Human Security: Reactivation of an Idea?

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Human Security is a concept in which the general principles of human rights are interpreted at the perspective of a single citizen. Originally associated with security sector reform, Human Security offers a holistic approach to our understanding of security: all relevant actors and instruments should be included in the process of the efficient, effective and non-discriminatory provision of common state and human security within a framework of democratic governance. The importance of Human Security will probably increase in the future as an important category in foreign and security policies, and it will generally exert considerable influence upon the development of international relations.

There is a broad catalogue of threats in the contemporary world. Threats such as terrorism, organised crime, hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, and violations of human rights pertain to the international community as a whole or to individuals directly. In that sense, the increasing importance of the individual as the subject of international relations (e.g., through an emphasis on human rights, the development of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect, or the strengthening of the legal protection of individuals before international tribunals) has resulted in widening the circle of beneficiaries of security. This phenomenon has shifted issues traditionally belonging to the internal security of states to the international level. This approach has been defined as Human Security, a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented approach that should contribute to the enhancement of the protection and empowerment of people and communities. The foundations of this concept are in line with projected, so called "megatrends" such as the deepening of globalisation, technological development, individualisation (as a result of the development of information technology), the growing importance of health issues, and protection of the environment.[1]

Human Security: The Backstory

The discussion on Human Security was initiated at the UN in the 1990s. From the very beginning, when in 1994 the UNDP Human Development Report "New Dimensions of Human Security" was published and the term "Human Security" was coined within the UN system, four characteristics of Human Security were highlighted, which are that it is universal, people-centred, interdependent, and include the notion of early prevention.[2] But it also outlined seven interconnected elements of security: economy, food, health, environment, the personal, community, and politics. In 1999, Japan and the United Nations Secretariat established the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), then a group of 13 countries (Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand and South Africa—then an observer state) that formed the Human Security Network (HSN) to promote the concept of Human Security.

After the UN Millennium Summit, the independent Commission on Human Security (CHS) was established. Chaired by former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata and Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, it

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[1] J. Nesbitt, *Megatrends. Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, Warner Books, New York 1982.
[2] New Dimensions of Human Security, UNDP, New York–Oxford, 1994, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994.

published its report "Human Security Now".[3] That report resulted in the establishment of an independent advisory group tasked with advising the UN Secretary General on the promotion of the Human Security concept and the management of UNTFHS. Then, in 2003 the Advisory Board on Human Security (ABHS) was created. Accordingly, in the following year the Human Security Unit (HSU) was established inside the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with the principal objective of placing human security in the mainstream of UN activities. In 2005, the Friends of Human Security, an informal group of supporters composed mainly of UN member states, was formed to provide a forum to discuss the concept, and to explore possible collaborative efforts to move Human Security into the mainstream and formulate joint initiatives at the UN.

A report by the Secretary General on Human Security was released on 8 March 2010. It provided an overview of the discussions on Human Security and outlined its principles and an approach for its application to and advancement within UN priorities. Four months later, on 27 July the UNGA passed Resolution A/RES/64/, which recognised the need to continue discussions on Human Security and to agree on a definition. In the meantime, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed Yukio Takasu, an experienced Japanese diplomat, as his Special Adviser on Human Security.

A second report on Human Security by the Secretary General was released on 5 April 2012. The report proposed a common understanding of Human Security based on views expressed during consultations with UN members. A meeting of the UNGA was held on 4 June 2012 to discuss the assumptions of the second report on Human Security, and then on 10 September 2012 the UNGA adopted by consensus the resolution in which UN member states finally agreed on a common understanding of Human Security.

The unanimously adopted resolution (A/RES/66/290) contains the internationally agreed scope of this concept. It was a milestone in clarifying the definition of Human Security at the multilateral level and also a confirmation of its growing importance. The shape of the definition was introduced at the international level by three proposals—the Canadian, Norwegian and Japanese.[4] The first two focus on aspects of protection against violations of human rights, conflict prevention and peacekeeping operations. However, the adopted resolution preferred the third, the Japanese concept, which adhered to the protection of individuals against common threats and also to issues of development, an approach that recognises the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. That concept recognises equally civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This kind of approach to the subject should come as no surprise, given the history of the concept at the UN and the strong commitment of Japanese diplomacy to that idea.

The Importance of the Idea

At the moment, the concept of Human Security is still in the creation stage, and is being shaped into institutions known to legal systems as so called general clauses. A significant role in establishing Human Security as a legal norm will be played by non-state actors—NGOs—especially in the areas of human rights and humanitarian assistance. The adopted UN resolution specifies the scope of the future norm. It could become one of the most important ideas to shape the concept of security in the future, provided that a strong link with human rights is preserved (especially close ties with Articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter[5]). Then, violations of Human Security could be equal to violations of human rights. This compound idea may have a positive impact on other concepts related to the category of security, enhancing the position of individuals in relation to the state. It could also elevate problems such as the economic aspects of security, which is consistent with a visible trend in developing countries, and useful in focusing this concept towards the very existence of its citizens and the protection of social and economic rights, the challenges of adequate healthcare (such as the aging population problem, which is important to developed countries), the provision of food and water (recognising that access to water and sanitation are parts of the right to an adequate standard of living), and ecology (the issues of climate change and GMOs). It seems that these issues are of key importance and very likely will determine the future of the concept of Human Security, with its limits and possibilities for development.

[3] S. Ogata, A. Sen, *Human Security Now*. Commission on Human Security, New York 2003, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/91BAEEDBA50C6907C1256D19006A9353-chs-security-may03.pdf.

