From National Security to Human Security

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At first glance the notion of security appears quite simple: it involves protection a group of people or an individual against a real or apprehended threat. But in itself this simple definition raises a host of other questions: protection for whom? what constitutes a "real or apprehended threat"? just who defines that threat? what do we mean by protect? how do we go about providing that protection? It does not take long to realise that security is a complex concept, with no one, simple definition. The situation becomes even more complicated when be try to delineate the notion of *human security* and which does not fit in with traditional, standard definitions of security.

Most observers agree that the traditional conception of security, which referred to defence of the state, its territory and its population against an external military threat, usually known as *national security*, is no longer adequate in the post-Cold War world. Though most traditionalists will grudgingly concede this point, they still tend to see security as a good or an objective which is not only to be pursued, but is also achievable. In the first part of my presentation I will look very briefly at how conceptions of security have changed in the last fifteen years. Secondly I will argue that we should see security as a socio-political process, which involves the production both of security and insecurity, a process known as securitization. It is within this context that I will try to set out the main guidelines of what human security is all about.

How our conceptions of security have changed

There have been several broad trends in the way our conceptions have changed in the last twenty years, amongst which mention should be made of:

1. A gradual blurring of the distinction between internal security and external security.

2. A trend towards broadening, extending and deepening the view of security.

3. The rise in transnational threats to security.

4. The loosening of the state's monopoly over the production of security, and increasing privatization of security, notably with the emergence of private police forces, mercenaries, large firms hiring their own security forces, and the spreading practice of "gated communities", not only in the developing countries but also in the industrialized world.

Until the end of the Cold War the traditional view of security was that of *national security*, which involved protecting the state, its territory and its population from external military threats and from internal subversion. This is what I would call an essentially *negative* conception of security, which emphasized protection from a threat. This notion of security was already being contested before the end of the Cold War, not only by people involved in peace studies, but also by analysts who called a wider conception of security. This call for *broadening* the idea of security became louder as people began to talk of the new threats in the post-Cold War world, such as organized crime or threats to the environment.

Others rejected traditional views of security as part of a move to *extend* security beyond the state and a conception of international relations that is limited to relations between states. Extended security focuses on insecurities and risks facing individuals and groups rather than just military threats to the state, and recognizes that in many countries the state is itself a source of insecurity for many members of society.

Finally, the critics of traditional conceptions of security are seeking for ways to *deepen* the idea of security, by proposing alternative, more *positive* views of security – for example by linking security to the conditions which create fear and feelings of insecurity, by emphasizing the need to reassure the Other rather than treating him or her as an automatic source of danger, or by connecting security to the idea of emancipation.

The concept of human security is part and parcel of the trend towards broadening, extending and deepening the idea of security.

Producing security

When we talk of producing security, all the critics of the traditional approach to security agree to a certain degree that security does not exist in itself, that it is a "social construction", the product of the process of *securitization*.

Securization is the means through which a question or a problem is transformed into a security issue and occupies a position that places beyond or above the political debate. In the words of the Danish political scientist Ole Wæver: "By declaring a certain development a security problem, the 'state' can claim a special right, a right which will always be defined, in the final analysis, by the state and its elites". Thus securitization means a process in which one names a referent object of security – the state, the population, the territory etc. – and in which one identifies the threats against this referent object. The first stage in this process is what Wæver calls a "securitizing move", a discourse that presents something as an "existential threat". An attempt to securitize succeeds to the extent that one manages to convince one's audience of the need for this securitizing move.

