Chapter 15

Human Security

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv

Abstract

In this chapter students will learn about human security and the status of this concept in policy and research today. The popularization of human security through the UN Development Programme’s 1994 Human Development Report promised a revolutionary move in security studies, reorienting the focus on individuals rather than the states. The hopes that this concept would significantly change the course of security studies thinking did not come to fruition, at least not as some had hoped. States and international institutions adopted the concept but often for their own purposes, losing sight of individual, contextualized experiences of insecurity that were often brought about by these same states and institutions. Some critics of human security saw this development as the demise of an effective, non-state based security concept. However, other critics argue that it still has potential, and they continue to provide empirical evidence that recognizes the work non-state actors do in providing security and to influence the policy of states and international institutions. As such, the human security concept continues to be relevant to state and non-state actors alike.

Introduction

The concept of human security came into popular use through its introduction in the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP 1994). This report marked a milestone in the field of security studies and in security policy, explicitly contesting the dominant, realist approach to security
promoted during the Cold War (see chapter 1). It also had a substantial impact on debates around the theory and practice of security. Human security made explicit the possibility, not just in academic circles but also in policy, of thinking about security beyond the confines of the state. By virtue of distinguishing ‘human’ security from ‘security’, the fears, needs, and priorities of ordinary people were brought to the forefront, highlighting that the security (and interests) of states did not necessarily coincide with the security (and interests) of people.

Almost 25 years after the UNDP report, human security continues to have relevance and application both in policy and academic worlds. It provides a framework for discussions about humanitarian intervention and the ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) (ICISS 2001; Orford 2013), and it is increasingly engaged by scholars and practitioners in diverse disciplines from health and medicine, to criminology, to gender and feminist studies, as well as in security studies and International Relations (Wibben 2008; Anand 2012; Roses Periago 2012; Newman 2016). The concept has also gained attention beyond the context of armed conflicts, with analysts using it to make sense of the intersections between challenges of identity, health, food, and environmental security issues, for example (Hoogensen Gjørv et al 2014; Cassotta et al 2016).

Since its introduction, however, human security has also been subjected to sustained critique. Some saw this as inevitable given the absence of a clear theoretical foundation or definition (Breslin and Christou 2015). Other critics suggested that as a concept it is ‘everything and nothing’, constituting the IR equivalent of ‘motherhood and apple pie’ (Paris 2001; Hoogensen and Rottem 2014). Roland Paris (2001) noted that it was unclear whether advocates of human security saw it operating as a new security paradigm for theorists or a progressive policy agenda for practitioners. On the
former, some critics argued that, as a conceptual framework, human security fails to provide a resource for either understanding global security politics or the processes through which political communities give meaning to security (McDonald 2003). On the latter, human security has been accused of failing to alter the security considerations and practices of key actors, namely states (Booth 2007: 322-4), or conversely of being co-opted to serve as a tool of neoliberal powerbrokers that perpetuates Western-dominant interests, particularly through the use of military intervention (Chandler 2012).

The development of the concept helps to explain its relative resilience. By the early 1990s, in an atmosphere of international cooperation after the Cold War, it was clear that the narrow definition of security as a militarized and elite notion reserved for the ‘state’, bound within an anarchic international system regulated by superpowers, was insufficient for making sense of key international political concerns (Walt 1991; Hough 2008). Since the late 1970s, some analysts noted how security referred to issues that went well beyond the use of military power to protect the state (e.g. Ullman 1983; Rothschild 1995). Early advocates of human security, including the UNDP, were arguably attempting to redefine security precisely because it was considered ‘high politics’, commanding both political attention and funding (Hough 2008). Thus including poverty and inequality as fundamental threats to (human) security, as did the UNDP, would help ensure attention and funding for prioritizing these issues, all which had been ignored during the Cold War.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. It begins by summarizing how the UNDP’s 1994 report approached human security through the key components of “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want.” The second section then situates both the UNDP approach and broader debates about human security within the history of
security studies more generally. The third section analyzes the role of the state in promoting and providing human security, and the potential contradictions that arise from this approach. The final section builds on this discussion by examining how critical security scholarship, in particular gender and feminist security studies, brings human security closer to its original revolutionary aspirations.

Human Security

The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people... Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives... In the final analysis, human security is a child who did not die, disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity (UNDP 1994: 22).

