Human security

The concept of human security emerged on the world scene only towards the end of the twentieth century. Before that, for over three hundred years, the idea of *state* security was a familiar and accepted concept. States were entitled, indeed expected, to defend their territorial integrity against external threats, and special measures were even permissible towards such an end, but the notion of security, at least at the international level, stopped at the borders of the state.

The discourse on security changed in the 1990s, and the international community began to accept the importance of special measures to defend not just states but *people* from threats to their security, even where this went against the wishes of the government in question. Of course, even before that, there was a common use of the word "security" which applied to people, but the radical change in the 1990s lay in international discourse: for the first time, the defence of *a people*, which had formerly been regarded as the sovereign business of individual nation states, became potentially the business of the international community.

The language changed, and so did the actions

Collective security actions, involving coalitions of nations and under the guidance of the United Nations, were taken not necessarily with the aim of enhancing the security of states, but primarily in the name of the security of people(s). Events that had previously been referred to only in such terms as *humanitarian disasters* came to be redefined in terms of peace and security. This was used to justify international enforcement measures, one of the first examples of which was the humanitarian enforcement programme in Somalia (1992-93), where the United Nations Security Council determined that

> *"the magnitude of the human tragedy … constitutes a threat to international peace and security"*.

"The meaning of human security is synonymous with that of 'the security of people' … The objective of human security is the safety and survival of people."

Dr. Sverre Lodgaard

Related activities

- Can I come in?, page 98.
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- Rights bingo, page 206.
- The language barrier, page 228.
- The scramble for wealth and power, page 231.
- Violence in my life, page 248.
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The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) was established in 1992 to monitor the cease-fire in Mogadishu and escort deliveries of humanitarian supplies to distribution centres in the city. The mission's mandate and strength were later enlarged to enable it to protect humanitarian convoys and distribution centres throughout Somalia.

"The Security Council,

Bearing in mind the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security,

Determined to resolve the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and to provide for the safe and free return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes,

Determining that the situation in the region continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security … and *acting* for these purposes under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations,

…*Decides* that the responsibilities of the international security presence to be deployed and acting in Kosovo will include:

    1. Deterring renewed hostilities … ;

    2. Demilitarising the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) … ;

    3. Establishing a secure environment in which refugees and displaced persons can return home in safety … and humanitarian aid can be delivered;

Ensuring public safety and order …"

Extracts from Resolution 1244 (1999). Adopted by the UN Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999.

Two aspects of change:

The above extract from the United Nations resolution on Kosovo illustrates the two fundamental changes that had come about in the classification of issues as posing a threat to international security:

1. the types of events that came to be seen as a threat to security;
2. the extension of security concerns to cover intra-state events as well as conflicts between nation states.

What led to the change?

There were a number of influences which prompted this movement away from a definition of security that focused on states to one that focused on people. One such influence was undoubtedly the end of the cold war, which allowed the interests of governments and peoples that had previously been hidden to come to the surface. One result was an outburst of complex and vicious conflicts, often intra-state, where the cost in terms of civilian casualties required a new type of response.

However, there was perhaps a more important influence than merely the realisation that the defence of peoples sometimes required an international response. This realisation had, after all, been there for many years, but "interfering" in what were seen as purely domestic affairs had not been considered a possible or acceptable course of action. Now, however, the increasing profile of human rights concerns in the world led to a form of justification which was, if not universally, then at least very widely acceptable: human rights, after all, are concerned precisely with people rather than states, and all countries in the world express their agreement at least in principle with these norms.

? **To what extent should the domestic policies of nations be subject to scrutiny by the international community?**

Individual or state interests?

The central idea behind human rights is that there is a certain level of human dignity which cannot be infringed by any government or individual. Thus, it is an inevitable consequence of embracing human rights that states relinquish some of their sovereignty, in the old sense of that term. In signing up to internationally agreed human rights norms, they have thereby agreed to put the individual at the forefront of all their actions, and they therefore relinquish their ability to do absolutely *anything* in the name of the interests of the state.

It is this idea that has gained ground in the last ten years in the field of international relations. It has resulted not only in an increasing number of United Nations missions with a much broader mandate than previously but also in the pressure to set up a permanent international criminal court, where violators of human rights can be tried outside the borders of any particular state.

The International Criminal Court

The international community met in Rome, Italy, from 15 June to 17 July 1998 to finalise a draft statute which, when ratified by a minimum of 60 countries, will establish an International Criminal Court (ICC). This will be a permanent court for trying individuals accused of committing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Continuing debates: freedom from "want"

The origins of the new focus on human security are often traced to the publication of an Agenda for Peace by United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992. This document suggested that threats to global security were not only military in nature:

> *"A porous ozone shield could pose a greater threat to an exposed population than a hostile army. Drought and disease can decimate no less mercilessly than the weapons of war."*

It was suggested that not only were environmental instability, poverty, famine and oppression critical security issues in and of themselves, they were also both sources and consequences of conflict.

