The idea of “human security” has rekindled the debate over what “security” means and how best to achieve it. Much of this debate concerns the different ways in which the concept has been defined and pursued by its various national and transnational advocates. Although presented as a global template on which to fundamentally recast the security philosophies and policies of countries to reflect the changing conditions and principles of world order, human security has also been an instrument of national strategic priorities that often have strong domestic roots. As such, human security has been presented variously as a means of reducing the human costs of violent conflict, as a strategy to enable governments to address basic human needs and offset the inequities of globalization, and as a framework for providing social safety nets to people impoverished and marginalized by sudden and severe economic crises.

While the different interpretations of human security are not necessarily incompatible, they do create ground for controversy and suspicion in multilateral settings. Reconciling the different meanings of, and approaches to, human security is thus crucial to any meaningful effort to operationalize the concept and make it into a potent instrument of a just and secure world.

For the advocates of human security in the West, a powerful challenge to the idea comes from the “East” (Asia), a challenge that draws upon the East’s traditional understandings of security, claims of cultural specificity, and relative abundance of illiberal polities. To be sure, Asia hosts some of the strongest advocates of the human security idea. But the understanding of human security now prevalent in much of Asia differs in important respects from its meaning in Canada and other Western countries. Some Asian governments and analysts see human security as yet another attempt by the West to impose its liberal values and political institutions on non-Western societies. Others question the alleged newness of the concept, claiming that the emphasis of the human security idea on a broad range of non-military threats mirrors many regional governments’ earlier, home-grown notion of “comprehensive security”. In this chapter, I argue that human security is a distinctive notion which goes well beyond all earlier attempts by Asian government to “redefine” and broaden their own traditional understanding of security as protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity against military threats. At the same time, the development of this notion has strong roots within the region, which could provide an important foundation for promoting a collective human security agenda. To identify a common conceptual ground between the East and the West remains a challenge for scholars and policy-makers concerned with the promotion of human security in both arenas.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first part examines the various understandings of human security, especially the perceived tension between “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”. This will be followed by an analysis of the similarities and differences between human security and existing security concepts in the region, specifically comprehensive security and cooperative security. The extent to which a new idea like human security could find acceptance in the region depends very much on how it resonates with existing ideas and practices concerning security. Here, human security does pose some challenges to existing notions which need to be understood and reconciled if human security is to advance through national and regional channels in the region. Finally, the paper looks at the relationship between human security and humanitarian intervention with a view to assess what kind of multilateral action might be feasible to promote human security in the region in the event of most serious dangers to regional order. The paper concludes that promoting human security as freedom from want, which seems to be the current emphasis of regional governments, must be supplemented with more effort to develop human security as freedom from fear.

The Roots of Human Security
Most understandings of human security trace it to the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). But the origin of the notion is rooted in debates about the meaning of security that predated the end of the Cold War. One important source of human security was the debate over the disarmament-development nexus that took place in various UN forums in response to the Cold War arms race. The work of several independent commissions, such as the Brandt Commission, the Bruntland Commission and latter the Commission on Global Governance, helped shift the focus of security analysis from national and state security to security for the people. This was followed by a growing recognition of non-military threats in global security debates. The UNDP approach to human development represented a synthesis between these earlier representations of human security. While adopting a people oriented notion of security, it also invoked the “guns versus butter” debate in critiquing states such as India and Pakistan, for spending too much on military at the expense of development efforts.

The UNDP’s work was the result of innovative scholarship by an Asian scholar, Mahbub ul Haq. It listed 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), and political security (protection of basic human rights and freedoms).


2 An important multilateral meetings that focused on human security was a UN-sponsored International Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development, held in July 15-Aug. 2 1986 in Paris. A media preview of the meeting appearing in Toronto’s Financial Post described it as “an opportunity to enlarge world understanding that human security demands more resources for development and fewer for arms.” Preceding the conference was a three-year study by 27 experts “from every area of the world”, headed by Inga Thorsson of Sweden, which concluded: “The world has a choice. It can continue to pursue the arms race, or it can move with deliberate speed toward a more sustainable economic and political order. It cannot do both… the arms race and development are in a competitive relationship.” (Douglas Roche, “Balance out of kilter in arms/society needs”, The Financial Post (Toronto), 18 January 1986, p.8.)