The 1994 UNDP report on human security was considered revolutionary in some respects. Within this framework, the policy community drafting the report pushed against the narrow definitions that dominated IR during the Cold War to generate ‘another profound transition in thinking – from nuclear security to human security’ (UNDP 1994: 22). Indeed, human security has contributed to ‘deepening’ (from the state down to the individual) and ‘widening’ (from state and military security to economic, environmental, etc.) the concept of security from the Cold War focus on military defence of the state to include a much broader and comprehensive set of concerns (Buzan and Hansen 2009).
The UNDP report argued that the everyday security of people around the world was usually focused on worries and fears of unemployment, disease, localized discrimination and violence, and crime. It also had become increasingly clear that the state was by no means the sole security provider, particularly in weak or failed states where civilians had to rely on other sources, including themselves, to establish some semblance of security to manage their day-to-day existence. The UNDP report acknowledged the role of more ‘traditional’ security threats such as large-scale physical violence understood as ‘ethnic and other conflicts’, and ‘military spending’ (UNDP 1994: 38). However, as is clear in the report, these indicators can no longer be seen as isolated or independent indicators that define security when taking individuals into account. Human insecurity is equally severe under conditions of food insecurity, job or income insecurity, human rights violations and inequality (political insecurity), or gross environmental degradation.

Thus at its core, human security is concerned with how people experience security and insecurity. The 1994 UNDP report highlighted four essential characteristics of human security (1994: 22-23). First, human security is universal, meaning that it applies to all human beings, rich or poor, global south or global north. As will be noted, however, human security was heavily oriented towards the concerns of people of the global south and the sources of their insecurity, a focus arguably reflective of the interests of the UNDP in addressing global poverty and inequality. Second, human security is interdependent, meaning that human insecurities derive from both the local environment as well as across international borders and can have global implications. The third characteristic of human security, the imperative of prevention, argues for the necessity to implement measures such as primary health care for example, so that insecurities are less likely to arise. The fourth characteristic
of human security is that it is ‘people-centred’, which, given the increased dominance of the state-based security concept during the 19th and 20th centuries, made human security quite revolutionary (UNDP 1994; Breslin and Christou 2015).

The definition of human security has often been referred to as ‘freedom from fear and freedom from want’ (Winslow and Eriksen 2004; Vietti and Scriber 2013). This phrase was popularized by US President Roosevelt in his 1941 state of the union address (Roosevelt 1941). The UNDP report reinvigorated it as encompassing the ‘two major components of human security’ (1994: 24). This characterization has been criticized for being either too vague or all too encompassing – everything in life becomes a potential human security issue – or a ‘shopping list’ of a wide range of otherwise disconnected issues (Krause 2004). The 1994 UNDP report further defined seven main categories of threats against human security: political, personal, food, health, environment, economic, and community security (see box 15.1).

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<tr>
<th>Box 15.1 The UN Development Programme’s Categories of Human Security (UNDP 1994: 25-33)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economic security:</strong> Economic security is defined as an assured income, preferably through paid work, but also includes (in the last resort) public safety net measures ensuring income to those who are unable to obtain an income.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Food security:</strong> Food security concerns adequate access to food, both physically and economically. Some (see Arctic box) note that food security is also about getting access to those foods that are important to culture, health, and wellbeing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health security:</strong> Health security entails access to healthcare, and protection against diseases: infectious and parasitic diseases linked to malnutrition and environmental degradation (including pollution), and also those diseases linked to lifestyles (such as...</td>
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circulatory diseases or cancer).

**Environmental security:** Human wellbeing is intricately linked to the condition of the environment. Deforestation, overgrazing and poor conservation methods lead to environmental degradation such as desertification where the land can no longer support communities. Climate change has emerged as a central human security concern in recent years.

**Personal security:** Personal security addresses threats from physical violence including threats from the state (including torture), from other states (war), from other groups of people (ethnic tension), as well as violence stemming from crime, gendered violence or threats against women, threats against children, and threats against oneself (suicide).

**Community security:** Community security addresses the security individuals get within a group, establishing a sense of belonging and identity rooted in shared values.

**Political security:** political security affords individuals the freedom to be governed in a way that respects basic human rights, protected by democratic institutions in which individuals are given a voice. Control over information and media, physical repression by militaries, and threat of prison or detainment (or worse) during political protests are all examples of political insecurity.

