

The concept to the contemporary security agenda politics essay



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Is the concept of human security, which is the most controversial and debated issue in international organizations since 1994, simply hot air, as seen by its critics? Or does it contribute to the concept of contemporary security agenda where the whole world is increasingly interconnected (Paris, 2001). This paper introduces to the international theories which can help understand human security better and the extent to which human security contributes the contemporary security agenda.

There is no single definition of human security as human security goes beyond traditional notions of security to focus on such issues as development and respect for human rights. Definition of human security remains an open question. The simplest definition of security is "absence of insecurity and threats" (Shahrbanou, 2004 cited in McIntosh, Hunter, 2004: 139). In context, to have security is to have freedom from both fear of psychological, physical or sexual abuse and from want of food, employment and health. Human security therefore deals with the capacity to identify threats and to avoid them when possible. It means to help people cope with the insecurities resulting from wars, conflicts human rights, violations or massive underdevelopment (Owen, 2004: 15).

The on-going debate of human security among its advocates is that there should be a shift of attention from a state centric to a human centric approach to security. That is, 'concern with the security of state orders should give way to concern with the security of the people who live within those borders' (McDonald, 2002: 279). Traditionally, in state- centric or realist view security means protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states from external military threats, rather than the protection of

individuals (Newman, 2010: 85). By contrast human centric or liberalist view places individuals at their main priority and proposes some essential conditions, for example adoption of universal human rights to ensure the protection of the people. Thus in 1970s and 1980s, people responding to the Middle East oil crisis and the growing awareness of environmental degradation, began to think of security in broader, non- military terms. After the end of the Cold War, many scholars started to see state- centric security as essentially in narrow terms (Hough, 2004). Thus the concept of human security developed which attempted to redefine and expand the meaning of security. However, it does not challenge the relevance of state- centric arguments in so far as these concern the protection of the state from external military violence and accept the state as the main provider of security.

Some analysts still argue that external military threats are bigger than ever in the post-Cold War era as there is no balance of power which for years ensured state and individual security (Hough, 2004). However, even if these threats are bigger at the moment, they definitely are not the only threat to the lives of people all around the world. Issues like environmental degradation, diseases, and famines are also huge threats affecting people (Shahrbanou, 2005: 30).

Constructivism is also one of the theories in international relations which can be adopted as way of interpreting human security. It provides a useful framework for understanding the true nature of issues relating to human security such as race, class, violence and gender (Conteh-Morgan, 2005 cited in Tsai, 2009: 28). Constructivism can be found to be more beneficial in <https://assignbuster.com/the-concept-to-the-contemporary-security-agenda-politics-essay/>

approaching the concept of human security, in contrast to structural realism. Constructivism believes that language, customs, norms and culture can change the behaviours and interests of people living in that country. Unlike realism, which sees anarchy as the inescapable outcome of self-help, constructivism sees it as state created which can be changed by state intervention (Wendt, 1992 cited in Tsai, 2009: 24).

Onuf stresses on language and the role that plays in constructing human beings, interests and principles. He considers language and rules as the fundamental norm of constructivism, and regards the human being as the first point of research and the hub of human security. In the contemporary world with the growing knowledge, language has become one of the key elements of building human security. Onuf also stated that people use language to interpret the rules and therefore it is the most important way of constructing a society (Onuf, 1989). For instance, the on-going interaction of human society has been eventually generated into international norms (Bedeski, 2007: 46). Peter J. Katzenstein also challenges the traditional realist theories of security by emphasising the norms and culture of constructivism as his main concern in solving the human security issue in international relations theories. He states that the concept of culture defines the state actors in the system and the interactive associations among actors and society. Katzenstein asserts that culture can be defined by looking at the social customs and laws of that society (Katzenstein 2005: 6). For example, Due to the lack of knowledge of internal factors within the Soviet Union, neo-realism and neo-liberalism failed to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Thus culture can play a major role in

influencing state actors, institutions and even respect for international law and human rights.

More recently, analysts, following the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report and their notion of security as "freedom from fear and want" (Hough, 2004), have settled on the phrase "human security" to emphasise the people-centred aspect of these efforts. In 1994, Human Development Report (HDR) issued by the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) presented a different philosophy about the integration of security issues and globalization. Thus, this report defined human security according to seven dimensions such as economic security, environmental security; personal, political, community, health, and food security. The report also adopted a people-centric security concept instead of the traditional state-centred concept (UNDP, 1994: 24-33). Realist would contend that the above list has clear military security implications. The report makes it clear that the real security protects individuals from threats such as disease, hunger, unemployment, political oppression and environmental degradation (Tsai and Tan, 2007: 8-9). Due to the broadness of the concept, the human security includes both traditional and non-traditional elements of security (Paris, 2001: 88).