Securitization is more than just a speech act on the part of a state's leaders. Other social actors also participate in the definition of security – social movements, political parties, opinion leaders, security professionals (the military, the police, intelligence services and civil servants). Securitization also takes place through security practices, such as the interpretation and application of security legislation, border controls, or airport surveillance. And of course, securitization is never as neutral as our leaders would like to make it appear:

- First of all, it is a political act, which is part of the struggle to control the political agenda and hence power within the states and in the international system.
- Secondly, defining security, which is often above all defining the threat, is a powerful instrument of social control.
- Finally, the decision to designate a referent object and to indicate something as a threat has an ethical or moral dimension which we cannot ignore and has consequences – for example to declare illegal immigration or asylum seekers a source of insecurity will affect attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers in a very negative way

Given these conditions, it is clear that the concept of human security, which places so much emphasis on protecting those who cannot protect themselves and can rarely depend on their own states to protect them is not only very complex in itself, but also raises some very sensitive

questions about the very nature of international relations in general, and international politics in particular.

Human Security – the concept

Defining human security involves exactly the same questions as defining security in general:

- o Ensure the protection of whom?
- o What constitutes a threat to human security?
- o Who defines that threat?
- o What do we mean by protect?
- o How do we go about providing that protection?

The idea of human security has become very much part of the international agenda as the result of two major events: the end of the Cold War; the spread of globalization. The end of the Cold War not only made agreement on certain issues much easier, it also unleashed a series of intra-state conflicts or given greater scope for those which already existed, usually in developing countries, and which have underscored the need to revise our conceptions of security. Globalization has also made the world's economies much more venerable to general economic trends and has often involved painful adjustments which have affected the welfare of the populations of those countries finding it most difficult to adapt. The emergence of economic, social and political transnational forces is part of globalization.

It is generally agreed that the term human security really becomes part of the vocabulary of international relations with the publication of the publication of the 1994 Human Development Report on Human Security by the UN Development Programme. It has since become the official policy of several countries, including Canada, Norway and Japan. It comes up constantly in UN publications, and is at the centre of a report published in December 2004, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, produced by the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change at the request of Kofi Annan, after the deep divisions in the Security Council over Iraq. But it was preceded by a slightly different, but connected, view towards the challenges to human rights by authoritarian governments devised by the French in the late 80s, that of *humanitarian intervention*. However, whereas humanitarian intervention involves essentially military intervention by states to protect populations, human security has a much broader scope, both in what security means, who is targeted and the means by which it is pursued. Human security definitely implies a form of *positive* security.

So we must try and answer the very fundamental question about human security: how can we define it in any meaningful way, which needs special attention and does not get confused with the broader term of human development? In other words there must be identifiable threats, or to be more precise identifiable forms of insecurity, and recognizable sources for these threats and insecurities, which affect areas of human existence which are affected by such threats and insecurities. The task is easier said than done. Rather than add yet another definition to the growing list of definitions which have come out of UN reports, government policy statements, reports from NGOs and, of course the academic literature, I will just suggest in which directions we should look and some criteria for including phenomena on the human security agenda.

The 1994 Human Development Report on Human Security identified four essential characteristics of human security, which have been retained by most definitions of the concept:

.   It is a universal concern

.   Its various components are interdependent

.   It is easier to ensure through prevention than intervention

.   It is people-centred

It defined human security as:

Ø   Safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression

Ø   Protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life

Most definitions of the concept also involve the questions of freedom from fear and freedom from want. These are obviously very vague, but together with the characteristics and definitions laid down in the 1994 Report, they provide a good starting point. Fear involves insecurity and the feeling of threat. It must mean more than just a general feeling of anxiety. There must be some probability that the threat can really occur, that it is likely to result in physical, material or psychological damage or sense of insecurity for an identifiable section of society and that it can be prevented in some way. So this would include not only the obvious need for protection against physical abuses, protection of civilian populations against political and religious oppression, military exactions etc., but also against infectious diseases. It would not

normally include natural disasters, though the consequences of such natural disasters might well become issues for the human security agenda. The scope of such threats and insecurities is extremely wide and cannot be totally determined in the same way for all societies. The sources of these threats can come from other groups, which might be ethnic, ideological, political, social or simply criminal, from within from outside the society, and of course from the state, or at least one section of the state itself. Freedom from want implies that there is a basic standard of living which is being denied important sections of the human community and which must be attended to. In other words, to be fully comprehensive, a human security policy agenda cannot just be concerned with immediate or apprehended threats and insecurities *per se*, but must also cover the conditions which favour the emergence of these threats and insecurities.

