

The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

Written by Aydar Gazizullin

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AYDAR GAZIZULLIN, FEB 29 2016

What is the Significance of the “Human Security” Paradigm in International Politics?

Since the very first days of its coinage, the question of human security has taken a prominent place in the security studies' field and has established itself as a useful umbrella notion which helps to conceptualise particular political rhetoric. The main aspect of human security is considered to have changed from being state focused agenda to an individually focused agenda in security scholarship. Nevertheless, the topic of human security is quite multifaceted and demands caution when analysed in different contexts.

This essay will examine the importance of human security in contemporary international politics. For this purpose, it is vital to determine the boundaries of prospective analysis. This paper will draw a line between human security as a concept and as a paradigm (Bergman, 2010, p. 172). The concept approach will discuss the core constituencies of human security as a possible research and analytical framework as well as focus on debates depicting scopes and flaws of this concept. Considering this as an important step, the paradigm approach will go above and beyond the human security concept debates in the security studies framework. It will explore the importance of human security as a worldview, a guide, and an intellectual agenda for policy actions when traditional approaches to security are not sufficient for the elaboration of viable solutions for real problems.

To reveal the relevance of human security for the pressing issues in international politics, several sections will be successively examined. Firstly, the core elements of the concept will be described, followed by historical context of the concept's evolution and formulation. Secondly, the main scholarly debates existing within the concept will be explored, proceeded by the critical evaluation of the concept. Finally, the analysis of human security as a concept will be used as a basis to understand the extent to which human security could be applied as a paradigm shaping a vision in international politics. This part will seek to explain the contribution of the human security paradigm at both global (the UN peacekeeping) and a regional (the EU security policy) levels of international politics.

The human security concept has become a milestone in the field of security studies. The core of the concept is considered to be the idea that the focus shifts from the state as the referent object to humans, to individuals. This is embodied in the so called “human – centric” vision (Kerr, 2007, p. 92; UNDP, 1994). This approach brings a new spirit to the realist vs liberal understanding of the nature of international relations. The state – centric model emphasises the necessity to secure the state from insecurities posed by the anarchic environment. In contrast, the human security concept in a liberal sense encourages attention to be concentrated on the security of an individual with a connection to ensuring one's freedoms. Here, however, it is necessary to distinguish the human security concept from the liberal, democratic concepts which also posit the importance of state sovereignty, whereas arguing that the international environment is the source of threats for the democratic nature of the state (Williams and Paul, 2008, p. 232). The main thesis of human security is that security risks should be assessed with the people-centred view in mind and with the assumption that when a human faces a threat, so does international security (Burgess and Gräns, 2012, p. 101).

The human security notion is considered to be relatively young. It was coined in the mid-1990s in the wake of crucial

The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

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changes in the international system. The end of the Cold War was an incentive to review the old security agenda focused on the military sector and to relocate resources to the pressing issue of development, with a particular attention on a human development (Kerr, 2007, p. 92). Since then, traditional defining terms of international security have lost their positions as a sole conceptual guidance. Arguing from the realists' perspective, the character and the priorities of the bipolar world system and its later dissolution revealed the weakness of states and governance structures responsible for the security of humans. It gave impetus to the unfolding tragic events in Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. These events are the cases of the worth mentioning conflict and development nexus in the security studies. The growing amount of research on this issue (Nyberg-Sørensen, Hear and Engberg-Pedersen, 2002; Chandler, 2007; Stern and Öjendal, 2010) has been conducted in the light of remarkable empirical observations. Since the mid-1990s the character of conflict has changed – intra – state conflicts started dominating over inter – state conflicts (Intrastate Conflict by the Numbers, 2013). This happens mainly due to the poor level of governance and the disrupted state of institutions, and leads as a result to endangering the security of peoples' lives both at a local and at an international level (Human Security Centre, 2005).

It is because of this experience that the world community in the 1990s managed to come up with the understanding of new security challenges which was reflected in the Human Development Report of 1994. The United Nations Development Program Report identified seven areas of threats to global security, ranging from health and food to economical and political security (1994, pp. 24–25). This approach, adopted by the UN, is a way of understanding human security in a broad sense with an emphasis that all types of threats should get equal attention. At the same time, in human security literature these types of threats are commonly categorised as freedom from fear (protection of an individual from violence) and freedom from want (focus is beyond violence, on existential threats to a human's life) (UNDP, 1994). Thus, the UNDP report might be regarded as the origin of human security conceptualisation which became a result of the views' evolution on security issues in the new political landscape. The human security agenda has given rise to the heated debate in academic circles over the scope of the human security concept.