The categories identified in box 15.1 provide more narrow foci within which one can identify human insecurity, but they are also interconnected. Poverty, youth unemployment, general population unemployment, and temporary or contract work all fall under economic security issues; however, they simultaneously closely impact health security, including access to general healthcare, maternal healthcare services, clean water and food sources, and affordable medicines. Environmental security
focuses on clean water resources, access to energy and food resources (and their sustainability and manageability), air pollution, and natural disasters, all of which affect economic, food, and health security.

The political and community security categories serve to recognize that the ways in which we organize and create order in society has an impact on individual security. Community security focuses on the role of ethnicity and cultural traditions that can impact individuals positively (providing a sense of identity and belonging to a community) or negatively (where persecution and discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, race, or religion, for example, continues). Political security, meanwhile, acknowledges the role of the state as a potential threat to human security. The absence or violation of human rights due to oppressive or dictatorial regimes, restrictions on ideas and/or information-sharing, and lack of democratic political processes are identified as signs of political insecurity, which in their worst form can lead to violence against individuals by the state. This example serves as a reminder of the rationale for human security: while states exist to provide for the security of their populations under the social contract, many are not only failing to perform this role, but they represent a source of threat to the very people they claim to protect.

The final category of human security is personal security. As the UNDP report stated, ‘perhaps no other aspect of human security is so vital for people as their security from physical violence’ (1994: 30). Threats to personal security range from those emanating from the state – which overlap with the insecurities identified in the political category – to threats from groups of people or other forms of social organization like white supremacist or radical religious groups, which overlap with community security. But personal security is also threatened by criminal elements, domestic violence, and aggression against self, such as suicide. State and international
developments in human security amongst states and internationally have focused on narrow definitions of human security that prioritize the category of personal security. Canada, for example, which for a time championed the human security concept, chose to focus on physical threats as the core indicator of threats to human security. This approach reflected a narrowing of human security to just ‘freedom from fear’, focusing on crisis prevention or conflict management (Bosold and Werthes 2005). It left aside the dimensions of the human security concept that emphasised immediate but non-violent threats to people.

In contrast to the focus on direct, physical violence in the dimensions outlined above, the categories of food, health, economic, and environmental security might be said to align with ‘freedom from want’. Harms to individuals come through more indirect means, either through starvation, poverty, natural disaster, or illness. Again, strict dividing lines are difficult: personal security, for example, enters the realm of health security regarding family violence and threats to the self, while economic security may play a central role in ethnic conflict when inequalities in unemployment or poverty lie at the core of unrest.

In 2001, the Commission on Human Security (CHS) was formed by the Government of Japan, responding to the continued interest of then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to focus on freedom from fear and freedom from want as reflected in the 2000 Millennium Summit declaration (UN Millennium Summit 2000). In their 2003 report titled Human Security Now, the CHS argued that the goal of human security was: ‘to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment’ (CHS 2003: 4). This definition was very broad, noting that ‘what people consider to be “vital” – what they consider to be “of the essence of life” and “crucially important” – varies across individuals and
societies’. The CHS report claimed that human security included the ‘interrelated building blocks’ of freedom from fear, freedom from want, and ‘the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment’. Lastly human security also ‘reinforces human dignity’.

In some respects the CHS definition went beyond the 1994 UNDP report, widening the possibilities for understanding human security from the position of individuals rather than states. At the same time, however, the CHS report placed significant emphasis on the role of the state, frequently repeating the claim that human security ‘complements’ state security. Nevertheless, both the UNDP and CHS reports were clear about the important role of the individual. Individuals are not just a security ‘referent’, nor are state actors expected to address all manner of human security threats. Rather, the concept of human security is also a call to action, specifically to increase the capacities of individuals to address their own security and confirming that ‘people are the most active participants in determining their well-being’ (CHS 2003: 4). They are security actors in their own right, able to ‘meet their own essential needs and to earn their own living’ (UNDP 1994: 24).

As such, we can say human security
‘is achieved when individuals and/or multiple actors have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and values ... the opportunity to articulate these threats to other actors, and the capacity to determine ways to end, mitigate or adapt to those risks and threats either individually or in concert with other actors’ (Hoogensen Gjørv et al 2016: 186).

The concept of human security thus draws attention to security dynamics at the level of civilians or non-state actors. Understanding the needs and capacities of persons, and how they understand and manage their security needs, is crucial for both
academics and policymakers. Scholars exploring potential theoretical avenues in human security are increasingly aware that people, and in particular marginalized women, people of colour, and the poor, for example, need to be included in any lens that helps us understand security from the local to the global levels. Policymakers need to be aware of how their decisions may decrease human security or work against the initiatives of other, non-state security actors operating in the same environment. As discussed in the next section, the ideas behind ‘human’ security have been a part of the debate about definitions of security throughout the history of Western political thought.