The populations or social groups that are the primary targets of human security would appear to be easy to identify. Most of those that spring immediately to mind are to be found in developing countries, and include what we call "vulnerable populations", such as ethnic and religious minorities, women and children. However, especially in the post 9/11 era where the fight against terrorism now heads the international security agenda, the industrialized countries are not immune from such concerns. A few examples will suffice to remind us of the extent and the nature of the problem within the developed world: immigration and asylum-seeking; trafficking in human beings, which includes exploiting "nannies", hiring slave-labour, and prostitution, both within developed countries and so-called sexual touring abroad.

A third set of problems concerns just who defines the human security agenda. Western governments, NGOs, academics and the UN have all been involved in identifying the threats and insecurities that make up this agenda. Not all of them have the same credibility or legitimacy. Not surprisingly, attempts by the governments of the industrialized states to decide what human security is all about are often met with some mistrust by those countries that feel they are being singled out. On the other hand, any effort to come to grips with these issues must involve those Western states that have the economic and military clout to actually do anything about it. NGOs often have the credibility, and the means, but usually need the backing of Western states when their own safety is under threat. Academics obviously serve the purpose of helping to clarify the issues at stake. Finally, only the UN and UN-sponsored organizations have the credibility and the legitimacy to define the human security agenda in any meaningful way, but depend very much on the involvement of member-states to translate words into action, which of course is also their Achilles' heel. As it can be seen, the process of securitizing human security is a very complex and difficult one.

Finally, there is the question of how one implements human security. Clearly, it involves infringements of national sovereignty, one of the traditional pillars of the modern international system. Invoking a state's sovereignty is often a convenient way of claiming the inalienable right to do whatever a government wants to within its territory, and to tell others to mind their own

business. Likewise, invoking human security issues can be construed as a way for Western governments to impose a particular value system on societies for whom certain values are totally alien. And let's face it, this is a temptation which Western governments do not always resist. This means that one of the first, and most obvious ways of carrying out a human security agenda, humanitarian intervention, has to be carefully thought out. On the other hand, the right to absolute sovereignty is no longer as acceptable as it was, though unfortunately a lot depends on who is invoking it. The US, Russia and China can usually do it successfully, though even these states have to find ways of justifying their behaviour. Unfortunately the national security argument normally puts an end to any further debate. International agreements and treaties can be another, more effective method for dealing with human security issues, though there again raising the question of national interest, especially on the part of the single superpower and the two great powers, can limit the scope of such agreements, for example the one on the use of land-mines. The most successful way of coming to grips with human security questions is through prevention, particularly through aid and development programmes, carried out by national governments, NGOs and the UN and its specialized agencies. The role of NGOs is also very important when it comes to monitoring these programmes, and also for providing information about real or apprehended threats to human security.

Despite 9/11, human security has continued to be a fundamental international norm, which has been defined most recently by Kofi Anan and the UN-sponsored report *A More Secure World*, in the following terms:

> There is a growing recognition that the issue is not the "right to intervene" of any State, but the "responsibility to protect" of *every* State when it comes to people suffering from avoidable catastrophe — mass murder and rape, ethnic cleansing by forcible expulsion and terror, and deliberate starvation and exposure to disease. And there is a growing acceptance that while sovereign Governments have the primary responsibility to protect their own citizens from such catastrophes, when they are unable or unwilling to do so that responsibility should be taken up by the wider international community — with it spanning a continuum involving prevention, response to violence, if necessary, and rebuilding shattered societies. The primary focus should be on assisting the cessation of violence through mediation and other tools and the protection of people through such measures as the dispatch of humanitarian, human rights and police missions. Force, if it needs to be used, should be deployed as a last resort.