

On the Concept of Human Security

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Abstract

The prevalence of intra-state conflicts, especially since the end of the Cold War, has urged some politicians, academics and activists to deepen the traditional notion of National Security. As a result, the concept of human security has evolved in recent years. However, the new concept still suffers from ambiguity. The present paper seeks to provide an overview of the concept and investigates both its definition and practice.

Keywords: Security, Human Security, Individuals, Human needs.

ملخص:

دفع انتشار النزاعات داخل الدول ، خاصة منذ نهاية الحرب الباردة ، بعض السياسيين والأكاديميين والناشطين الى محاولة تعميق المفهوم التقليدي للأمن الوطني. نتيجة لذلك ، تطور مفهوم الأمن الإنساني في السنوات الأخيرة. ومع ذلك ، فالمفهوم الجديد لا يزال يعاني بعض الغموض. تسعى هذه الورقة إلى تقديم نظرة عامة حول المفهوم وفحصه من حيث تعريفه و تطبيقه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمن، الأمن الإنساني، الأفراد،

الاحتياجات الانسانية.

1. Introduction

The concept of human security has attracted the attention of many researchers and politicians since the publication of the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1994. Although it was considered as a new idea of the post-Cold War security environment, and the existence of countries such as Canada and Norway linking their foreign policies to the concept of human security, and also Japan, which is striving to create a global fund to support human security, many researchers doubt the importance and usefulness of this new concept, and emphasize that human security is more ambiguous and broader than the possibility of study, academic analysis and practical application.

This article seeks to shed light on this concept, by trying to address the following questions:

- What does human security mean?
- Its relationship to traditional security?
- What are its components and the nature of the relationship between them?
- How can it be applied and reflected in useful political and security programs in order to address the dangers facing countries and individuals?

2. Evolution of the concept of security

“Security Studies” is an important field in the study of International Relations. The study of security has been the focus of many theorizing efforts to diplomacy and international relations, especially after the First World War. However, these efforts have been divided into two different perceptions of the concept of security:

A narrow vision confines security in the political and military sphere while a more comprehensive vision tries to extend the meaning of security to other areas as well as political and military. These contending perceptions have resulted in major disagreement over whether the focus should be on the security of individuals, nations or the world as a whole.¹

The narrow political meaning of security indicates that the latter is the state's safety from external threats (national security) that affects its independence, stability and territorial integrity². However, the broader meaning of security is more general and includes, in addition to political and military dimensions, the safety of individuals from violence, crimes and actions taken to achieve an acceptable standard of living.

The narrow political meaning of security reflects the traditional perceptions that emerged during the post-World War I international politics. The concept of security was linked to the state, the main actor in international relations, in order to protect the state from risks and external political, diplomatic and military threats that can affect state's political and legal entity and its territorial integrity.

Therefore, it is usually referred to the term "National Security" to define the political meaning of security." Indeed, state security is the dominant concept in countries foreign policies discourse and in the practice of international politics, while social and economic dimensions of security are seldom discussed. The result was that the main concern of both academics and statesmen was the military capabilities that their countries must develop in order to address external threats and risks.³

The narrow meaning of security was developed in the context of an international system based on State as a fundamental and dominant unit in international relations. Power, National Interest, and Balance of Power were the dominant theories of foreign policy and were believed to be the most effective means of achieving stability and security in international relations.

The evolution of international law and international organizations and the need to move from "International Politics" to "the international Society" have contributed to the emergence of the idea of collective security, which revealed that national security of all countries together has become the common purpose that the entire international society seeks to preserve. Despite the fact that collective security led to a focus on the security of the whole world rather than the security of each individual state, the concept of security remained limited in the political and military fields. Then, the evolution of the concept did not affect the various fields that can be sources of threat: economic and social dimension, environmental degradation. It, instead, merely altered the subject of the concept as it no longer means the security of the state but the security of the entire international society.

However, the post- World War II period and after the establishment of specialized agencies of the United Nations: World Health Organization, World Food Program, United Nations Development Program, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ..., has increased attention to the economic and social conditions of peoples on the international scale, which was revealed through the growing bilateral and multilateral assistance between countries in the economic and social fields. The new situation has prompted a growing belief that international agencies and rich countries are somehow responsible for the economic and social security of the developing countries.