A Brief History of Human Security

The concept of ‘human’ security logically has its roots in the concept of security in general. The distinctions between ‘human’ or ‘state’ security, for example, are historically contingent, reflecting the values of those who have the power to define security at a given time. At its core, the concept of security is about reducing or eliminating fear. The work of Cicero (106-43 BCE) is frequently taken as the departure point for our understanding of the concept of security. Cicero coined the word ‘securitas’ to reflect a state of calm undisturbed by passions including fear, anger, and anxiety (Liotta and Owen 2006; Hamilton 2013). The concept also included the acknowledgement that without security, one was ‘incapable’ (Hamilton 2013: 62). This implies that the condition of security ensures that the individual has the capacity to pursue tasks and ambitions without fear (or at least, with as little fear as possible). The concept was grounded in the condition of the individual, though Cicero recognized its relevance for larger political communities (Hamilton 2013). Even after the creation of states within Europe through the Peace of Westphalia,
Western political philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith continued to theorize security from the standpoint of the individual, focusing on the tensions and responsibilities for security between the individual and the state (Rothschild 1995; Hoogensen 2005).

It was arguably not until the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century that the central referent object of security—the individual—was replaced by the state (Rothschild 1995). In this vision of security, as long as the state was secure, it was assumed human beings were also secure via a form of ‘trickle-down’ security (Hoogensen and Rottem 2004). Throughout the 20th century, the idea of the state as the sole security actor became increasingly prevalent, especially during the Cold War. However, attempts to widen and deepen the concept of security continued throughout this period, with the focus broadening, for example, to include environmental issues and a vision for society/nation as opposed to solely security for the state (Buzan 1983; Ullman 1983).

By the early 1990s, the security of the individual was reintroduced through the concept of human security. The dominance of the state as the referent object and actor of security remains today, and is even referred to as ‘traditional’ or ‘classical’ security. Human security, however, challenges the state’s privileged position. Analytically, the human security concept demonstrates that there is nothing about security (its origins or contemporary usage) that necessitates a focus on states and precludes a focus on individuals. Rather, the focus reflects a particular choice made by the analyst or the practitioner, rather than the essential meaning of security. This view shares some common ground with constructivist approaches (see chapter 3) and the securitization framework (see chapter 6). The concept of security has thus always allowed for diverse and multiple actors, or multiple referent objects. But it has often
reflected the interests of those who have the power to define it. It embodies a competition of values: which values should be prioritized and who decides (Hoogensen and Rottem 2004; Wibben 2008)?

**Human Security: The Role of States?**

If one issue, beyond the lack of a universally recognised definition, has consistently raised challenges and questions concerning human security, it is the question of the role of the state. The human security concept is clear about the need to reorient towards the individual as a security referent. It is also clear that individuals as well as states are recognized as providers of security, at least in principle. What has been less clear, however, is how the provision of security is operationalized. How are freedom from fear and freedom from want secured, and by whom?

Operationalizing human security is important not just because of the practical need to know ‘who does what?’ in creating and/or maintaining security, but because it also speaks to who decides which human security issues need attention. The question about the role of the state thus implies an additional question regarding where the power behind the concept lies. Can the concept be revolutionary if it is operationalized primarily by states? Is the concept an empowering tool for non-state actors, or have states co-opted it for their own devices, including using it as justification for military intervention?

While individuals clearly have a role in providing their own security within the concept and practice of human security, there are many instances in which individual action is insufficient – responding to interstate violence, structural threats, or issues requiring transnational cooperation, for example. States are powerful actors
in the international system with considerable resources and capabilities; maybe the best way to advance progressive ends within that system is hence to work with them?

At the same time, however, a state embracing ‘human security’ may not necessarily be consistent with the ultimate goals of the approach. If human security emerged as a necessary response to the failure of the state system to serve the interests of people, can we realistically expect those same institutions to protect the rights of others, particularly people on the margins? State leaders generally prioritise the rights and needs of their own population over others, which do not necessarily serve the interests of suffering populations abroad (Hataley and Nossal 2004). Moreover, states may co-opt the human security agenda to add legitimacy to business-as-usual practices, or even to help justify illiberal ends.

