Human Security or National Security:

the Problems and Prospects of the Norm of Human Security

Hasan Mahmud

Department of Sociology

Atish Dipankar University of Science and Technology,

Faisal Tower, Gulshan-2, Dhaka, Bangladesh

E-mail: mahmud.soc@gmail.com

Muhammad Mahbub Quaisar

Department of Sociology

University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

E-mail: mquaisar2005@yahoo.com

Md. Abdus Sabur

Military Institute of Science and Technology

Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh

E-mail:saburshajal@yahoo.com

Sharmin Tamanna

Department of Anthropology

University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

E-mail: stamanna86@yahoo.com

Abstract

The emergence of the norm of human security prioritizes individuals' security over national security and conceptualizes poverty as the real threat to the security of individuals. Therefore, it urges for more attention to sustainable development as the functional strategy to ensure human security. However, in its way to ensure human security, the norm underrates national security and overlooks the role of the state in providing for human security. Consequently, the application of the norm of human security suffers from adequate support from the powerful states who are the most potential providers. To improve the efficiency of the norm of human security, it is necessary to include all states along with the non-state actors by reconciling human security with national security.

Keywords: Human security, National security, UNDP, ICISS, UNSC, NGOs

1. Introduction

A crucial change in the development discourse has come about with the emergence of the norm of human security that prioritizes individuals' security over national security and conceptualizes poverty as the real threat to the security of individuals. This goes counter to the traditional view of security which refers exclusively to the national security interests of the state by using military to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, security studies and security establishments have been focusing on foreign and defense policy mechanisms to avoid, prevent and, if needed, to win interstate military disputes. After the cold war during early 1990s, it has become increasingly evident that security threats towards individuals originate more from within the states. This is particularly true about the breakdown of the civil wars in the regions of Balkans, Africa and South-East Asia. Individuals' life is seen as severely threatened in these regions resulting thousands of casualties, forced displacement, rape, ethnic cleansing and many other fatal crimes

against individuals by the perpetrating states. As a consequence, security for non-combatant individuals has become one of the major concerns with huge import within the international community. However, the emergent norm of human security encounters numerous essential difficulties with regard to its practical application, rendering continued sufferings for those people who have been aptly identified as its targeted beneficiaries. This paper is an attempt to focus on those difficulties through an analysis of the debate between the new conceptualization of human security and the traditional view of national security, and also aims to identify potential policy measures to improve the efficiency of the norm of human security.

2. From National Security to Human Security

Human development report 1994 by UNDP is a seminal piece in the discourse of human security. It is the first to make the specific claim that individuals should be the referent of security instead of the states since state's security has become less vulnerable while that of the individuals suffers even by their own state. This claim is supported by the fact of declining instances of inter-state war and increasing intra-state wars during the 1990s. Therefore, it declares that the definition of security in terms of 'carefully constructed safeguards against the threat of a nuclear holocaust' has become redundant in the post-cold war era. It stresses two aspects of human security: safety from such chronic threats as hunger, diseases and repression; and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life (UNDP 1994, p.23). Consequently, it proposes human security in terms of the safeguards against "the threat of global poverty traveling across international borders in the form of drugs, HIV/AIDS, climate change, illegal migration and terrorism" (UNDP 1994: 24). To ensure human security, it stresses that exclusive focus on territories must be replaced by greater attention on people and security through armaments replaced by security through human development. The concept of human security, as UNDP develops, is built on four essential characteristics: universalism, interdependence of components, prevention rather than protection, and centered on people.

According to the UNDP formulation, human development and human security are two preconditions for peace and mutually reinforcing. Defining human development as "a process of widening the range of people's choices", it argues that human security denotes people's ability to exercise those choices safely and freely- and with the relative confidence that those choices would sustain (UNDP 1994:22). Here empowerment of people is a crucial aspect in that individuals should be able, and allowed, to take responsibility and opportunities for mastering over their lives. Therefore, human security is essentially a preventive as well as integrative concept that includes every individual for whom security is meant. Hence, human security can broadly be defined as having multiple components falling within two categories: freedom from fear and freedom from want.

