

Is human security  
better than state  
centric security?



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Along with the end of the Cold War, the spread of globalisation, and the fast development, the world is facing new challenges and threats endangering states as well as people all over the world. Those new problems require effective counteractions. Two approaches can be distinguished, which are particularly meaningful in a context of global security, Human Security, and 'state-centric' approaches, such as realism, neo-realism, or Strategic Studies. They differ not only because of the subject of their focus, and hence the manner of protection, but also because definition of security they draw and methods of achievement of that security. 'New' threats endanger people globally, therefore Human Security, which is focused on the providing the security of people, not states in the first line, seems to offer better way of dealing with these non-traditional problems. However, is the Human Security sufficient? Both approaches, like any other theories, comprise positive and negative aspects. In order to estimate which of these two approaches offer a better way of dealing with non-traditional 'new' global security problems, first the definition of security will be explained, in context of both theories, to assess an impact of diverse conceptions of security on the specifying threats and methods of dealing with them. Next, and there will be assessed an importance of non-traditional 'new' global security problems, in the scope of states' and human security, and threats and difficulties associated with them will be clarified as well. Furthermore, both conceptions will be characterised, including examination of manner they offer to challenge the 'new' threats, and to provide security, additionally effectiveness of their models will be estimated. Finally, two perceptions will be compared, emphasising the most colliding issues between them, and all arguments will be put together and summarised in ending statement.

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## Diverse dimension of security

Primary issue, whilst discussing the different perception of the global security problems, appears to be understanding of the security concept.

Recognition of threats and methods we use to challenge them depend on the way we define security. We can distinguish two potential objects of security, states and human beings.

The former conception is strictly associated with realism, which favour protection of state as the highest authority, according to King and ' The traditional view of security has focused on using the military to ensure the territorial integrity of sovereign states'.<sup>[1]</sup>Realists argue that the main goal of states is assurance of their survival, regardless of citizens' well-being. Military potential is according to realism a guarantor of state's existence, and consequently, therefore realists claim that the best method to obtain the highest level of security is maximization of state's ' unilateral military capabilities'.<sup>[2]</sup>However, there is also other side of this idea, because such states' struggle to the maximization of military power and international hegemonic position, as Richard Ullman argues ' in the long run can only increase a global insecurity',<sup>[3]</sup>therefore realist definition of security seems to have positive as well as negative aspects. Such model on the one hand offers a way to protect states, but on the other hand put it in danger.

The latter concept, Human Security theory, draws a view that the individuals are of primary importance. For that reason they turn their attention towards the international rather than national security. Subsequently, because of its wider and more global character, it establishes different risks, not only

military, but also environmental, social, and economic, proposing different methods of protection. However, there is also another interesting aspect, even though people are aware of the different kinds of threats and their crucial impact on their lives they value defence from violence more than from any other risks. The outcome of the enquiry conducted in 2005 in Afghanistan justifies that fact. Accordingly, 37% of questioned said that violence is the biggest danger facing their country, whilst 29% sustained that they are economic problems, such as poverty or unemployment.

[4]Subsequently, people appreciate their physical safety more than a good condition of a country, and believe that violation of human rights is the major threat resulting in many others difficulties.

To sum up, the essential aspect in counter measuring of a particular threat is first its recognition, because in order to deal with something we need to be aware that it is a threat to our security. The effectiveness is determined by the extent that particular threat endangers our security. Here arises the question, how those distinct perceptions of threat and security affect attitude of both approaches to non-traditional threats?

#### Non-traditional 'new' global security problems

We cannot decide of the predominance of one theory over another without explaining types and meaning of non-traditional security problems. 'New' threats are of diverse nature, for example environmental threats, spreading of diseases, growing population, poverty, intercontinental crime, threats associated with new technology, or acts of terrorism, and for that reason there are so hard to be challenged. What makes them even more

problematic is their interconnectedness, usually one issue is correlated with another one or even causes another problems. They, therefore, need collective response, which obviously in anarchical model of self-interested states created by realists is difficult to obtain.