The study of human security could be very tricky, since it is a multifaceted construct. This paper will now look at the academic debate stemming from differentiation of freedom as from fear and from want. The former interpretation promotes a narrow way of understanding of human security. The narrow school advocates that political violence posing a threat to an individual should be the focus of analysis of the human security concept. This position is articulated by the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia: "human security is the protection of individuals and communities from war and other forms of violence" (Human Security Centre in Kerr, 2007, p. 95). So, there is a clear consensus that in the narrow school particular threats (political violence, military conflict, war) must be prioritised over other types of threats.

The other way of interpreting human security is conceptualised in the broad school. This approach includes not only freedom from fear approach, but also expands to all types of threats and dangers to a human's life. The broad school ties human security with political and economic agenda, such as environmental and ecological problems, issues of underdevelopment and human freedoms, since these types of threats endanger a human's life as much as political violence (Kerr, 2007, p. 95). The logic of this school encompasses a wide range of security issues and thus encourages us to take more comprehensive measures (Burgess and Gräns, 2012, p. 93). Finally, the important fact is that broad definitions give an equal level of priority to any type of threats (Thakur, 2004, p. 367).

These two camps differ sharply in the scope of the definition they operate with. To understand an analytical value of this concept, it is necessary to look at the arguments used by both of them. The most illustrative and dominating in this debate is the criticism of the broad school by the narrow school. According to the narrow interpretation, the expansion of the security agenda (inclusion of non-violence threats) constricts the analytical capabilities. The point here is that if some threats are not considered as correlates of violence (have a lower level of priority), then it is difficult to construct a clear analytical hypotheses that prevents formulating applicable frameworks for scholars and policy makers (Mack, 2004, p. 367; Kerr, 2007, p. 95). Khong (2001) argues that prioritising everything leads to the absence of any priorities and makes a possible framework of the broad school not operable. The main advocate of the narrow approach Mack points out that a broad understanding of human security hinders clear analysis of a phenomenon, and makes an important methodological remark that "any definition that conflates dependent and independent variables renders causal analysis virtually impossible" (2004, p. 367).

The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

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The broad school gives attention to the inclusiveness of the definition, arguing that the purpose of the concept is in its ideational dimension, i.e. in an attempt to advance and protect a value of human centrism (Kerr, 2007, p. 95). The response of the broad school to the aforementioned critics is built upon the argument that human security is mainly important not as a research and analysis tool, but rather as a “signifier of (shared) political and moral values” (Burgess and Gräns, 2012, p. 94). So, the broad school argument comes down to a comprehensiveness of the approach accentuating a normative appeal in a real policymaking.

Having unboxed the human security concept, it was possible to reveal sharp contradictions within it. This paper acknowledges that human security is, to a large extent, a contested, low-reflective concept with a lack of coherence and analytical clarity. The quick overview of the narrow and the broad school debate on the human security might let one even dismiss the concept which “effectively means nothing” (Paris, 2001, p. 93).

At the same time, if even one abstracts from the narrow vs broad debate, there is a risk of resorting to extreme claims while juxtaposing the security of a human to the security of a state. To start, drawing attention to the need to go beyond the traditional, military-strategic security awareness and disclose the diversity of security problems is a merit of the human security approach. In this regard, it is possible to presuppose that this theory places human security issues essentially on a par with contemporary global challenges. However, the extreme alternative of the human security could be a choice between a pure realism or an ethical humanist solidarity. The individualistic nature of the human security concept is manifested (at least could be in its radical interpretation) in the fact that the freedom of an individual is opposed not only to the state, but also to other individuals. So, if one turns to the philosophical side of this discussion, it is possible to argue that a human is a source of danger and threat to other humans and the state. In a creative sense, man is a designer, a defender of his inhabitant, in a negative sense, a man is a destroyer and a disrupter. By “freeing” an individual from state oppression, this theory leaves one defenceless against a possible threat from another individual, thus returning everyone in Hobbesian terms to “the natural state of mankind” (Hobbes, 1996). The bottom line is that solutions to existing human security problems are considered to be found where harmony prevails among the interests of the international community, the state, and the human. The nature of contemporary security threats does not render the traditional principles of state security as anachronistic (McCormack, 2011, p. 99 in Trobbiani, 2013). Ultimately, the human security approach has normative characteristics. The shift to ensuring the security of a human indicates the existence of an ethical responsibility to guide one’s actions by appropriate international standards. This essay highlights the necessity to look at the human security concept as a stepping stone for an analysis of a broader discourse existing in international politics.

