BROADENING SECURITY CONCEPT –
FROM “NATIONAL” TO “HUMAN SECURITY”

ABSTRACT

In this paper the author explores advantages and disadvantages of expanding the definition of security from the traditional state-centric and military-oriented focus of security to the broader focus on human security. The author’s opinion is that human security indicates important social-economic threats, but that the theory of the concept has not yet been coherently developed. Such a broad concept with so many equally valid dimensions of security lacks mechanisms for the establishment of causal relationship among them, and for prioritisation on policy level. There are no clear answers on key questions: who or what will provide human security, under which conditions, and how? The all inclusiveness of the human security approach reduces its value as a concept both to inform and to legitimise practical policy-making.

Among the many attempts to expand the scope of security studies after the end of the Cold War, the human security concept is the broadest. However, its comprehensiveness has led to more disadvantages than advantages. In this paper I will argue that it is difficult to accept such a vague concept of “the welfare of ordinary people” as the focus of security studies, although the broadening and deepening of the traditional state-centric and military-oriented approach is necessary. After a brief introduction to the debate about the scope of security studies, various definitions of human security will

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be explained. Several recent attempts by academics to narrow and measure human security will be presented. Then, the numerous disadvantages of the human security approach will be discussed. The advantages will be also listed. In conclusion, I will argue that human security has not yet been coherently developed on a theoretical level and that this has reduced its value as a concept both to inform and to legitimise practical policy-making.

The end of the Cold War strongly challenged the universally accepted realist paradigm in which security studies were centred on “the threat, use and control of military force” and focused on the system level of analysis and states’ foreign policy. In spite of their failure to predict the collapse of Socialism, as late as 1991 supporters of the realist approach to world politics resisted the broadening of the scope of security studies to include non-military phenomena on the grounds that this would destroy its “intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions.”

2 Doubts about regime change or revolution as a potent cause of conflict were still present.

Although substantial critiques in terms of necessity to include non-military threats and non-state actors had been presented as of the 1970s, the end of the bipolar world and the reduced threat of nuclear war have provided a new context and given these ideas a stronger voice.4 Liberal institutionalists’ hopes have been raised that the international regimes, particularly in the field of human rights, would be strengthened in response to growing interdependence and the end of ideological confrontation. Also, in the words of Barry Buzan, “as the military security agenda has become more static, those for economics and the ecology have become more dynamic and more central to day-to-day concerns.”5 Simultaneously, the disappearance of Communist glue which held together many nations and groups of large parts of Euro-Asia, and the vanishing of Communist ideals for a better future in other parts of the world, opened the arena for conflict over state resources and the formation of new ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups, whilst allowing the appearance of conflicting nationalist and religious ideologies. Civil wars and the increasing role of non-state actors over the past few years have definitely moved the focus of security studies away from the

3 Stephen Walt wrote that ‘further research to measure and explain this effect is still needed’, ibid, p. 224, although it has been well known that the death of a king (“death-watch”) was often the herald of war (see for example Geoffrey Blainey, The Causes of War, The Free Press, New York, 1973, pp. 108-145); and practically all revolutions encompassed civil wars.
narrow study of the use of military force to ensure the territorial integrity of sovereign states. However, it is the concept of human security that has gone the furthest. The human security concept has been based on a people-centred approach within a global perspective and as an endeavour to move towards common security on all levels.\textsuperscript{6}

The first major statement on human security was in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 1994. Criticising narrow interpretations of security as the “security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust,” the report stressed that “forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their ordinary lives”\textsuperscript{7}. To that end, the UNDP proposed the concept of human security which “is people-centred. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities and whether they live in conflict or in peace... It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.”\textsuperscript{8} The UNDP has since produced some variations in the definition in their reports. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan defined human security as “freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment.”\textsuperscript{9}

Human security has been promoted through a human security network that includes a dozen countries led by Canada and Norway, and international institutions, starting with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Although co-operation existed earlier, the starting point for the Canada-Norway axis related to human security is usually taken to be the May 1998 meeting, and following this the Lysoen process.\textsuperscript{10} However, within this coalition members have stressed different aspects of human security. For example, the then


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., pp. 22-23.


Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy declared at Lysoen II, 1999, that in “essence, human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats.”\textsuperscript{11} Axworthy in 2001 defined human security as “freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, safety or lives”\textsuperscript{12} The Government of Japan has also formulated and implemented the human security concept. Its definition is that human security “comprehensively covers all the measures that threaten human survival, daily life, and dignity – for example, environmental degradation, violations of human rights, transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, refugees, poverty, anti-personnel landmines and infectious diseases such as AIDS – and strengthens efforts to confronts these threats.”\textsuperscript{13}

Academics have taken up the challenge and offered their own definitions, even including psychological security which “hinges on establishing conditions fostering respectful, loving, and humane interpersonal relations.”\textsuperscript{14} However, some of them have attempted to narrow such an all-inclusive approach. Gary King and Christopher Murray for example have included only “those domains of well-being that have been important enough for human beings to fight over or to put their lives or property in great risk.”\textsuperscript{15} They define poverty more broadly to include the deprivation of any basic capabilities, and have developed a system for measuring individual human security and perceived individual human security. Their suggestion for a parsimonious set of domains for measuring human security includes income, health, education, political freedom and democracy.\textsuperscript{16}

For Astri Suhrke “the essence of human security is reduced vulnerability”\textsuperscript{17} She defined those exposed to immediate physical threats to life or deprivation of life-sustaining resources as extremely vulnerable: this includes victims of war and internal conflicts, those who live close to subsistence level and are thus structurally positioned at the edge of socio-economic disaster, and victims of natural disasters. Suhrke proposed an internationally supported “human security regime” to protect the vulnerable by developing norms, regulations and ultimately, international human security standards.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 269.  
\textsuperscript{13} Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook 1999: Japan’s Diplomacy with Leadership Toward a New Century, Urban Connections Inc. Tokyo, 1999  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 594-8  
\textsuperscript{17} Astri Suhrke, “Human Security and the Interests of States”, op. cit., p. 273.
strengthening institutions (national and international) and operationalising and implementing strategies. For those who live permanently on the edge of a socio-economic disaster some basic standards of socio-economic conditions should be incorporated in aid policy, safety nets should be established and certain categories of people should be compensated for direct losses.  

The broad and versatile approach among leading proponents of human security concepts as outlined above demonstrates a fundamental weakness in the concept that has already been stressed by other authors: clearly there is no precise definition. The above-quoted definitions encompass a wide range of issues, from physical to psychological, including highly controversial notions such as “freedom from want”. Human security, according to Kofi Annan, “joins the main agenda items of peace, security and development,” but it makes the concept resistant to comprehensive definition because of its all-inclusiveness. Invoking ordinary people - those for whom security should be provided - the concept includes the level of individual security, resulting in an endless list of events which might be understood as “disruptions in the patterns of daily life” in homes and in jobs. The UNDP concretisation of seven specific elements includes economic, food security, health, environmental security, personal security, community and political security, hardly narrowing the concept at all. How could one provide security from suicide and traffic accidents, which are listed under personal security? Or when domestic violence becomes a gender and/or a security issue? Where is a bottom line for the survival of tiny ethnic groups that might naturally disappear? For example, what will be the fate of the Lužički Srbi? Some of the academics’ contributions only add to the tremendous scope of human security.