3 The fact that this was a UN meeting based on a report authored by a world-wide panel and which took up a cause already advocated by the developing countries through forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement is significant in considering the current human security debate. Indeed, the concept of human security was also invoked in a Xinhua News Agency report of a world disarmament conference held in Beijing in June 1988 at which the President of the Conference, Zhou Peiyuan, who was also president of the Chinese people’s association for peace and disarmament, “stressed the peaceful utilization of new scientific inventions for mankind, but not for military purposes”, and stressed “growing concern from the international community for disarmament, which is connected with world peace and human security.” (“Beijing hosts disarmament conference,” The Xinhua General Overseas News Service, 14 June 1988.)

4 While the disarmament –development nexus served as one of the bases for the human security concept, the concept was also used in conjunction with developing multilateral capabilities to deal with non-military threats. A 1987 report by a 23-member panel, chaired by former U.S. attorney-general Elliot Richardson, and including former World Bank president Robert McNamara, former West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, former U.S. secretary of state Cyrus Vance and former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, proposed a “global watch” council under UN auspices which could serve as “a small political centre for high-level consultations on urgent matters of human security and welfare.” According to this report, while the UN Security Council dealt with direct military threats to world order, the global watch council consisting of up to 25 member states could deal with non-military threats, which would include world debt repayments, environmental hazards, natural disasters, disease, drug trafficking, urban growth, refugees and special Third World problems such as capital flight. (Gordon Barthos, “U.N. urged to set up council to deal with crises,” The Toronto Star, 30 September 1987, p.A28.)

K. Bajpai, op. cit.

One of the obvious criticisms of the UNDP definition was that it left the definition and scope of human security too broad. Defenders of the report, however, believe that a broad definition is both necessary and desirable given the wider constituency of the UN. Other definitions of human security linked it even more explicitly to human rights and humanitarian law. This reflected a new international climate marked by changing norms of state sovereignty with particular regard to human rights protection.

One critic of the UNDP report was the Canadian Government under the foreign policy leadership of Lloyd Axworthy. While acknowledging the Report as the source of the “specific phrase” human security, Canada critiqued it for focusing too much on threats associated with underdevelopment and ignoring “human insecurity resulting from violent conflict.” In the Canadian view, human security is “security of the people” and the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions are the “core elements” of the doctrine of human security. “The concept of human security has increasingly centered on the human costs of violent conflict.” This understanding of human security was shared by a few other like-minded middle powers, such as Norway, which joined hands with Ottawa in establishing a Human Security Partnership. The partnership identified a nine-point agenda of human security focused on land-mines, formation of an International Criminal Court, human rights, international humanitarian law, women and children in armed conflict, small arms proliferation, child soldiers, child labour and northern co-operation.

A different understanding of human security, predating the Canadian formulation, was developed by Tokyo. In a speech to the 50th anniversary special session of the UN General Assembly in October 1995, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama advocated human security as a new strategy for the UN. Although he provided few specifics as to the measures to implement it, Japanese media reports viewed the concept as “a new approach intended to redefine the concept of security, which so far has been understood largely in terms of individual states, as a way of further protecting the security and rights of each person.” Striking a similar tone to the subsequent Canadian formulation, the editorial viewed human security as a conceptual tool for addressing the growing incidence of civil conflicts around the world, and the human costs, such as starvation and genocide, associated with it.

But official statements by Japan on human security came to reveal important areas of disagreement with the Canadian formulation. While acknowledging that “[t]here are two basic aspects to human security – freedom from fear and freedom from want,” the Japanese Foreign Ministry criticized those who “focus solely” on the first aspect, and related initiatives such as control of small arms and prosecution of war crimes. While the latter is important:

In Japan’s view, however, human security is a much broader concept. We believe that freedom from want is no less critical than freedom from fear. So long as its objectives are to


7 Ibid.
ensure the survival and dignity of individuals as human beings, it is necessary to go beyond thinking of human security solely in terms of protecting human life in conflict situations.

