independence from the state, there are many ways in which it is dependent on states; 'Human Security complements state security, furthers human development and enhances human rights'[22], considering insecurities that may not have necessarily been considered as state threats, whilst 'supporters always reiterate that Human Security cannot replace existing security policies'[23]. Human Security works with other types of security, whilst simultaneously attempting to adapt the policies of other types of security. The use of force is always maintained as a last resort to ensure Human Security, as the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 demonstrates. Authors such as Clark present a different 'type' of Human Security, in which it is the practices of states which are being reconfigured to 'take account of new concerns with human rights and societal identity'[24]. This approach reflects that presented in figure one, as states and 'security studies' are not withering away, but renegotiating and reshaping the security agenda.

The issue of whether Human Security is 'new' is important. Many of the ideas have been carried out under the banner of 'international development' for many years, so it is necessary to question whether this is just another 'securitisation' issue, designed to increase legitimacy and

funding. 'Most countries can incorporate Human Security as a leitmotif in their foreign policy because the term covers a wide array of potential issues'[25], and it could be argued that whether or not it is a concern is inconsequential, as the concept is so broad. Another side of the debate argues that concern for Human Security has increased as it appears the most cost-effective way of countering violence and terrorism *currently*. 'The problem with this logic is that interest in Human Security might swiftly cease if more cost-effective terrorism prevention mechanisms were discovered'[26].

Figure Three. Steve Bell's interpretation of President Bush's view of Human Security, represented by the symbol of Amnesty International. www.guardian.co.uk

'9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' marked a watershed in the sense that the North has become much more conscious of the fact that problems in the South do not remain there but affect the everyday lives of ordinary people everywhere'[27]. Following the terrorist acts, the UN passed resolutions 1368 and 1373, labelling the acts as 'threats to international peace and security'. The United States initially enjoyed universal support and sympathy, yet the US's subsequent actions did not follow a Human Security pathway, as mocked in figure three. Instead, 'interest in Human Security has generally suffered a blowback because of a renewal of national security thinking in the aftermath of 9/11'[28] according to Bosold and Werthes. The response has been based more on raising traditional physical security, rather than attempting to address the causes of terrorism; the rationale in doing so may be derived from the actors involved not being motivated by their own human insecurities, but by ideological and religious hatred. Against such a security threat, it is difficult to conceive how the Human Security approach alone can prove proficient in preventing such attacks and insecurities.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) kill around 500,000 people annually, and Kofi Annan has referred to them as 'slow weapons of mass destruction'[29]. SALW present a major source of concern for advocates of Human Security, not only as threats to sovereignty, territorial integrity and state institutions, but also to Human Security as a whole. 'There is a strong correlation between the use of illegal SALW and underdevelopment'[30],

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which can impact on the developed world's security through transnational crime and international terrorism. Afghanistan provides an interesting example in this regard, as it has been posited that the disarmament programme of 1989, following the Afghan-Soviet War, focused only on weaponry, and thus the ex-combatants did not feel integrated into society, providing the basis for transnational terrorist training. More than a decade later, the US has been accused of supplying Northern Alliance troops with SALW, via Russia, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on 2001. In many ways, Human Security does not appear to be the main concern of the US in the 21st Century.

Currently, resources for aid provision worldwide constitute seven percent of those allocated to military budgets[31], yet it is argued that it is not the lack of funding which presents the most significant hurdle, so much as the lack of political will; 'the major obstacle to addressing the various threats to Human Security is not the lack of funds, but rather the lack of political will and wrong priorities'[32]. Human Security can be considered an international public good, which is non-rival and non-excludable; everyone can access it, and one person utilising it does not diminish the ability of another to do so. However, if this concept is accepted, the international community must also accept the responsibility to protect and finance it. Although limited successes have been achieved in the field, it is clear that we are nowhere near an 'end-stage' of Human Security being established and guaranteed for all. 'Acceptance of Human Security in world politics is still very low'[33], and whilst this is the case, meaningful, influential concern cannot be demonstrated.

Figure Four. A Matrix of Security Studies[34]

It has been demonstrated that individuals are intrinsically concerned with Human Security, and that states have varying concern with the concept, depending on their situation. However, the lack of precise definition has proven problematic for academics. If treated as a taxonomic 'banner', the concept can prove useful in relation to 21st Century security studies, as

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shown in figure four. This demonstrates how interlinked Human Security is with other types of security, whilst still occupying an entirely new sphere of research. If considered within this matrix, Human Security has utility as a discrete area of research and policy, and certainly shows potential to become a significant, if not the main, concern of the 21st Century.

On the other hand, some critics will never accept fully the legitimacy of Human Security. Some will argue that Human Security simply represents an attempt to blur the boundaries of 'security' in order to allow the ascension of international development and humanitarian issues to the security agenda. Others will continue to criticise the lack of cohesion and definition, and it is also important to emphasise that in many peoples opinions it cannot usurp existing security policies, as implied in figure two.

It is unquestionable that Human Security embraces aspects of other types of security, due to its expansive and all-encompassing mandate and definitions. Whether or not it is the 'main concern in the 21st Century' is highly subjective, and in many ways it is simply too early to tell; 'a definitive appraisal of the success or failure of the Human Security Network seems premature'[35], whilst 'the next decade is likely to prove pivotal in determining the degree of international instability that could prevail for much of the new century[36]. It is for this very reason that academics and policymakers alike are searching for a concept with which to approach the new security environment, explaining partly why Human Security has received such attention. The very nature of the agenda is that it will be the main concern for proponents of it, such as 'middle-states' and NGOs, whereas those who see their security as being threatened in other ways will naturally show more interest alternative fields. The concept has not yet been universally accepted, and the actions of states such as the US indicate that this will not happen in the near future, yet undoubtedly, the actions of coalitions will continue to emphasise this important and holistic alternative security agenda.

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