Another crucial weakness is that such a broad concept with so many equally valid dimensions of security has room neither for the establishment of causal relationships among them, nor for prioritisation on a policy level. The elaboration of two aspects of human security in the UNDP Human Development Report 1994 for example does not offer any hint of hierarchy: chronic threats are mentioned first, and then sudden changes, with hunger

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18 Ibid., pp. 272-5.
20 Commission on Human Security, Human Security Now, op. cit. p. 4
22 Ibid., p. 92-93.
treated as a chronic threat although it might be also an acute threat etc. Interesting academic attempts to construct a system for human security measurement so far have focused on only a few aspects of human security. By choosing some aspects and ignoring others, these authors have practically abandoned the totality of the concept, which was praised as its main quality by its founders. For example, by choosing only five indicators for human security, King and Murray did not cover the huge area of violence, and did not offer an explanation of how the chosen areas were more valuable or causal than others.24 They include education among the domains important enough to fight over: “people have often fought over the cultural values reflected in education,”25 although it is too broad and indirect. At the policy level, devices for the development of priorities for security policy formulation - time and space, proximity of the threat, intensity and consequences of a particular threat - could be hardly implemented under such a wide range of equally valid dimensions within the UNDP-type definitions. Even in the attempt to make the concept more parsimonious, academics unintentionally add to the confusion about priorities: King and Murray are interested mostly in prevention - almost ignoring conflicts, while Suhrke stressed regime improvements mainly for post factum reactions. A much-quoted story from 1931 rural China comparing a peasant’s position with a man standing permanently up to the neck in water where even a ripple is sufficient to drown him,26 might have a sad end: the poor man being offered education instead of a life belt.

Alongside such confusion about causal links and priorities, the concept of human security is burdened with the absence of clear answers on further key questions: who or what will provide human security? Under which conditions and how? If the right to human security is taken to be universal, is everyone or no one responsible? If you cannot intervene everywhere, how do you decide where to intervene? And so on. Within the concept of human security there is no labelling of the current international system as a world order, but there is an implicit starting premise about the system as “almost constitutional” in the sense of how it was described by John Ikenberry.27 An idealistic dimension of the human security concept is its neo-institutionalist normative notion that “humanitarian ideas have become a

25 Ibid., p. 598.
principal normative reference for states and organizations to clarify their international obligations, or against which to hold others responsible.”

Citing international regimes’ responsibility for promoting human rights, protecting refugees and providing humanitarian assistance, Suhrke believes that “it may be useful to think of the structure as an ‘embedded humanitarianism’” and that the norms are “generally understood in a consensual way and invested with much legitimacy.”

Indeed the so-called international community looks over every nation’s shoulders and the Western tradition of humanitarian law, missionary work and aid are integrated into many existing regimes, but they are only partially relevant for this issue. Existing international agreements are far from a comprehensive system of norms for the implementation of such a broad concept of human security. Second, they include contradictory or at least non-complementary approaches, starting with the ambiguity of the UN Charter when it comes to the sovereignty and intervention. Or, an example related to implementation when it comes to socio-economic issues within the UN umbrella: while safety nets are a precondition for market liberalization in developing countries at the UNDP Poverty Reduction Strategy, the World Bank managed to downgrade concept of safety nets as only simultaneous to economic reforms in its report. Third, even when they are accepted in terms of values and level of cooperation in more or less integrated regions such as the NATO community, there are no guarantees for absence of conflicts. We might recall that the original conflict over Cyprus in the 1974 demonstrated that even the claim that democracies do not go to war with one another is not a universal rule, i.e. that ‘normative explanations for ‘democratic peace’ may only be valid under limited set of conditions.”

Fourth, on the level of implementation, the concept of human security implies that humanitarian motives and efficient experts work within the international organization. In practice, international organizations are far from such an ideal-type expectation. Their pathology has been recently

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29 Ibid., p. 269.
30 The so-called ‘cosmopolitan’ interpretation of just war, i.e. military action for humanitarian purposes will not be discussed within limited scope of this essay.
explained in detail, and I will here mention only arbitrary agenda-setting by different international actors for self-interest work.