The core idea of human security, i.e. considering an individual as a referent, lays the foundation for a different way of thinking and concentrates on how human security is framed as a worldview. This section of the essay will argue that it is possible to evaluate the contribution of human security to the world of real politics if human security is perceived as a paradigm. In this respect human security is understood as a way of conceptualising or shaping a positive vision in a policy domain, an intellectual agenda encompassing progressive intentions, which helps address pressing issues from a different angle. From this perspective, different aspects of the human security concept regarding its definition, scope and an analytical capability could either be ignored or be used to support particular political initiative.

It is important to stress here that the proposed logic could be developed in light of several assumptions. Above all, existing power structures cannot be overlooked. The human security vision therefore complements the state – centrist view of the world, although it stands firm on the idea that resources must be primarily allocated to provide security for a human. It should also be noted that actions taken within the human security paradigm do not have selfish intentions which can be justified by the notion of human security.[1] In other words, they are aimed at bringing purely positive change. Human security shapes and strengthens moral, ethical, and ideational foundations of politics and eventually accelerates multilateral, humanitarian efforts of the world community. Besides, the human security vision is considered to complement national and international security, but does not replace it. A strategy, policies and activities in the field of human security might be put in practice to overcome a humanitarian crisis which possibly could lead to a conflict. However, the provision of human security should and could not undermine the foundations of national and international security. So, the relevance of this paradigm is in its usability to frame solutions which are hard to elaborate and implement in the strict realists’ conceptions. This paper will now turn to the cases of the human

The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

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security paradigm in the frameworks of the UN and the EU policies.

The global level of international politics, primarily the UN system, gives a valuable insight on how human security has become a useful instrument. It is possible to argue that human security is a manifestation of the UN endorsed policy domain. It is exactly the UN structure's body where the human security notion originated. Human security has become a point of departure which the UN needed after the end of bipolar system. It ultimately helped to cement and mainstream the inherent human oriented activities of the UN. Eventually, the human security discourse emanated from the UNDP report (1994) gave rise to such new bodies as the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, the Human Security Unit which since their first days are supposed to institutionalise policies of human security. The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan managed to use the momentum of the human security discussions and adopted this view as a guiding principle of a prospective UN engagement (Burgess and Gräns, 2012, p. 92).

Strictly speaking, one can note the development of the human security discourse in a sense of the broad and narrow school dichotomy. The UN Millennium Development Goals declaration ('United Nations Millennium Declaration', 2000) is an example of how human security laid the basis for a particular policy formulation to ensure the freedom from want. This paper will more closely look at the UN response to the area of peace operations, which on the conceptual level are freedom from fear-related topics.

The human security paradigm has promoted a more practical embodiment for the issues of peace – keeping, – making, – building, and crisis management. The rise in conflicts in the 1990-s, as Suhrke (1999, p. 268) notes, stressed the humanitarian role of the UN with the establishment of a Department of Humanitarian Affairs which emphasized the importance of the humanitarian affairs domain. In a practical sense, ideas about human security were utilized to fit the needs of the UN's peacekeeping field.

The human security appeals gained momentum since the 1990-s when the UN missions failed in Rwanda, Somalia, Srebrenica that deep-rooted people's beliefs that similar instances should not happen again. It has stimulated the UN to review and reconfigure the character of the peacekeeping operations, for example, the essence of the impartiality principle was changed (Hultman, 2014). The altering vision in peace operations was reflected in the famous Brahimi report (2000). Apart from the recommendations concerning technical details, an important move was made towards applying the human security doctrine in peacekeeping practice, as the report pointed: "[...] peacekeepers [...] who witness violence against civilians should be presumed to be authorized to stop it" (Brahimi Report, 2000, p. 11).

The changes, which have taken place in the UN missions since the report's publication, represent qualitative (for connection between peacekeeping and enforcement see Hultman, 2014) and quantitative shift (see the UN DPI report 'Surge in Uniformed UN Peacekeeping Personnel from 1991- Present', 2015) in peacekeeping operations (Blocq, 2014). It is possible to presume that, albeit indirectly, the idea of ensuring a human's life has resulted in the strengthened capacity of peacekeeping forces. The existing studies in this field confirm that the UN missions with a higher number of the troops deployed better provide for protection of civilians' lives (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon, 2013 in Blocq, 2014).