It is tempting to see the divergent perspectives on human security, such as those held by Japan and Canada, as symptomatic of a familiar schism between Western liberalism and “Asian values”. But this would be misleading. Disagreements about human security are as much West-West and East-East as East-West. They reflect genuine differences on philosophical and practical grounds. Broadly stated, the debate about human security concerns the separation of direct physical violence from “structural violence”. Astrid Suhre has advocated a notion of human security that stresses “vulnerability” as its defining feature, which in turn is understood with reference to three categories of victims: those of war and internal conflict; those living at or below subsistence levels and victims of natural disaster. \(^{11}\) Dr. Sverre Lodgaard of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, on the other hand, has pleaded for a narrower definition of human security. In his view, human security should not be mixed with human development. Nor should it be about natural disasters, or “precarious human conditions” such as hunger, disease and environmental contamination. The key defining criteria of human security is “vulnerability to physical violence during conflict”. His rationale for a narrower definition is important to note. Security concerns arise when the threat of violence is present, but not all cases of socio-economic disaster lead to violent action; hence they should not be placed under the rubric of human security. Second, security questions are always “political” in the sense that they involve a degree of human agency and control. Natural disasters are rarely preventable, they remain outside human control. Humanitarian aid, on the other hand, is best pursued in a “depoliticised” manner, “cutting clear of political objectives and security concerns”, and offered “under the banner of impartiality and neutrality”. In this sense, “the concept of human security had better be confined to freedom from fear of man-made physical violence, also referred to as direct, personal violence.” A broader understanding of human security as freedom from structural violence will undermine the clarity of the notion and make it difficult to develop priorities and devise effective policy responses. \(^{12}\)

Many countries in Asia have embraced a broader conception of human security, \(^{13}\) rather than the Canadian/Norwegian formulation. This accords with existing conceptions of comprehensive security in Asia, although there are, as will be seen later, some important differences between the two. The Japanese formulation also renders the concept of human security less controversial for Asia Pacific governments suspicious of, and uncomfortable with, the close association between human security and human rights promotion and humanitarian intervention.

Indeed, the “human need” aspect of human security has been especially salient in the Asia Pacific context in the aftermath of the regional economic crisis. The crisis dramatically increased the

---

12 Lodgaard, op. cit..
incidence of poverty, undermined the fruits of decades of development, caused widespread political instability (the most dramatic case being Indonesia), and aggravated economic competition and inter-state tensions over refugees and illegal migration. It also underscored the need for good governance (to the extent that corruption, nepotism and cronyism was blamed for the crisis) and environmentally sustainable development (especially in the wake of the forest fires in the region attributed to reckless development and corruption). Moreover, the crisis underscored the crucial need for social safety nets for the poor, something ignored in the heady days of growth. In fact, a major advocate of human security in Asia, former Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuan of Thailand, has explicitly linked the concept to the need for social safety nets in the wake of the regional economic downturn.\footnote{Surin Pitsuan, “Keynote Address: ASEAN Vision 2020. Strengthening Human Security in the Aftermath of the Economic Crisis”, in Pranee Thiparat, ed., The Quest for Human Security, op. cit. See also, The Asian Crisis and Human Security: An Intellectual Dialogue on Building Asia’s Tomorrow (Tokyo: Japan Centre for International Exchange, 1999); Sustainable Development and Human Security: Second Intellectual Dialogue on Building Asia’s Tomorrow (Tokyo: Japan Centre for International Exchange, and Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999).}

While Asian governments generally prefer a need-oriented human security approach differences remain over the extent to which human security should be defined primarily as such, without incorporating those rights-protective elements that speak to freedom from fear. Countries such as Japan and Thailand do not see the two as being mutual exclusive; in fact Thailand in its domestic arena has made a clear attempt to reconcile freedom from want (in the sense of its stress on social safety nets) with freedom from fear (in the sense of developing a more rights-protective political system). While human security must be geared first and foremost to human need, the Thai approach under the Chuan Leekpai government at least did not see a contradiction between this and the safety and dignity of the individual protected through a political system geared to human rights and democracy.