These two positions were captured in two separate debates on human security in the journal *Security Dialogue*. First, in 2002, Nicholas Thomas and William T. Tow (2002a) argued that human security had potential to provide the basis for encouraging progressive state behaviour, but only if it was defined narrowly and applied to a selective set of circumstances, in particular transnational threats which require some form of intervention. For the authors, a more expansive definition of human security would be unwieldy for states to implement, and would prove unhelpful as a guide for practical action in a complex international system. The authors’ argument largely assumed that the state would be a, if not the, primary security provider for human security.

In response, Alex Bellamy and Matt McDonald argued that Thomas and Tow’s attempts to render human security ‘policy relevant’ meant ‘changing its scope to such an extent that it risks losing its emancipatory potential’ (2002: 375). For them, the desire to speak to policymakers effectively meant addressing the mechanisms
within state and international systems that had *produced* large-scale and systemic harm to which the human security discourse was responding. Indeed, the human security agenda should serve as a ‘radical critique’ of existing political structures and discourses (Bellamy and McDonald 2002: 376).

Thomas and Tow responded by claiming that ‘more states than not are usually successful in containing and resolving the most fundamental challenges of individual human survival and development’ and disagreed that states were the ‘primary agent of human insecurity’ (2002b: 379). They argued that as long as states remained the predominant actors in international relations, it must be acknowledged that they would absorb most of the burden of addressing human insecurities and advancing the human security agenda.

In a 2008 review essay, the question was debated again, this time beginning with the critique that the human security agenda offered little new (Chandler 2008a). This was no revolutionary paradigm, it was argued, but one that ‘reinforced, rather than challenged, existing policy frameworks’ (Chandler 2008a: 428). For Chandler, while promoted in international circles, the human security agenda had done little to impact policy outcomes. Instead, this agenda was accused of exaggerating security threats in the post-Cold War era, of identifying these threats as largely emanating from the global south, and finally, of serving as a stop-gap measure that distracted from the clear absence of long-term foreign policy strategy and visions (Chandler 2008a). While Thomas and Tow argued for the importance of the state as a human security provider, Chandler criticized the human security agenda for becoming another tool of the state. Like Bellamy and McDonald had stated six years earlier, little systemic reflection and change occurs when state actors continue to dominate security discourse and practice, as well as the provision of security.
Human Security: From State-Dominated to Critical Approaches?

Instead of giving up on human security – and indeed the state as a provider of security – a critical academic approach can be pursued that engages with policy but which promotes a greater consideration of the structural dimensions of deprivation and insecurity. Human security must be used to interrogate and problematize the values and institutions which currently exist as they relate to human welfare and more thoroughly question the interests that are served by these institutions. (Newman 2016: 1179)

At first glance, it may appear that the debate has been stuck in a holding pattern between those who see the state as an adequate, and still primary, human security provider, and those who are looking for a more critical approach to security. Taylor Owen’s response to Chandler’s 2008 critique noted that the human security agenda, rather than exaggerating new threats, made existing threats and vulnerabilities more visible since the end of the Cold War, including the impacts of disease and extreme poverty and ‘dire human development conditions’ (Owen 2008: 447). He further argued that the policy focus on the global south was driven by the fact that ‘those that are dying in the greatest numbers’ were located there (Owen 2008: 448). David Ambrosetti added that integrating a new security approach into established bureaucracies like the UN and its member states required time for it to be amenable to state-based interests and to be considered legitimate by certain ‘audiences’ within the international system (2008: 442). From this vantage point, it might be concluded that the human security agenda has no other option than to be integrated, if not co-opted, into the state system. Annick Wibben agreed with Chandler in his critique of the lack of critical engagement within the human security concept, but she saw the potential
for an opening that would give non-state actors a much larger role and stronger relevance (Wibben 2008).

Have debate and progress regarding human security stagnated? One analysis claimed that human security was of little interest to the international community, arguing that the term human security had ‘all but vanished’ from UN documents (Martin and Owen 2010: 211). The authors noted that a report from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change titled ‘A more secure world: Our shared responsibility’ (UN General Assembly 2004) employed the concept of human security, but almost always as a complement to state security. They also noted that, in the 2005 Secretary-General report “In Larger Freedom: Towards development, security, and human rights for all” (UN General Assembly 2005), human security was not mentioned at all, though the components of ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’ played a central, defining role in the document.