2.1 Sources of Threat:

The UNDP report identifies seven prospective sources that include most, but not necessarily all, aspects of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, communal security and political security (UNDP 1994:25-33). The report also argues that threats to human security do not only originate by conditions of deprivation, inequality, and instability within the states, but also by the globalization of threats, for example, unchecked population growth, disparities in economic opportunities, excessive international migration, environmental degradation, drug production and trafficking and international terrorism (UNDP 1994:34-38). The ultimate conclusion of the report is that the root causes of threats to human security lies in the structural context of societies that provoke conflict. Therefore, we must go beyond the understanding of physical violence as the only source of security threat and include the structural factors in our analysis of human security. The report claims that resource scarcity, low level of economic growth, inequitable development, and the impact of structural adjustment are important sources of threat (Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:152). Consequently, sustainable development has become the definitive solution to conflict resolution and, thus, to ensure human security.

2.2 Who Provides Security:

To the UNDP, dealing with individual security need- especially their basic economic needs- is a central aspect of conflict resolution. Such conviction is supported by empirical data that shows strong correlations between conflict and structural factors i.e., lack of income, food, healthcare, personal freedom, etc (UNDP 1994:25-33). Therefore, it is argued that "soldiers in blue beret are no substitute for socio-economic reform. Nor can short-term humanitarian assistance replace long-term development support" (UNDP 1994, p.38) in order to ensure human security. As a result, all the actors concerned with development including the states are urged to contribute in ensuring human security through sustainable development.

2.3 Evaluation:

Ogata and Cels (2003) argue that human security does not replace but seeks to complement and build upon state security, human rights and human development (p.275). Kong and MacFarlane (2006) observe that the new conceptualization of human security stresses on four fundamentals in international relations: *first,* that security is for the individual, *secondly,* that human security is the apt and comprehensive term to capture the threat to the physical survival

of civilians caught in civil wars, *thirdly,* that states and regional organizations can effectively incorporate human security in their foreign policy; and *finally,* that the securitized domains such as economy, environment, health, gender, etc. are also important aspects to be given priority in the state budget along with military expenditures (p. 228-231).

Such a conceptual revision adequately serves two purposes: on the one hand, it helps in the policy battle for resources, and on the other hand, it focuses on a blind spot of the mainstream security studies by assuming the individual as the referent and enforcing the state to accept certain universal norms concerning the protection of individuals within their boundaries. However, the boundless stretching poses a great weakness in the new conceptualization of human security with regard to its effectiveness: everything related to human rights and human development has come under the umbrella of security and competing for priority consideration. As a result, taking effective measures to ensure human security has become impracticable, if not impossible. The case of Darfuor in Sudan is a staggering example of such impasse where lots of individuals have been suffering and yet receiving extremely limited attention needed to improve human security conditions.

Konh amd MacFarlane (2006) identify pitfalls in three areas in this elaboration of the concept of human security:

1. the term 'security' refers to something deserving priority. In the conventional security discourse, territorial integrity and political sovereignty are given most priority with the expectation that these would ensure all other security needs within the state boundary. Since protection from outside invasion is the precondition to have other securities, -for example, economic, political, environmental, and such- all states focus on this issue. The claim for replacing state-centric security approach by a people-centric approach, although sounds more liberal, has two weaknesses: on the one hand, the claim that less inter-states war and more casualties in intra-state wars does not necessarily prove that national security has become useless; on the other hand, public policy requires prioritizing certain aspects over others, it cannot just give the same attention to everything concomitantly.

2. putting too many items under the umbrella of human security confuses rather than clarifies the causes, and with ambiguous causal propositions, any policy formulation is likely to fail, and sometimes may even backfire.

3. including everything into human security runs the risk of securitizing a range of issues that may unwittingly lead to military solutions to political or socio-economic problems. (2006:237-243)

Hammerstad (2000) also discusses the post cold-war era in which the concept of human security has emerged and the conflict between the normative and practical implications of human security from the experiences of UNHCR. Particularly, she identifies UNHCR caught in a dilemma of serving donor states (that prefer to keep the refugees within their own home country) on which the organization depends for its existence, and protecting and assisting the refugees (who may be persecuted in their home country) the task for which it exists (p.395). For her, this is because the all-encompassing nature of human security blurs the distinction between human rights and human security and also confuses with regard to prioritizing among many goals that are often contradictory with regard to national security interests and human security. As such, she urges to explore the clear cut nature of the link between security and the dignity of individuals and the national security interest of states (p.401).