In addition to such idealistic, i.e. normative weakness, there is rational choice exaggeration within the concept. Namely human security assumes a certain type of rational choice decision from the side of people who are to be secured or empowered. However, competing norms and identities, lack of international legitimacy and local circumstances might create different perceptions about security for the people for whom human security is supposed to be provided. For example, as a part of its human security endeavours, the Japanese government provided $1 million for Kosovo to be spent on the five communities that handed over more than 300 illegally possessed arms during an amnesty period in September 2003. The UNDP, in cooperation with local nongovernmental organizations, organized a public awareness campaign explaining benefits for development and opportunities for local inhabitants, in addition to enhanced rule of law and physical security. However, not one of over 20 communities qualified – in area with estimated 300,000-400,000 illegally possessed Kalashnikovs, the total number of guns handed over in all communities was 155.

In spite of the numerous weaknesses listed above, there are some advantages to the human security concept. First, its attempts to include a broad range of issues remind us that the causes of the threats and vulnerabilities are numerous and that they differ in various parts of the globe. The collapse of a bank involved in a “pyramid scheme” in the UK was not a security issue, but in Albania in 1997 it caused serious unrest and required the involvement of a peacekeeping mission. The use of language is security issue in Estonia and Moldavia, but unlikely in France, for example. Second, by stressing socio-economic threats and the destiny of individuals, this concept reminds us that “liberty without economic status is propaganda”. Thirdly, as some authors


34 For example, the European Union has proclaimed that human trafficking is a major security threat for the Balkans. The EU and its agencies and institutions, under the auspices of the Stability Pact, plus member-states on bilateral basis, organize numerous meetings occupying the time and attention of many levels of authorities in the Balkans through labelling the issue as a security concern and exercising pressure regarding the set-up of local police priorities. The Balkans are rarely the start or end point of the human trafficking chain; there are no attempts by Kurds or Pakistanis in illegal transit to stay for example in Serbia, nor particular rise of crime caused by that. There are in fact other, local and sub-regional priorities, but human trafficking is imposed as a priority security issue to deal with for the sake of the EU.

have already noted, several campaigns of the “human security network”, namely the Ottawa Convention against personal landmines, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court, show that a strong commitment could produce new regimes (although they are not entirely universally accepted). Fourthly, the idea of complementing state security is welcome under conditions of transnational threats, the increasing role and number of non-state actors and a partially globalised world. The identities of states are not fixed and international organizations to some extent change and reconstitute states. But human security does not offer concrete explanation how complementarity might be achieved. The champion of the concept - Sadako Ogata - only poses the questions without providing answers. “The issue is how to make the UN and other regional security organizations more effective in preventing and controlling threats and protecting people, and how to complement state security with human security at the community, national and international level.”

According to the spirit of the time, even before the formulation of the concept of human security many important attempts were made to “broaden” and “deepen” the traditional narrow focus of state security by including non-military threats and non-state actors. However, it seems that national security conceptions in an integrative perspective like Buzan’s have not been taken as the starting point for building up the human security concept. Human security is an attempt to oppose the most traditional and narrowest approach to security pursuing an agenda at the opposite end of the continuum. The consequence is that by going too far from basic threats to survival and from national security, the idea of human security faces numerous problems. While admitting that “the state remains the fundamental purveyor of security”, human security still practically perceives the state as the main source of threat, while it is increasingly the case with non-state actors. As was shown above, there is no precise definition about the scope of this concept, or prospect of the establishment of a causal relationship among the various dimensions; and hence

no room for practical prioritisation on a policy level. While advocating liberal
neo-institutionalism, this concept neglects the fact that current international
regimes and norms do not guarantee absence of conflicts, that they are not
universally accepted, let alone broad enough to cover the all-inclusive approach
of human security. There are some ambiguities in the norms interpretation and
implementation, as well as contradictory and arbitrary agenda-setting within the
leading international organizations. Furthermore, people who are supposed to
benefit from the human security approach might have different systems of
values and security perceptions or simply not follow externally-projected
rational choice options. All these disadvantages have reduced its value as a
concept both to inform and to legitimate practical policy-making.