So, the human security vision could be traced as bringing positive influence to peacekeeping efforts in the UN framework. The human centric appeals should be considered as having taken precedence over the logic of cool calculations. This does not dismiss a realist sense of the foreign policy of a state which is ready to contribute to the noble intentions of the world community and does not undermine the role of the state structure (in a recipient state) where this help is brought to. It is rather possible to say that the human security paradigm gives way for this kind of thinking and policies to be formulated and implemented. By acknowledging the virtue of the human security paradigm in this domain, one should not ignore the still existing limitations. Newman emphasises (2011, p. 1740) that peace operations do not pay enough attention to such "human insecurities as deprivation, alienation, exclusion", therefore, neglecting valuable aspects of one's everyday experience which threatens the overall success of the peace building process. Thus, the narrow vs broad debate over threats prioritisation on the conceptual level still remains to be a relevant issue.

Although there are views that the human security discourse has been steadily in decline, it is also possible to claim

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that a new generation of human security is on the rise manifesting itself in the EU's domain (Martin and Owen, 2010, p. 212). Considering the potential of the EU in the international politics realm, it is vital to reveal the role of human security for the EU's capacity to act as a security provider (in a broad sense).

The milestone in the EU's security policy discussions became the publication of the implementation report on the European Security Strategy. It has become a point of departure for the solid conceptual features of human security to take shape (Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy, 2008). But it is more interesting to look at how the language of human security has been used to strengthen normative positions of various actors across the EU. The European Commission through the Commissioner for External relations declared: "the idea is to put people [...] at the centre of our policies", thus it was a plea to boost the commitment of member states to the development and security policies nexus (Martin and Owen, 2010, p. 218). This rhetoric also drove actions in the ESPD framework, such as peacebuilding operations in African states, anti - pirate operations near the coast of Somalia, and monitoring missions in the Balkans (ibid, 2010, p. 218). Human security could be also seen as a driver for effective multilateralism, a widely endorsed principle by the EU (Matlary, 2008, p. 140). In essence, human security is employed by the EU as a guide for its ambiguous, vague, at the operational level, policies to be incorporated in a clear "strategic narrative for a supranational foreign policy" (Martin and Owen, 2010, p. 218-220). As a concluding remark, human security is a landmark for the EU's foreign and security policy development, and as Kaldor et al. argue, this paradigm is an "enduring and dynamic organizing frame for security action, a frame which European texts and practices currently lack" (2007, p. 273).

In this regard, the human security paradigm has established itself as a cementing ground for different directions of the EU's policies. It is possible to argue that the embedded humanitarian agenda has been able to mainstream itself by virtue of the human security vision. Thus, the connection between human security and the civilian power nature of the EU seems to be apparent. But at the same time it is worth mentioning that the conceptual drawbacks of human security still retain their urgency. The conceptual blurriness exacerbates the complexity of the already overly diversified toolkit of the EU and aggravates the discrepancy between promises and actions. Thereby, policymakers will need to revise the conceptualisation of the human security approach. One of the ways of doing this could be proposed by the Owen threshold definition of human security (2004).

The concept of human security has gained prominence in security studies. It echoed the changes which took place in international politics after the end of the Cold War. Although the focus on the human's security and freedoms is a necessary direction, the human security concept as such remains to be contentious, lacking operational clarity and validity. This essay has tried to abstract its analysis from the conceptual structure of the human security concept and has viewed it as a paradigm in a broad discourse of international politics. Thus, it underlined the inherent problem-solving nature of human security that contrasts to framing it as a critical approach (Newman, 2011, p. 1753). The cases of UN peacekeeping and the EU security policy highlighted human security as a conductor and facilitator of attaining desirable positive change and consensus seeking. Yet these cases show that the existing shortcomings of the analysed policies are still rooted in the conceptual weakness of the human security approach. It is possible to agree with Paris' opinion that human security is just a "label" (2001, p. 96) and acknowledge the truth in Pitsuwan's words that human security is a "rational approach in the diplomatic community" (Martin, 2013). However, it is necessary to emphasise that these "label" and "rational approach" are of extreme importance to the world of practitioners. The significance of the paradigm lies in its capacity to accentuate and promote progressive intellectual agenda by appealing to normative dimension of a policy in question. By putting human security in the state centric framework, this essay argues that this paradigm attaches a specific characteristic to the realist's toolset. It cannot shape a coherent human security policy for a state or an international organisation, but it adds value and reinforces the politics with a human face.

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The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

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The Significance of the 'Human Security' Paradigm in International Politics

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Endnote

[1] Taking into account the scope of this essay, discussions of human security as a “neo – imperialist tool” are not considered in this analysis – the examples are the US 'War on Terror' (Gilmore, 2011), the NATO led operation in Libya (Dembinski and Reinold, 2011)

*Written by: Aydar Gazizullin
Written at: University of Bath
Written for: Brett Edwards
Date written: December 2015*

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