Along with the problem of ambiguity, the broad approach provides no direction in determining the improvement or failure to improve human security conditions due to the lack of a concrete measurement. As this approach considers almost everything as human security problem, it is virtually impossible to develop an index to facilitate measurement which in turn renders determining effectiveness devious. In fact, the possibilities that the concept of human security brings forth requires precise demarcation of its nature and scope so as to enable activists formulate practicable policies in order to solve real-life security problems of individuals effectively with urgency.

3. Narrowing the Concept

The attempts to replace traditional state-centric security paradigm by a development oriented human security paradigm is successfully initiated by the UNDP. Specifically "the initiative in defining human security by providing a list of past humanitarian crises and threats is a very useful descriptive first step, but this does not provide a potential definition of the concept for analytical assessment of human security" (King and Murray 2001:591). Consequently, security scholars attempt to address the problems in such a broad definition of human security and propose correctives. King and Murray propose a definition of human security that includes only the 'essential' elements, that is, the elements that are "important enough for human beings to fight over or to put their lives or property at great risk" (p. 593). Using this definition, they construct 'generalized poverty'- an analytical tool- in order to measure human security which includes income, health, education, political freedom and democracy (p.598).

Ronald Paris (2001) observes that although the expressive and ambiguous definition of human security helps to achieve collective action by the members of human security coalition, it renders any fruitful analysis difficult (p.102). However, he criticizes King and Murray for prioritizing certain values over others without providing a clear justification for doing so and argues that in attempting to simplify human security into a more analytically tractable concept, one has to provide a compelling rationale for preferring certain value. Paris constructs human security as one of the four subfields

of security studies each of which will have its own devices in terms of questions, methods, and propositions. Though his approach has much credit with regard to classifying various approaches to security studies, the 'matrix of security studies' suffers from lack of a rationale for separating certain potential sources of threat- for example, civil war and ethnic conflict- from the list of threats to human security without providing acceptable rationale for doing so.

Kong and Macfarlane (2006) propose a schema for human security that seems to qualify in most of the criteria of an acceptable definition of human security. They stress that, to ensure conceptual clarity and analytical traction, one has to consider human beings as the referent and delineate the threats to human security with obvious justification. They differentiate between the maladies that impinge on human well-being and those that threaten physical survival. In doing so, they propose two basic defining standards: "that the source of threat has to be another individual or individuals, and that the agents of insecurity are organized or they organize themselves to hurt people" (p.248). This definition promises to reconcile the tension between the state and the non-state actors in terms of specifying whether an activity by the state constitutes a threat to human security or not. This also rules out much of the economic, political, or environmental problems that do not threaten directly to physically hurt people. Thus, this definition stresses that the perpetrator is not the nature, but instead it is individual or individuals organized as states, transnational terrorist groups, or political leaders (p.257).

Although this definition centers on people, it does retain an important role for the state or military security. Therefore, it seems to account for the conflicts and cooperation between the security-interests of both the state and people depending on the context. Such a concept of human security is more likely to generate measurable proposition that would ultimately lead to policy formulation in order ultimately to enhance human security.

In fact, the goal of measuring and enhancing human security is impossible without a consolidated and precisely defined concept. A concept is meaningless if it is not effective in policy formulation and implementation by actors interested to work for the improvement of the plight of individuals.

3.1 Sources of Threats to Human Security:

The discussion above eventually leads to single out, from an array of components of human security, only a small selection of factors that constitute as threat to human security. These include civil war, genocide, ethnic conflict, terrorism, organized crime by state (i.e. nation building), war-crime, violent crime, crime against peace, war-induced displacement, rape and abuse of women in war, conscripting child soldiers- all of which share the two basic characteristics of threats against human security: that these all are performed by other organized individuals, and that all aim to cause physical harm to civilians.