On the contrary, to the critics, the concept and definition provided by UNDP is very broad. Gary King and Christopher Murray criticizes the overly broad and understanding of human security. By broad it means trying to include all the well-beings, which makes no sense. For example, 'the seven dimensions of human security defined by UNDP indicates a ray of dimensions centred on human-dignity, which are potentially interrelated and overlapped, and fails

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to provide a coherent construction with a single and integrated concept'(King & Murray, 2002). For Roland Paris human security is nothing more than " hot air". In his view those who support the concept of human security are the ones who want to keep the broadness and fuzziness of the concept just for their motive (Paris, 2001). Lincoln Chen has a similar opinion as well. In his view the concept is so wide and broad that it is difficult to make a choice which threat should be taken as first priority and which can be neglected (Chen & Narasimhan, 2003).

Deriving from the UNDP's interpretation of the human security concept and putting aside the differences between state-centric and human-centric positions for the moment, the meaning of human security is also contested by different schools of human security. The dispute over types of threats that should be included has divided advocates into the narrow and the broad schools. Mack, an advocate of narrow school, argues that threat of violence to people by the state or any other institution or a political actor is the proper focus for the concept of human security. On the other hand, Thakur a proponent of broad theory, asserts that 'human security is concerned with the protection of people from critical life-threatening dangers, regardless of whether the threat are rooted in anthropogenic activities or natural events, whether they lie within or outside states, and whether they are direct or definition of narrow school can be simplified as 'freedom from fear', similarly broad school can be defined as freedom from fear but also from want which is also the focus of human development in UNDP Report (UNDP, 1993: 2). Japan promotes the human security idea of freedom from want whereas Norway, Canada and other members of the human security network

promotes freedom from fear (Shinoda, 2007, Dedring, 2008 cited in Tsai, 2009). Thus Kofi Annan has pointed out the three pillars of this wider conception of human security, freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live in dignity.

However, the differences between the two conceptions of human security can be exaggerated, as both perceive the individual as the main object of the security and stresses on safety from violence. Both of them even acknowledges the role of globalization and its changing nature of armed conflict that is generating new threats to human security, besides both calls for a rethinking of state sovereignty as an important part of promoting human security. Therefore, both the concepts overlap each other as here to a large extent. 'Seeking freedom from fear without addressing freedom from want would amount to addressing symptoms without the cause' (Baylis, Smith, Owens, 2011: 483).

With the on-going wars, conflicts and problems, human security also deals with issues like climatic change and environmental degradation as everything is interconnected with one another. Death caused by armed conflicts has declined in relation to other challenges to the safety of individual. Wars and violent conflict often leads to environmental degradation, economic disruption or levels of poverty. For example Vietnam War or the Gulf War in which Saddam Hussein burned Kuwaiti oil which ultimately led to air pollution and land degradation. Similarly, environmental problems also lead to wars and conflicts. Such as scarcity of resources in over populated countries like India, Pakistan leads to dispute. For example Indo- Pakistan dispute over the Wular Barrage. While no direct link can be <https://assignbuster.com/the-concept-to-the-contemporary-security-agenda-politics-essay/>

found between terrorism and poverty, terrorists often 'exploit poverty and exclusion in order to tap into popular discontent -taking advantage of fragile states such as Somalia, or undemocratic regime such as Afghanistan in the 1990s, to plan violence'(UNDP 2005: 47). Poverty and lack of economic opportunity can also lead to terrorism. For example, Orissa in India is the perfect example of how poverty deprivation can trigger acts of terrorism, signifying how freedom from fear and freedom from want are intricately connected (Baylis, Smith, Owins, 2011: 486).

In the contemporary world climatic change or natural disasters has also emerged as a human security agenda especially for the western countries. Potential disasters like global warming or tsunami pose a threat to individuals and societies around the world. Most scholars tend to view this challenge as a national security challenge rather than human security. However, climate change and natural disasters can be linked to human securities issues like state failure, food shortage, water crisis, which are genuine human security issues. Communicable disease like the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) which alarmed the whole world in 2003 became the main issue of concern in the human security agenda (Curley, Thomas, 2004: 18). Diseases can travel rapidly across borders. It has become a major global issue and no country can protect the human security of individuals and communities within its national borders on its own. Another issue which falls under human security is protection of women against violence, women's human rights, gender inequalities in control over resource or inequalities in power and decision making. Recent conflicts have shown women as victims of rape, sexual slavery and torture. Such violence against women is now

recognised as a crime against humanity (Rehn, Sirleaf 2002 cited in Baylis, Smith, Owins, 2011: 488).