The concept of security is, thus, no longer confined to the internal situation of states, but rather includes international dimensions and extends to non-political and military spheres. Most importantly, the issue of security is no longer linked to states, but to individuals themselves.

3. The emergence of the concept

In other words, the idea that public authorities are responsible for the political, economic, and social security of individuals at the national and international scales has historically led to the emergence of the concept of human security and increased attention to the individual as a unit and a reference for analysis and security policy implementation.

The focus on the role of the individual is not new. Historically, many thinkers, jurists and sociologists have raised this issue, notably Hugo Grotius (1583- 1645), Alberico Gentili (1552 - 1608), and George Scelles⁴ (1878 – 1961). In terms of reality, many events and issues contributed to the emergence of the role of the individual in international relations, mainly the conclusion of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1948 Universal Declaration and the regional and international human rights agreements, in addition to the UN specialized agencies previously mentioned. On the other hand, the development of the phenomenon of globalization in international relations has increased attention to issues of economic development, technology, environment and human rights, and the end of the Cold War has led to the development of intra-state conflicts, which are the most important threats faced by countries and have been a key factor in increasing economic costs of military security.

These conditions and developments have led to the failure of the conventional vision of security, which means the safety and protection of the state and the reliance on the balance of power and foreign defence policies to achieve peace and stability. "People do not die because of wars between states; they die because of drought and environmental disasters, violence and civil strife."⁵

This has made academics and decision makers admit that even the most successful national security systems do not ensure the security of citizens within states. They also underline that environmental degradation and natural disasters such as earthquakes, drought and diseases are important threats to security.⁶

The concept of human security has thus emerged, usually as defined by the UNDP report "Freedom from Fear and Need", and soon took centre stage in States foreign policy debates.

4. Searching for a definition to human security

Despite its widespread in debates among academics and politicians and its adoption by some countries such as Canada, Japan and Norway as a tenet of foreign policy, the concept of human security remains ambiguous and controversial concerning its definition, analytical scope and practice.

The definition of human security requires answering three traditional questions related to the discussion on the concept of security: For whom security? Security from what? What are the means to achieve security?

It has been previously pointed out that the development of the concept of security has urged increasing attention to the protection of individuals. However, addressing the second question, which is supposed to identify areas that could be risks or threats to the security of individuals, created controversy among researchers concerning the definition of the concept of human security, and provided two distinct definitions of Human Security: a broad and a narrow definition.

- A broad definition:

Attempts to define the concept of human security have sought to examine its basic dimensions or measure its indicators. The first attempt to define human security came in the 1994 report of the United Nations Development Program on Human Development, which called for researchers and practitioners in the field of international relations to make two fundamental changes: taking the security of the individual as a reference and not the security of the state and thinking security within the borders rather than outside.⁷ Considering the report statement that "For most people, there is a sense of insecurity that results from the fears of everyday life rather than from a global catastrophic event.", it can be understood that human security is to protect individuals and not countries from several dangers that threaten their daily lives. The report identifies seven areas that are considered as components of human security:

- Economic security threatened by poverty.
- Food security threatened by famine.
- Health security threatened by diseases.

- Environmental security threatened by pollution, environmental degradation and Depletion of resources.
- Personal security threatened by multiple forms of violence
- Political security threatened by political repression.
- Societal security threatened by social unrest and instability.⁸

It can be noted that the report has transcended the traditional perception of security, which is limited to the political and military dimension, through incorporating many dimensions of material and non-material elements that can be judged as security challenges. It can be also noted that these dimensions that focus on human dignity are interlinked and overlapping, and the report does not define the types of links between these dimensions, which can provide a coherent methodological framework for integrating them into a single concept. Furthermore, the multiplicity and diversity of dimensions can lead to the difficulty of linking and assorting them in one analytical framework. The report, therefore, provided only a descriptive list of various risks and possible threats to individual security.