Human security requires conceptual clarification if it is to be taken more
seriously. However, human security signals the development of important
dimensions of non-traditional insecurity, particularly in socio-economic sphere,
while several successful campaigns by the human security network are a reason
for its continuing existence.

Original in English

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PROŠIRENJE POIMANJA BEZBEDNOSTI – OD “NACIONALNE” KA “LJUDSKOJ BEZBEDNOSTI”

REZIME

Građanski ratovi, narastajuća uloga aktera nezavisnih od države i pitanja međunarodne intervencije poslednjih godina značajno pomeraju fokus studija bezbednosti od ranijeg poimanja da je njihov predmet upotreba vojske kako bi se osiguralo teritorijalni
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(str. 397-408)

izintegritet i suverenitet države, odnosno od koncepta nacionalne bezbednosti. Ovaj rad se
bavi konceptom ljudske bezbednosti koji je u širenju područja studija otišao najdalje i koji
u središte bezbednosne strategije stavlja čoveka.

Rad najpre analizira kako koncept definišu njegovi zagovornici u sferi
međunarodnih odnosa: Program za razvoj Ujedinjenih nacija (UNDP), države-pobornice
ljudske bezbednosti kao što su Kanada, Norveška i Japan, kao i generalni sekretar
Ujedinjenih nacija Kofi Anan. Zatim su prikazani akademski napor da se ovaj pristup
definiše, kao i da se nađu mehanizmi kojima bi se merila ugroženost ljudske bezbednosti.

Analiza pokazuje da se definicije značajno razlikuju i da uključuju široki krug
problema, od fizičke do psihološke nesigurnosti. Kako koncept obuhvata pitanja vezana za
mir, bezbednost, razvoj i ljudska prava, on je preširok da bi se precizno definisao. Ta
sveobuhvatnost otvara mnoge probleme: ako postoji toliko mnogo jednako vrednih
dimenzija bezbednosti, kako uspostaviti kauzalne odnose među njima i prioritete u
praktičnoj primeni? Ko je nadležan da osigura ljudsku bezbednost, pod kojim uslovima i
kakovim mehanizmima? Ako se pravo na ovako shvaćenu bezbednost smatra univerzalnim,
da li je svako odgovoran; ili možda niko?

Zagovornici ovog pristupa posmatraju postojeći međunarodni sistem kao red u
kome su humanitarne ideje postale glavni normativni okvir za obaveze i odgovornosti država
i organizacija. Međutim, tako shvaćene humanitarne norme nisu generalno prihvaćene kao
univerzalne, već su često i kontradiktorne, kako kada je reč o suverenitetu i intervencijama.
Ne postoji sveobuhvatan sistem normi i mehanizama koji bi omogućio primenu tako širokog
koncepta bezbednosti, a međunarodne organizacije su daleko od idealnog tipa u pogledu
motivacije, odlučivanja o prioritetima i legitimite. Osim toga, postoje razlike u percepciji
bezbednosti različitih zajednica, a time i u efikasnosti mehanizama koji se primenjuju radi
navodnog unapređenja ljudske bezbednosti u određenoj sredini.

Navode se i dobre strane koncepta ljudske bezbednosti, kao što su skretanje pažnje
na raznovrsne pojavne oblike bezbednosnih pretnji, ulogu drugih aktora osim država,
naglasak na značaju socio-ekonomskih pretnji poput siromaštva, problema zdravstvene
zaštite i obrazovanja. Takodje, neke akcije mreže ljudske bezbednosti (koju čine desetak
država, više agencija UN i nevladinih organizacija), poput usvajanja Otavške konvencije o
zabrani protivpešadijskih mina, pokazuju da postoji mogućnost formulisanja i usvajanja
novih normi koje će svet učiniti bezbednijim.

Preovladaju, međutim, ocena da koncept ljudske bezbednosti nije teorijski
koherentan. Ovaj pristup bezbednosti zahteva konceptualno pojašnjenje, bez čega je
njegova vrednost umanjena i kada je reč o primeni u praksi.