A good deal of the controversy about human security today arises from a perception that the notion, at least in its Western usage, reflects the individualistic ethos of liberal democracy. Thus, some understandings of human security see it as integral to the West’s campaign for human rights and liberal democracy. This, at least to a certain Asian mindset, conflicts with the old “Asian approach to human rights” developed in the heydays of the “universalism versus cultural relativism” debates about human rights in Asia.

In the early 1990s, in response to a perceived Western onslaught on human rights and democratisation, some Asian governments argued that the definition and promotion of human rights should be subjected to the different cultural contexts and historical experiences of Asia. Moreover, they championed the principle of “non-selectivity”, or that human rights should not selectively focus on political rights, and maintained that the promotion of human rights should respect the communitarian ethos of Asian societies, founded upon an allegedly “society-before -the-self” tradition.\footnote{Amitav Acharya, Human Rights in Southeast Asia: Dilemmas for Foreign Policy, Eastern Asia Policy Papers, no.11 (Toronto: University of Toronto – York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1995).} Does the contemporary notion of human security undermine “non-selectivity” and “communitarian ethic”? A brief review of this debate in ASEAN may be worthwhile here.

The ASEAN states' considered the rising prominence of human rights in recent years as a direct result of the end of the Cold War. The anti-communist thrust of Western policy, which tolerated blatant human rights abuses by pro-Western Asian governments in the past, is no more. Instead, promotion of human rights constitute the core element of the "New World Order". As Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's elder statesman, put it in an Asian context:

Unfortunately, with the end of the Cold War, U.S. policies toward China, Japan and the countries of East Asia have not been guided by strategic and economic considerations as they
used to be. Issues of human rights and democracy have become an obsession with the U.S.
media, Congress and the administration."\(^{16}\)

A number of Western policy concepts and instruments underscore the growing salience of human rights. These include humanitarian intervention (collective military intervention against governments charged with gross violation of their citizens' human rights), the prior importance of self-determination (for persecuted ethnic minorities) over sovereignty, the spread of democratic governance (related to the Liberal belief that this will reduce warfare in the international system, since, according to this belief, "democracies do not fight each other"), and the use of aid conditionality (linking development assistance with human rights record of aid recipients). These instruments have a direct bearing on the economic, social and political conditions in the developing countries. As such, they suggest a shift from the relatively simplistic East-West geopolitical framework of the Cold War period to a more complex setting in which North-South conflicts over humanitarian norms have become the major faultline of the international system.

But while the promotion of human rights standards by the West is justified in the name of their universality, some ASEAN policy-makers see this as a highly selective exercise. Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng of Singapore argues that "Concern for human rights [in the West] has always been balanced against other national interests."\(^{17}\) Attesting to "hypocrisy" in the West's application of its human rights standards, a senior Singaporean Foreign Ministry official contends:

...while human rights campaigns are often portrayed as an absolute moral good to be implemented without qualification, in practice Western governments's are prudent and selective. For example, given their powerful vested interest in secure and stable oil supplies from Saudi Arabia, Western governments have not tried to export their standards of human rights or democracy to that country, for they know that any alternative to the stable rule of the Saudi government would very likely be bad for the West.\(^{18}\)

To underscore this point further, the Saudi case is contrasted with Algeria, where the Western governments acquiesced with a military coup which overthrew an elected government with a strongly Islamic orientation.\(^{19}\) In this context, the enforcement of human rights standards by the West are not only selective, but also intensely political. Ali Alatas, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, wonders whether there are any "disguised political purposes" behind the West's human rights campaign, designed to "serve as a pretext to wage a political campaign against another country".\(^{20}\) Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammed, has provided his own answer to this question, by casting human rights as an instrument of dependency. Citing the example of the former communist states of Eastern Europe, Mahathir contends that the campaign of human rights and democracy is a prescription for disruption and chaos in weaker countries, a campaign which makes the target ever more dependent on the donor nations of the West.