Contrary to the argument that the human security concept was largely dying out, however, it was again highlighted in the UN’s 2005 World Summit Outcome, a document that provided the definition of human security for the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS). UNTFHS finances UN organisations to carry out projects and activities that promote human security, including rebuilding war-torn communities, supporting people after natural disasters and events causing extreme poverty, addressing human trafficking, and other activities, contributing to 210 projects by 2013 (Human Security Unit 2014). The intentions and operating definitions of human security thus have continued to stimulate debate and develop at the UN level, including in reports from the Secretary-General and in General Assembly resolutions.
The UN General Assembly has continued to work on an effective and operational human security concept, and its 2012 resolution plays a central role in the definition of human security for the UNTFHS Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (UN General Assembly 2012; Human Security Unit 2014). Though sceptical about the UN’s operationalization of the concept, Martin and Owen (2010) remained cautiously optimistic about the EU’s incorporation of the concept into its security policy, as long as the concept and intent stayed clear. NATO’s comprehensive approach to civil-military operations, meanwhile, has reflected human security perspectives (Weller 2014), and the concept has continued to be considered relevant, though controversial to NATO anti-terrorism efforts (Kfir 2015). Finally, the IPCC (the official international scientific body whose assessments inform the UNFCCC climate negotiations) included a chapter on the human security implications of climate change in its 2014 impact assessment report (IPCC 2014). It can thus be concluded that the human security concept is still active within leading international institutions and, by association, to the states that are members of them.

All this may just prove Chandler’s point, that human security is nothing more than a tool to further state and international agendas. However, as Newman (2016) argued, it is imperative that critical human security perspectives develop simultaneously, informing and pushing institutional approaches towards changing harmful state and global structures that contribute to human insecurity. Wibben (2008: 457) noted that critical security studies (CSS) itself (and not just human security) could be subjected to Chandler’s critique, where CSS scholars ‘have been careful not to divert too much from a traditional security framework.’ Wibben, however, has encouraged human security scholars to challenge ontological and epistemological
assumptions – in other words, she has urged them to outright challenge the politics of security (2008: 460).

These challenges were already reflected in the debates referred to above, where the potential of a revolutionary, non-state centric security concept instead became a Western-centric and state co-opted conception of security (see Bellamy and McDonald 2002; Chandler 2008). Human security policies, largely from northern states like Canada and Norway, were criticized for perpetuating ahistorical claims that assumed that ‘strong states provide better security’ (Wibben 2011: 70; see also Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007; Hoogensen Gjørv 2014b). Not only was the global north assumed to be composed of ‘strong’ states that successfully addressed their own human security issues and that could assist the perceived insecure global south, but ‘securing’ the global south would in turn support northern state security (McRae and Hubert 2001). The co-optation of human security for state security purposes thus turned into a sort of ‘virtuous imperialism’, whereby states in the global north engage in humanitarian interventions or other proclaimed human security measures for the purposes of ensuring that unrest in the global south does not extend to northern states through migration or terrorism (Hoogensen Gjørv 2014b).

Contrary to what was originally envisioned in the UNDP and CHS reports, the state security orientation and implementation of human security has often rendered non-state actors passive, and made invisible any human insecurities and vulnerabilities not identified by states. It assumes that community and individual voices are represented, and attended to, by a state actor, and it disguises and prevents any possible shared human security concerns and experiences between peoples across communities and regions, let alone across states. The result is an imbalance in perceptions and explanations of what occurs within and across regions and the globe,
a tendency that also disguises the contributions and competencies of different actors in providing security at different levels (Bellamy 2009; Abiew 2010).

This highlights the importance of opening the concept to various methodological and analytical approaches. An essential ally for human security research is the work done in feminist and gender security studies, which has developed simultaneously and alongside human security perspectives (Blanchard 2003; Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006). Individuals and their communities are, and have always been security actors, functioning alongside ‘traditional’ tools of security such as states and their militaries, or more often, functioning in the absence of the latter. Narrow or state-based ‘security narratives ... limit how we can think about security, whose security matters, and how it might be achieved’ (Wibben 2011: 65). In contrast, feminist scholarship has been ground-breaking for security perspectives that adopt a people-centred approach and have been developing in parallel with human security theorizing (see chapter 5). Significant empirical research has been conducted, particularly in the area of gender and feminist security studies focusing on the efforts of ‘average’ or everyday women and men, girls and boys, in identifying insecurity and sources of fear, and expressing vulnerabilities. This research has also examined capabilities and the ways in which people, societies, and groups enable and ensure their security through a variety of means (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006; Scharffscher 2011).