While natural disasters or accidents do cause physical harm to individuals, these are not premeditated and performed by other individuals and are not deliberately aimed to physically hurt people, thus do not qualify to be threatening human security.

3.2 Who Provides Security?

The UN has been the vital player in international security and the key performer in building the norm of people-centered security (Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:165). There is a consensus that the state should assume the primary role in providing human security in collaboration with community of other states and non-state actors. But what if a state is unwilling to provide security to its citizens? This situation points to a unique dilemma: the international system considers that "the worst act of domestic criminal behavior by a government is large-scale killing of its own people; among the worst act of international criminal behavior, to attack and invade another country" (Thakur, 2006:244). To overcome this deadlock, the norm of 'responsibility to protect' is enhanced by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) led by Canada that essentially bridges the divide between the state and international community with regard to the established norm of non-intervention. This new norm of responsibility to protect implies that the state is primarily responsible for the protection of its citizens. If the state defaults- willingly or unwillingly- the responsibility goes to the broader community of states. Further, it embodies three essential elements: to prevent, to react in the event that prevention failed, and to rebuild societies where protection failed (Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:178).

With a balanced composition, the ICISS comes up with "problem-solving formulations for the future" based on narrowly defined sets of problems as opposed to the broad concept of human security attempting to address the wide range of human rights and development issues. The core criterion is: "the physical protection of individuals and communities experiencing or at risk from physical violence" (Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:179). The moral foundation of this norm is that "the security of the state is not an end in itself but is a means of ensuring security for people within its border" (Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:172).

However, the report holds that states are the ideal providers of human security and as such, strengthening the state competence and resilience is the best strategy to ensure human security; and conversely, human security is deeply at risk in conditions of fragile states (Thakur, 2006:257).

3.3 Evaluation:

By prioritizing the state as the provider of human security, the ICISS repot eventually gives the security council of the UN the central role in the international system. Under the leadership of the UNSC, the international community is expected to decide on whether to intervene on the basis of a threshold characterized by three criteria: the right intension (i.e. to protect civilians in war), reasonable prospect for success, and military intervention as the last resort ((Kong and MacFarlane, 2006:179). Nevertheless, the report recognizes that this norm may fail to work in cases where any of the great powers is the perpetrator or favors the perpetrating state.

The Kosovo crisis highlights this limitation within the UN to address human security when great powers are disinclined to support. As regional organization, NATO took initiative by considering abuse of human rights as a potential cause of local and regional instability and human sufferings as a matter of concern to the alliance. Although this bypassing of the UN created considerable tension and rendered the NATO operation questionable, most regional organizations (EU, AU, SADC, OSA, etc.) have, by now, started increasingly to show interest in such concerns. This confirms the growing acceptance of the newly developed norm of human security. In spite of such recognition of human security within the international community, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) - the highest institution in the international security sphere- has shown very little effective concern to this. As such, Newman (1999-2000) urges to reform the UNSC in a way so that it may go "beyond transparency to actual empowerment" and "beyond modified representation (of states) to entirely new kinds of participations" (p.234). Nevertheless, such reform in the UNSC would undermine state's jurisdiction in that it essentially stresses that human security is "ultimately about constituting international relations less on a state-to-state level and more on a people-to-people level" (p.236).

In reality, any norm must be backed up by capable powers to be in effect where the norm of human security suffers in particular. Owing to the lack of sufficient acceptance among the great powers, many initiatives to enact the norm of human security have failed so far. The humanitarian crises in Kosovo, Rwanda, DRC are some striking examples of such failure. Still there are instances of success in some areas that provide much optimism for effective application of the norm of human security exemplified by the international acceptance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. This success is largely credited to the innovative alliance between states, multilateral agencies, the ICRC, and NGOs that proves to be an effective advocacy mechanism (Axworthy, 2001). Axworthy argues that peace and security-national, regional and international- are possible only if they are derived from people's security. Yet he recognizes that working for such a coalition is not smooth as is evidenced in the WTO summit in Seattle in 1999. Kong and MacFarlane (2006) also identify that the norm of human security may be ineffective even though there is an international consensus in recognizing the threat if that directly contradicts with national security interest. For example, the UN has drafted and adopted a convention aiming to control the illicit trade in small arms and light arms in 2001 that is regarded necessary to enhance human security threatened by the unrestrained use of such weapons especially in the conflict situations. However, this contradicts with national security interest in that small arms and light weapons have significant law-enforcement, recreational and, in some societies, economic usages (p.199). The relevance of small arms and light weapons to national security interest and culture impedes the effectiveness of the convention, while the absence of such links with land mine renders success.