[4] E. Remacle, "Approaches to Human Security: Japan, Canada, and Europe in Comparative Perspective", *The Journal of Social Science*, no. 66/2008, pp. 5–34, http://dev.ulb.ac.be/sciencespo/dossiers_membres/remacle-eric/fichiers/remacle-eric-publication75.pdf

[5] Article 55 of the UN Charter states, "With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the UN shall promote: higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion". In Article 56, "All Members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55".

The ongoing financial crisis has shown that the economic aspect of human security is not only important for developing countries. The lack of economic security painfully affects citizens even in developed countries, which easily can lead to social unrest. In conjunction with the development of technology and changes in the labour market, the economic security of the individual creates a serious challenge, increasing the role of private entrepreneurs and business, in addition to the state as a provider of general security.

As for healthcare, apart from the obvious challenge of how to provide adequate healthcare, an important issue arises from the aging population phenomenon in developed countries. This will have an impact on the nature of the services provided by healthcare systems. In this context, the main problems turn out to be an inadequate insurance system along with issues arising from the development of medical science and the associated opportunities and threats.

Another important issue is ecological security. In addition to the crucial issue of climate change and its adverse effects on living conditions, Human Security covers issues related to environmental protection and the extensive consequences of environmental legislation on industries and economies (such as emission standards). A very important question is also the problem of how to introduce genetically modified organisms into the environment.

Last but not least, there is also a broad range of social problems. Progress in science and technology could in some aspects affect the safety of an individual. The development of a global information society can cause "future shock"[6]— the stratification of communities with various access to new technologies—or to the creation of new categories of social exclusion and criminal acts (cybercrime). Gender issues, especially in societies operating in a patriarchal paradigm when there is a change in the social position of women, can lead to conflicts, though such issues are likely to be a hallmark of social development.

In trying to predict important factors determining the shape and meaning of the Human Security concept, one should always bear in mind that the future may be different than expected and may create new, unforeseen types of threats that may give a different meaning to the implemented concepts. From this point of view, we can clearly see the advantages of the Human Security concept as it is capacious and can be extended to cover "future shock".

Acknowledging the Potential

Due to its multidimensional meaning, the importance of Human Security should increase as an important category in security policies. Historically speaking, Human Security binds together three baskets of the Helsinki Accords of 1975. In particular, it implies an extension of rule-governed security as opposed to war-based security. This approach focuses more on the improvement of the lives of individuals in conflict zones by monitoring human rights on the ground. Useful in operations abroad and in stabilisation missions, especially in post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction, Human Security is of special relevance in the context of the events in Libya and Syria.[7] However, it may also be interpreted more generally, as a concept that may be applied to the transition process from a totalitarian regime to a democracy. It is both an advantage and disadvantage. The recognition of a variety of issues as part of the security agenda (especially if it is the basis for interference by the international community) can be counterproductive: undemocratic regimes may oppose the idea of Human Security, thinking that the concept undermines the authority of the ruling groups, which are interested only in the perpetuation of their power.

Nevertheless, the application of Human Security in its full scope through the UN can be difficult. At the UN, consensus among the members, especially in the General Assembly, is achieved by subtracting the issue on which there is disagreement. Hence, the final reading of many agreed documents is often disappointing. This also applies to the resolution on Human Security. It clearly underlines a distinction between the concept of Human Security and Responsibility to Protect. It also noted that the concept of Human Security is based on sovereign responsibility, in which providing security is the primary responsibility of governments and the support of the international community is only complementary and of an auxiliary nature. Furthermore, the supremacy of the purposes and principles of the UN was confirmed. However, the resolution does not impose any additional obligations on the member states and assumes non interference in matters within the internal competences of the states. Thus, taking into account situations that may require decisive action by the international community (especially humanitarian disasters), this statement may seem insufficient.

The common understanding proposed by the resolution is useful in elucidating the boundaries of the Human Security concept. However, this does not mean that the result is satisfying to all sides. Western countries highlighted the point that a common understanding on Human Security is not an end in itself but a means to advance its implementation, especially in areas such as the protection of women and children or other vulnerable groups including those caught in situations of armed conflict. This opinion was visible in the EU countries' position towards the UNGA's adoption of

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[6] A. Toffler, *Future Shock*, Random House, New York, 1970.
[7] See, R. Murotani, "Operationalizing Human Security in Post-Conflict Development Assistance: Case in Bosnia and Herzegovina", http://www.janp.sfc.keio.ac.jp/JAHSS/2012/papers/2-C-2.pdf.

the Human Security resolution.[8] According to Canada's position, state sovereignty is not an end in itself but exists to serve citizens and protect them. The phrase "international peace and security" then should imply that the security of one state depends on the security of other states.

As for Poland, and the whole EU, it will have to deal with the influence of the concept of Human Security at both the planning and implementation levels of EU policies. This fact should be seen as an opportunity and should translate deeper into the planning process of relevant policies. The most important issues from the point of view of Polish foreign policy (such as energy security and the question of support of democratic changes in Eastern Neighbourhood states) should be identified in areas where Human Security could be useful as a concept of security in which the individual is at the centre. It is also important when it comes to promoting human rights. Linking the safety of human rights defenders with the idea of Human Security, for example, would allow Poland to take advantage of international support to achieve important objectives, especially in the context of the democratisation of the EU neighbourhood.

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[8] EU Explanation of Position: United Nations General Assembly: Resolution on Human Security, http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_12565_en.htm.