Gender and feminist analyses take their starting point from the bottom up, similar to critical human security approaches, but exhibit an increased awareness of the impacts of gender on personal relations and on understandings of security. Gender and feminist analyses question the terms we use, including the notion of ‘human’ itself – who is included (or not) and why (Hudson 2005). In acknowledging that the
personal is political, these analyses reach deep into the individual’s experience claiming it is highly relevant to the security of the individual and the community, but also to the state and global order. By identifying the articulation of security needs by those who are least secure or marginalized, security is reoriented away from elite or state interests (Hilhorst 2003). Feminist approaches have long highlighted marginalized realities that the majority of the world’s population faces on a daily basis resulting from economic insecurity and domestic violence, from rape as an institutionalized strategy of warfare, and/or from the gendered roots of war itself.

In other words, regardless of the way traditional approaches to security position the state as the exclusive security provider, in practice states have never been the only ‘security’ providers, particularly where human security is concerned (Kaldor 2007). Government officials, politicians and military leaders are neither always the leading actors in providing security or identifying threats, nor do they need to intervene at all levels of human insecurity. They can, however, act as important conduits for knowledge between communities and actors, and they have the capacity to respond to human insecurities when communities can no longer effectively confront threats on their own (Soderlund et al 2008).

Box 15.2: Human Security in the Arctic

While a human security lens is most often applied to contexts of the global south, dynamics in the Arctic region also serve to illustrate the purchase and utility of a human security perspective.

Until very recently, there has been a marked increase in proposed activities regarding energy and mineral resource development in the Arctic region. Even with the current downturn in prices for oil and gas, and the recent UN Framework
Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP 21 Paris agreement, many analysts claim that oil and gas (particularly in the Arctic) will still have a role to play in global economies and politics, not least replacing dependencies on coal (Topdahl and Stokka 2015). The tensions between economic security, energy needs and energy security, and environmental security have thus been heightened within the context of increasing global attention to and scrutiny over extractive industries and their potential impact on global climate change, habitat degradation, community health and welfare, and apprehensions regarding offshore drilling that powerfully resurfaced in the aftermath of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Environmental impacts of continued oil and gas exploration in the Arctic thus have implications globally, but also locally, where climate change and environmental contamination of territories occupied by indigenous peoples impact food and health security, as well as the ability of indigenous communities to continue traditional economic and social activities such as hunting marine mammals (whale, seal) and reindeer herding (Huntington et.al. 2016; Stammler and Ivanova 2017). At the same time however, the reduction or elimination of oil and gas development in the Arctic have profound impacts on the economic security of regions that have become reliant on these extractive industries as a promised or actual primary source of income and way out of poverty, including the Murmansk region in northwest Russia (Lvova forthcoming). Human insecurities in the Arctic provide important case studies for understanding the contextualized, at times competing, and complex nature of human security.

**Conclusion**

The concept of human security will continue to be a part of the broader debate on security for the foreseeable future. It has staying power within many global
institutions, including the UN, EU and NATO. Though operationalizing the concept still strongly reflects state interests, they also slowly but surely have begun to reflect an increasing awareness of the ways in which institutions and states cause human insecurity (see the Women, Peace and Security agenda, for example, discussed in chapter 34). Human security is a complex concept that will continue to play an integral role in the history of security studies as a whole. It continues to be subject to debate regarding whether or not it has been co-opted by the state, which uses humanitarian rhetoric to perpetuate measures and policies that in fact may not be conducive to the security of individuals, or whether it is indeed a revolutionary and radical concept that opens up the security debate to bring marginalized voices into the security conversation. It is safe to say that, at this stage, it is both.

Critical approaches to human security have exposed activities and processes taking place on the ground where individuals are constantly creating spaces of security that are often fragile, but that are in constant development. Local efforts made by women and men according to varying capacities can be influential not only to their security, but to perceptions of security beyond the individual and community levels. Sometimes, the powers behind competing geopolitical interests also understand that local community perceptions and experiences of security can be decisive for their own purposes. The lessons learned thus far are that human security perspectives emanating from individuals and communities, from the bottom-up, are not irrelevant to so-called traditional or state security priorities articulated by governments. Particularly in situations where state authorities are weak, fragile or virtually non-existent, the relevance of community needs and interests can be crucial to strengthening security at multiple levels.
Further Reading


References


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