MacFarlane and Weiss (1994) provide a successful example of how UN can collaborate with regional organization in enhancing human security. The military stalemate and an urge for democratization, human rights and economic development in Central America enabled a bottom-up approach where the UN and other regional organization formed a coalition to adapt more rapidly and creatively in coping with the complex and rapidly evolving realities (p.290-291). Although the case of Central America is not generalizable, they argue that it reveals a crucial role for the UN in "the identification of weaknesses and shortfalls in regional capacities to address issues of security" as well as "of ways in which the UN can act to rectify or to compensate for them" (p.293).

Hampson (2006) argues that along with the public good of human security, we must recognize the public good of international order that protects smaller states from foreign invasion. Without national security, human security would remain elusive, and thus "the challenge is never just whether or how to deliver one of these public goods…but how to reconcile them" (p.126). He proposes 'the portfolio approach' to using hard power for providing human security. This approach brings together both the middle powers that are agile in grouping together to foster collective action that super powers often fail, and super powers that have the capacity that small and middle powers lack to bring effective results. Such as approach would require for all actors- both state and non-state- the capacity to act as well as adapt to the emergent problems in the context of changing world. The ultimate outcome- success- should be measured "not by the formulaic resort to procedure, institution, or self-interest, but by standard of legitimacy- and good effect" (p.149).

4. Conclusion

The emergence of the norm of human security is a significant novel development in the discourse of security. It evidently refers to certain aspects of individual security that have been neglected in the traditional security studies. It has been proved as more than a slogan and able to draw interest among the international community with respect to its

essential connotation. However, a consensus regarding the content of what constitute threat to human security is absent due to the fact that all parties involved- states, international organizations, NGOs and civil society- are championing their own perspective of human security based on their respective interests where national interest continues to dominate. As experiences reveal, the key to attain success is formation of a coalition of the like-minded and interested states and non-state actors. Furthermore, the crucial aspect in such a coalition for the promotion of human security to be successful is to find a way to reconcile the competing national interests with human security. Because, without the backing from power, the strongest possessor of which is the states, any attempt for the norm of human security to have a significant effect is unlikely to come about.

References

Axworthy, L. (2001). "Human Security and Global Governance: Putting People First". *Global Governance* 7, 1 (January-March).

Hammerstad, A. (2000). "Whos Security? UNHCR, Refugee Protection and State Security After the Cold War". *Security Dialogue* 31, 4, 391-403.

Hampson, F. *et. al.* (1996). *Madness in the Multitude: Human Security and World Disorder.* Ontario: Oxford University Press.

King, G. & J. L. Murray. (2001-02). "Rethinking Human Security". *Political Science Quarterly* 116, 4, (Winter), 585-610.

Kong, Y. F. & S. N. MacFarlane. (2006). *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

MacFarlane, S. N. & T. Weiss. (1994). "The United Nations, Regional Organizations and Human Security". *Third World Quarterly*, 15, 2, 277-295.

Newman, D. (1999-2000). "Human Security Council? Applying A 'Human Security' Agenda to Security Council Reform". *Ottawa Law Review*, 213, 31, 213-241.

Ogata, S. & J. Cels. (2003). "Human Security- Protecting and Empowering the People". *Global Governance,* 9, 3 (July-September), 273-282.

Paris, R. (2001). "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security* 26, 2, (Fall), 87-102.

Thakur, Ramesh. (2006). *The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to Responsibility to Protect.* Cambridge University Press.

United Nations Development Program. (1994). *Human Development Report*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.