Non-traditional threats often cause as many harms as traditionally defined dangers, such as war. This assumption is illustrated by the following example: ' AIDS is a direct threat to human security because it kills an estimated three million people every year'.[5]Health issues concern not only developing countries, as it is generally believed. Stefan Elbe claims that because of the number of military operations all over the world, and highly developed tourist industry, the diseases spread very fast all over the world. Furthermore, there are also economic consequences, necessity of replacement of infected stationed soldiers equals additional costs, and likewise those soldiers create a risk for the population of their national states. Such situation took place in Sierra Leone, during peacekeeping operation number of people infected by HIV/AIDS increased in that region.[6]

Another worth noting issue is environmental threat. Thomas Homer-Dixon argues that ' environmental scarcities are already contributing to violent conflicts in many parts of the world'.[7]There is strict correlation between water and land exploitation and ethnic and national conflicts. Scarcity of resources resulting from devastating environmental occurrences such as global warming, acid rains, or deforestation, in result constrains people to migration, fighting for other sources of resources, or worsens state's economic and social situation.

Some of non-traditional threats are of greater military context, such as terrorism, arm trade, or militarization of children, other are less, such as poverty, health insecurity, or violation of human rights. What is certain, however, all of these threats are of the significant importance in terms of global security, both of people and states. Notwithstanding, difficulties in confronting those non-traditional threats derive from interrelation and global dimension of those issues. Non-traditional threats can very fast, if ignored, transformed into traditional ones. Which of the given approaches then offer a better way of dealing with 'new' threats to global security?

'State-centric' security approaches in an era of new threats

First, there will be discussed the case of 'state-centric' approaches, which at the first sight sacrifice very little attention to non-traditional threats.

According to main theory in that scope, realism, major actor on the political arena is a state, and it is a state that should be protected and secured.

Subsequently, the primary, if not only, danger for state is military invasion of other state; therefore the chief area of 'state-centric' considerations is war and peace. Correspondingly to that conception, the only provider of security is state, and as long as the external security of state is achieved, the state is in stable and safe position. Accordingly, 'protecting the state from military threats has the effect of protecting its people', [8] what indicates that 'state-centric' approaches do not completely ignore the safety of people, although they believe that safety can only be attained through military actions.

Realism and other 'state-centric' approaches offer some useful ways though with dealing with non-traditional threats, even though some argue that they

do not even recognise domestic insecurity as a threat.[9]Realism focuses on the national security. War, as Amitav Acharya argues, frequently endangers people by causing physical violence, but also undermines interior situation of the state, triggers malnutrition, migration of refugees, maximises the probability of pandemic, and negatively affects economic and industrial development of a certain state,[10]to name only few destructive features of military conflicts. For that reason, preventing wars consequently provides, to some extent, security against non-traditional threats which would result from a military conflict. Moreover, considering national security as a primary value affects the seriousness in deliberation any threats that somehow put that national security at risk.

Nevertheless, not every arising problem might be resolved militarily. Furthermore, 'state-centric' approaches apparently omit a lot of serious aspects of global security, we may even say that they are very monothematic in a context of security. One of the major omissions is a role of a state as the threat for its own citizens, not always protector. Enquiry held by Amnesty International greatly exemplifies such argument: 'In 1993 annual report of Amnesty International spoke of human rights violations 'on a terrifying scale', recording violations in 161 states'.[11]State's interest are, in a context of that particular theory, various of the interest and well-being of its inhabitants, Alan Collins even claims that 'a state exists somewhat apart from society',[12]as a result it is unsafe to sustain that state should be the highest and only provider of law and security, and ought to have unconditional sovereignty. Another weakness of 'state-centric' approach is its static character. It ignores possibility of collective actions in order to

increase states' and human security, as it does not recognise non-traditional threats as a serious danger. Richard Ullman claims that such manner, staying focusing only on the one aspect of a threat, ' reduces their total security'.[13]

Overall, ' state-centric' approaches, although they established some valuable techniques of providing security, tend fail to provide reasonable method of dealing with non-traditional threats, as most of these threats are concerned with human, not state, security.

Human Security in a struggle to assure global security

The most beneficial factor of Human Security approach in dealing with non-traditional threats is its area of focus. It places human beings in the centre of considerations. Therefore, scholars of that particular theory very broadly define security and distinguish numerous variants of security violation. The Report of the Commission on Human Security defines Human Security as: ' to protect the vital core of all human freedoms and human fulfilment'.