The United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report of 1994 followed up this idea of a broader interpretation of the concept of security, suggesting that the concept of human security can be broken down into two component factors:

1. "protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of our daily lives," (known as *freedom from fear*); and
2. "safety from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression," (known as *freedom from want*).

The report elaborated these concepts further and went on to identify seven separate components of human security:

- *economic security* (assured basic income);
- *food security* (physical and economic access to food);
- *health security* (relative freedom from disease and infection);
- *environmental security* (access to sanitary water supply, clean air and a non-degraded land system);
- *personal security* (security from physical violence and threats);
- *community security* (security of cultural identity);
- *political security* (protection of basic human rights and freedoms).

However, this very broad conception of human security has been criticised by many who believe that the more components we include within the concept, the less useful it becomes as a policy tool. In particular, one of the founding members of the international "Human Security Partnership", the Canadian Department for Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), proposes a much narrower definition: "Human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition or state of being characterised by freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, their safety, or even their lives ... The litmus test for determining if it is useful to frame an issue in human security terms is the degree to which the safety of people is at risk."

?   What are the advantages and disadvantages of extending the concept of security to include freedom from 'want' as well as freedom from fear?

The Human Security Agenda

Despite the different interpretations, definitions and emphases, the different concepts of human security do have common elements. The following characteristics are emerging as central to a human security agenda.

- There is a shift of emphasis from the security of states to the security of people. This is considered one of the primary contributions of the concept of human security. As mentioned previously, for centuries, security has been seen primarily as national or state security; now, the notion of human security brings people into international discussions and raises concerns around the security and safety of people, not just States.

- This implies and re-emphasises the obligations of states to ensure the security of their citizens. The focus on people's security raises the profile of states to provide for and protect their citizens.

- It recognises the inter-relatedness of people and the fact that many issues cross state borders and other boundaries. A human security position highlights the inter-dependent nature of people in today's world, reminding us that many problems do not have "passports" and cannot be stopped at political borders. Women and men in industrialised countries, for example, are not isolated from poverty in developing countries, as is evidenced by migration patterns and diseases that do not respect borders; and people in developing countries are at risk from the industrial pollution produced by northern factories.

- It recognises the importance of non-state actors. The international campaign against landmines is often cited as an effective initiative spearheaded by non-governmental organisations. "Civil society organisations are seeking greater opportunity and greater responsibility in promoting human security. In many cases, non-governmental organisations have proven to be extremely effective partners in advocating the security of people."[34]

- It requires that those responsible for violations of human rights and humanitarian law are held accountable. The creation of the International Criminal Court as well as the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are seen as important advances in the pursuit of a human security agenda.

- It highlights the complexity of security issues reinforcing the need for multi-faceted responses. Among the different uses of human security, there is agreement that it is a multi-faceted concept that requires co-ordination and collaboration among a wide range of actors. One response given prominence is an increased reliance on "soft power" or persuasion rather total focus on military might and hardware ("powerful ideas rather than powerful weapons").[35]

Personal security and the ECHR

The right to liberty and security of person is protected under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the importance of Article 5 was soon apparent in some of the early cases coming to Strasbourg. Of the first 10000 cases, nearly a third came from individuals deprived of their liberty.

This article concerns the protection of physical liberty and in particular freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention. It guarantees certain basic procedural rights such as the right to be informed promptly of the reason for arrest, the right to be brought promptly before a judicial officer and the right to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of the detention, or continuing detention, may be decided speedily by a court.

Examples of cases under Article 5 that have been tried before the European Court of Human Rights include:

1. *Bozano v. France, 1986*
    The Court found that the circumstances surrounding the arrest and deportation of the applicant from France to Switzerland were neither lawful nor compatible with the right to security of person.

2. *Brogan and Others v. the United Kingdom, 1988*
    The Court found that the holding of the applicants under prevention of terrorism legislation for periods exceeding four days, without having the legality of their detention decided upon, violated their right to be brought promptly before a judicial officer.

3. *De Wilde, Ooms and Versyp v. Belgium, 1970/71*
    The Court held that the procedures open to the applicants to challenge the lawfulness of their detention under vagrancy legislation did not give them access to a remedy with the necessary guarantees to contest their long deprivation of liberty, ranging from seven months to one year and nine months.

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