The aspect of human security has become irresistible nowadays . It deals with so many issues and it is so broad that it includes almost all type of human securities even if it is criticised over and over again. Whether viewed as freedom from fear or freedom from want, the concept of human security has not replaced national security. The Human Development Report estimates the rich countries of the world spend more in the military budget than in contentious issues like HIV/AIDS. However, it reflects a number of developments that have constantly challenged the traditional view of security as the protection of states from military attack. It originally began as a rejection of orthodox notions of economic growth in favour of a broader notion of human development, but now has been reinforced by new security threats such as genocide in the Balkans and Africa (Baylis, Smith, Owins, 2011: 491).

Human Security has grown into an important aspect in the contemporary security agenda. Responsibility to protect is an issue that supports human security and its three practical objectives, the responsibility to prevent, reach and rebuild. It was developed in the 2001 report 'The Responsibility to Protect' which was produced by Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. The commission argued that the primary responsibility to protect their citizens is in the hands of the state. If a state is unable or unwilling to do so or if they deliberately terrify their citizen then this leads to the international responsibility to protect the citizens of that particular state through humanitarian intervention. Development of this agenda for human
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security through the Right to Protection agenda is a point of debate and some contention (Gottwald, 2012: 9).

Humanitarian intervention to protect state sovereignty is one of the most important attribute of human security. The concept of humanitarian intervention was endorsed by the report of the UN Secretary General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. It was developed to help the state and its citizens from any threats external or internal. Despite the valuable articulation of such responsibility, Humanitarian intervention can always not be justified. An intervention can be manipulated and inevitably shaped by powerful actors. Skilled lawyers or diplomats can convince arguments, both for and against particular interventions, like they did in the case of Darfur (Bellamy 2010).

Just by accepting the idea of human security and treating it positively, the state cannot be benefitted. They have to make certain effort to implement the human security concerns in its political practices (McDonald, 2002).

Canadian government made the same move and exploited the state human security aspect. Canada's middle power status in the world system indicates that accepting the security theory of such agrees basically with its national interests. Based on the claims of Jockel and Sololsky, Canada's acceptance of the idea of " human security" altered the political nature of intervention. The Canadian government have continued to intervene in the name of human security anytime anywhere (Newman, 2001). As some scholars have already noted, there is risk in confusing the pursuit of human security concerns with the pursuit of traditional security concerns.

NATO intervention in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with as said was for the objective of preventing ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. However Ramesh Thakur argues that, it is still questionable that whether this intervention actually produced more damage than benefit (Thakur, 2002 cited in Glusac, 2010: 90). Noam Chomsky shares a similar view and sharply criticises the war against Yugoslavia. He believes that the bombing campaign only hastened the flow of refugees from Kosovo. The consequences of bombing campaign included the collateral damage in the form of refugees and long-term damage caused to the economy, which caused a creation of a state which ultimately became dependent on foreign aid. Multiple refugees, broken infrastructure, damage incurred by economy were the direct consequences of the bombing campaign (Chomsky, 1999: 81). Keeping this in mind, it's difficult to say that the goal of human security was reached by this intervention. If we recall the seven dimension of human security that was pointed out in the Human Development Report, we can draw a conclusion that the bombing campaign has affected almost all of them, and surely not favourably.

US invasion of Iraq can be another example of humanitarian intervention. Although US intentions for invasion were always unclear but when the post invasion period accelerated into the chaos the US raised the human security agenda as a justification for the war in Iraq, arguing that the US aim was to rescue the people of Iraq from the human insecurities caused by Saddam Hussein. However even USA did little to restore law and order through implementing pol justice procedure (Collins, 2007: 130). Therefore, if the goal of an intervention is to protect the human security and the avenue to

achieve these goals are the same that affect the human security, then the question that should be asked here is whether we have chosen the wrong means.

To conclude, Human security can be best understood under liberalists and constructivists theories. Realism therefore cannot be considered as the dominant theory of security. Human security has a long way to go before being universally accepted by everybody. The connections between wars, famines, disease, poverty and environmental degradation are still not understood by many, thus needs more clarification and explanation. Data from the Human Security Report Project shows there has been a remarkable decline in internal and global political violence since the mid-1990. If the world had to do without such aspect of human security, it would have been fairly difficult to deal the with the on-going security problems.