[14]Human Development Report classified seven areas of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.[15]Why then Human Security seems to offer a better way of dealing with non-traditional threats?

First of all, because it admits that those threats are of significant importance. Most of ' new' threats are of a global not state dimension. Therefore, while attempting to assure of security of all the individuals around the world it is aware of necessity of involvement multiple actors in challenging those dangers, such as NGOs, civil society, intergovernmental organisations, <https://assignbuster.com/is-human-security-better-than-state-centric-security/>



international institutions, single individuals, and many others.

[16]Furthermore, it offers numerous methods of dealing and preventing threats. To these methods we can include, for instance, world supporting programs, such as Millennium Development Goals, sanctions in case of any violations, humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping operations, implementation of international rules and laws, and setting up institutions that enforce abidance of those laws, because ' respecting human rights are at the core of protecting human security'.[17]Human Security approach values more the prevention of conflict, ensuring economic, social and political stability, than the military actions when the military dispute already begins. It comprehends the crucial meaning of development, innovations, and personal well-being. Additionally Human Security is seriously judged by states, for instance Japan and Canada included human security principles in their foreign affairs programs. Human Security is also the leading policy of the UN programs, and had its contribution in the establishment of Geneva Convention, Responsibility to Protect Report, the Ottawa Treaty.[18]

However, although Human Security approach appears to offer very successful way of dealing with ' new' global threats it has also some defects. One of its failures is that ' it ignores external military threats',[19]because it provides the security of people not states, it does not pay much attention to the relations between states. Next, it is difficult to find any effective method of dealing with non-traditional threats whilst we grant everything an importance, as Yuen Khong claims ' making everything a priority renders nothing a priority',[20]therefore we have already plurality of non-traditional threats, and it would be hard to challenge them if we grant everything an

equal status. For that reason, some scholars argue that Human Security define concept of security extremely broadly and that makes it implausible. Consequently, Human Security is very often divided into two sectors ' freedom from fear', and ' freedom from want'.[21]

Notwithstanding, in a context of globalism and global dimension of contemporary threats, Humanitarian Security offers a better way of dealing with non-traditional threats. Mostly because majority of those threats endangers directly human security first and usually affects large regions at the same time, consequently collective response is inevitable, which is rather problematic to obtain in ' state-centric' approaches.

#### Comparison of both conceptions

Which of those two approaches better adapts to contemporary standards, and offer a better way of dealing with modern threats? When we take under considerations Alan Collins argument, that ' conflict since the mid-1990s overwhelmingly takes place within the borders of developing states, not between states',[22]we would certainly assume that the ' state-centric' approaches since the end of the Cold War are no longer adequate to current global situation. Nevertheless, there is also other aspect of a dispute between those two theories, namely humanitarian intervention. Realists strongly believe in the right to unconditional sovereignty and that in some cases, intervention may exacerbate conflict, rather than mitigate it. Furthermore, interventions of different kinds are sometimes regarded as the hegemonic interference and an attempt to gain control. This in effect might cause hostility, as the threat to one's sovereignty is a threat to a security.

Consequently how can we deal with 'new' threats, which include also protection of fundamental rights, without supplying more harm than benefit? Human Security theorists believe, on the other hand, that sovereignty is conditional, as long as a state is responsible for well-being and protection of its citizens, any violation of that should require response of international community. It is strictly combined with the idea of 'sovereignty as responsibility'. [23]

## Conclusion

To summarise, both theories in contrary way try to challenge 'new' global security threats. Nevertheless, 'state-centric' approaches together with the end of the Cold War seem to lost their effectiveness and plausibility. Human Security, because of its alternative attitude and flexibility in dealing with arising problems, also due to its widely defined concept of security offer methods which appear to be more adequate and have a potential of success. Nature of non-traditional threats is diverse, interlinked and primarily global, therefore to deal with such threats, collective response is essential, but also of multilateral character, i. e. confronting diverse problems at the same time. The most threatened in a context of 'new' global problems is human being, and from both of these theories, only Human Security offers a direct protection of people, and offers a resolution of global dimension, which is necessary taking under consideration global problems.