Many researchers have attempted to investigate elements of human security in order to define the concept, but they have faced difficulties to sort and arrange the various dimensions of individual security. In this context, George McLean's huge typology of human security dimensions, which identified dimensions to the concept including personal security of individuals from violence and harm, availability of life necessities, protection from crime and terrorism, epidemics, political corruption, forced migration, lack of human rights, freedom from racial discrimination, political and cultural rights, political and cultural development, prevention of misuse and excessive exploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation and pollution.⁹

Researchers who emphasize the broad meaning of the concept of human security, agree that it is a comprehensive and adequate concept that reflects the reality of the current international situation and takes into account all the problems and dangers that threaten the future of humanity. Therefore, all the analytical difficulties resulting from concept broadness are inevitable and cannot be denied.¹⁰

The broadness of this meaning has caused the overlapping of the concept of human security with other research fields such as Interventionism, Development, Good Governance, Human Rights

and Conflict Resolution.¹¹ According to Daniel Collard, the concept of human security can allow international relations to evolve towards state of law, democracy and development.¹² Kofi Annan suggests that "human security in its broadest meaning refers to more than just the absence of violent conflict, it includes human rights, good governance, the right to education and health care, ensuring that every individual has opportunities to blow up his energies, freedom from fear and ensuring that future generations will inherit a healthy natural environment, these are the elements that are linked to human security and therefore national security."¹³

It can be hence asked whether the new concept is an attempt to create a single analytical framework that combines the research fields stated above. Therefore, this task requires researchers to examine and explore the overlap and interaction between these fields.

- Narrow definition:

In contrast to the broad meaning that takes into account all aspects of human development, which are outlined in the UN Development Program's report: "Freedom from Need", other academics, notably Krauze, Mack, McFarlane and also the Canadian government, suggest a narrow definition to human security. According to them, it means: "Freedom from growing threats to the rights, safety and lives of individuals."¹⁴

For example, the Canadian government focuses on protecting civilians, peace support operations, conflict prevention, good governance, political accountability and public safety. These measures affect the individuals but the threats remain of a military or material essence. The broad definition is criticized because it establishes a utopian and inapplicable concept which is lacking to clarity and analytical rigour.

McFarlane believes that the broad definition is just a big list of essential things that can occur. For his part, Kraus says that "a wide range of issues where there is no necessary link between them" is useless and misleading.¹⁵

The authors of the narrow concept of human security point out that when examining links between war, poverty, and governance, each of these elements must be dealt with separately. The independent and dependent variables must be identified accurately; any research confuses variables makes causal analysis impossible. According to McFarlane: "The concept that aspires to explain everything, in fact, does not explain anything."¹⁶ However, it is noticeable that it may be useless to work through a clear and rigorous analytical model that identifies responses and strategies if it does not provide a comprehensive profile of threats that affect individuals and does not adequately cover

reality. Indeed, researchers who emphasize a broadened meaning to security refers to a comprehensive perspective that allows for integrated and multidisciplinary analysis and useful for policy-making. Krauz, Mack, and McFarlane also argue that the choice of the individual as a reference broadens the concept of security without providing additional analytical value. Indeed, considering more issues as threats against individuals renders the study of relations between them more complex, a broad perception of human security lacking for pragmatism, conceptual clarity and rigorous analytical reasoning is the cause why thinking about violent threats is focused and thus a narrow perception of human security is adopted.¹⁷

The narrow concept proponents also believe that the broadening of the concept of human security has led to the inclusion of a network of actors ranging from individuals to supra-national entities: the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Broad human security requires multiple roles for various actors at many levels: National, regional and global levels in order to face different challenges. According to them, the multiplicity of actors raises, therefore, the problem of coordination between them.

On the other hand, advocates of narrow perception argue that broadened human security is difficult to apply because it does not set the priorities imposed by urgent challenges. They argue that, in the broader meaning of human security, multiple and heterogeneous actors with different interests and goals won't be able to coordinate and work together on various issues.¹⁸

Shahrabanu Tajbaksh admits that the overlap between various threats faced by individuals is difficult to manage according to priority or importance, which means that one element of threat, cannot be confronted in isolation from the other elements. However, he emphasizes that the broad perception of security is the only one that can provide language and analysis taking into account all problems of humanity.¹⁹

Nevertheless, it can be noted that even defining human security as the protection against violent threats, also renders research inaccurate as long as there is a difficulty in determining violence, whether it is physical violence and harms, or other aspects such as social and economic inequality.

In order to counter these difficulties, which impede the task of defining the concept of human security and developing an appropriate analytical framework, some academics seek to create more flexible analytical frameworks that enable actors to work together on different or similar issues.

Taylor Owen suggests a framework, which aims to reconcile narrow and broad perceptions of human security and provide the required flexibility to analyze and identify the levels at which individuals are under threat and risk.²⁰

This framework has succeeded, to some extent; in overcoming the difficulties faced by the concept of human security, in particular, the question of identifying links between dimensions and setting priorities.

King and Murray, in turn, proposed a definition of human security characterized by simplicity, accuracy and measurability: "the number of future years spent by individuals outside the general poverty situation." The authors say that "general poverty" occurs when an individual falls under the threshold of any major area of human well-being.²¹ This definition has also attempted to eliminate the shortcomings of the concept of human security by identifying indicators that can measure the security of individuals and levels at which they are far from insecurity. Thus, the concept of "general poverty"²² becomes a reasonable ranking of these indicators.

5. Applying the concept of human security

In addition to the problem of determining its dimensions and elements, the concept of human security faces the problem of identifying the different methodologies through which it can be applied. For many researchers, this concept has no benefit if it is not applied in practice.

The issue of applying human security suffers from many difficulties that can be summarized as follows:

- The difficulty of choosing the most appropriate actors due to their multiplicity and conflict of their interests. How to reconcile the participation of local civil society, international non-governmental organizations and the responsibility of Governments and intergovernmental organizations.²³
- The difficulty of distinguishing between internal and external dimensions of security due to intertwined international problems and the inability to identify priorities and issues of more importance, making it difficult to develop political programs and security strategy to handle these problems.
- Another difficulty facing the application of the concept of human security related to the issue of the scope of its application: is it a global concept that can be applied in all countries of the world or a concept only suitable for Western democracies. ?

According to Amitav Acharya,²⁴ many countries in the South regard human security as a new criterion to justify the imposition of Western models as long as the concept is addressed in its international dimensions and it is not possible to apply it in Western countries. Criticism of Roland Paris agrees with this point of view, he states that human security serves the interests of the powers who launched it through linking very different actors with very different goals.²⁵

However, in terms of reality, it can be noted that the concept of human security has achieved some success. It is usually referred to the role played by some governments that adopt this concept, particularly Canada and its partners in the “Human Security Network”²⁶ in promoting humanitarian activities and concluding agreements for protecting individuals, mainly the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Mine Ban (1997). Also, the concept of human security allowed setting up links between multiple and increasing activities such as humanitarian assistance, and advocating human rights and conflict resolution.

6. Conclusion

The concept of human security has contributed to highlighting the importance of individuals and their basic needs in international affairs; it has therefore brought a great impact on the concepts of Security, Sovereignty and the role of the State. Human security urges the State to embrace a conception of sovereignty that cares for individuals and their needs. Even the nature of the international system has been influenced by this concept as long as it does not draw boundaries between internal and international affairs, and also does not distinguish between national and international actors.

However, through this modest paper, many difficulties has been identified as impediments to setting up an analytical and methodological framework for human security that makes it a possible analytical tool that helps researchers to study the various problems facing current international relations, and also helps policymakers in formulating policies and strategies in order to address threats to the security of countries and individuals.

These difficulties may be stimulated mainly by the choice of the individual as a reference to security. This choice required more attention to many elements of threat than those imposed by choosing State as a reference, without providing a causal analysis of these elements. Incorporating various and distinct sources of risks and threats has, therefore, led to broadness and ambiguity of the concept of human security.

Based on a realistic perspective, Kenneth Waltz and Barry Buzan accuse human security of making security an idealistic concept as it confuses the purpose of security with its application. Traditional security, according to them, also seeks to protect individuals, but through the state, they argue that the role of individuals has no meaning outside the State. Therefore, the State is a necessary condition for the security of individuals and without it, there is no one who acts in the name of individuals,²⁷ and therefore is the most appropriate for the study of international security.

Footnotes

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