Furthermore, the Western campaign for human rights is reflective of the power disparities in the international system. As the Malaysian Foreign Minister Ahmed Badawi put it: "Attempts to impose the standard of one side on the other...tread upon the sovereignty of nations."\(^{21}\) As the current Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia warns that "In a world where domination of the strong over the weak and interference between states are still a painful reality, no country or group of

---

16. Michael Richardson, "For the Planners, a Time to Decide", International Herald Tribune, 18 November 1993, p.5
19. This point is made by a senior Singapore Foreign Ministry official. See Kishore Mahbubani, "The West and the Rest", The National Interest (Summer 1992),p.9
countries should arrogate unto itself the role of judge, jury and executioner over other countries on this critical and sensitive issue.\textsuperscript{22}

The characterisation of West's human rights campaign as being selective and self-seeking is followed by a plea against accepting the definition of human rights in terms of Western values, norms and application procedures. "Human rights questions", contends Singapore, do not lend themselves to neat general formulas.\textsuperscript{23} Instead, as the Thai Prime Minister argues, implementation of human rights should "vary because of differences in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds".\textsuperscript{24} At the Bangkok Regional Preparatory Meeting, ASEAN worked with other like-minded Asian countries (including China) to draft a declaration which stated that human rights "must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.\textsuperscript{25} To reinforce this point, Singapore's Foreign Minister draws attention not only to differences between the West and the Third World, but among the Western countries as well. Differing standards of human rights could result from different stages of development. The definition of human rights has changed over time and influenced by centuries of history and culture. Britain, France and the US had taken over 200 years to evolve into full democracies. "Can we therefore expect the citizens of many newly-independent countries of this century to acquire the same rights as those enjoyed by the developed nations when they lack the economic, educational and social pre-conditions to exercise such rights fully?\textsuperscript{26}

Against this backdrop, what might be called an ASEAN position on human rights combines aspects of cultural relativism, communitarianism and developmentalism. The cultural relativist viewpoint was forcefully argued by Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammed, who claimed to speak for the entire ASEAN membership:

"The West tells us that democratic freedom and human rights are fundamental for the achievement of economic and social development. We in ASEAN never disputed that democracy for the people and opportunity for the individual to develop his or her own greatest potentials are indeed important principles. We disagree, however, that political systems qualify as democratic only when they measure up to certain particular yardsticks. Similarly, the norms and percepts for the observance of human rights vary from society to society and from one period to another within the same society. Nobody can claim to have the monopoly of wisdom to determine what is right and proper for all countries and peoples. It would be condescending, to say the least, and suspect for the West to preach human rights to us in the East.\textsuperscript{27}

Indonesia's leaders have further stressed the communitarian underpinnings of human rights. While the concept of human rights may be universal, the standards imposed by the West to judge human rights performance is not so. Ali Alatas, speaking at the Vienna UN World Conference on Human Rights, argued that Indonesia and the developing world have to maintain a balance between an "individualistic approach" to human rights and the interests of the society as a whole. "Without such a balance, the rights of the community as a whole can be denied, which can lead to instability and even anarchy."\textsuperscript{28} Singapore goes further by invoking the Confucian principle of "community over self",\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{22} "Alatas: no nation can judge others on human rights", 16 June 1993, p.1
\textsuperscript{23} "Take pragmatic line on human rights: Kan Seng", \textit{The Straits Times}, 17 June 1993, p.1
\textsuperscript{25} "Vienna Showdown", \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}, 17 June 1993, p.17
\textsuperscript{26} "Take pragmatic line on human rights: Kan Seng", \textit{The Straits Times}, 17 June 1993, p.1
\textsuperscript{27} Cited in \textit{New Straits Times} (Kuala Lumpur), 20 July 1991, p.1
\textsuperscript{28} "Alatas: no nation can judge others on human rights", 16 June 1993, p.1
\textsuperscript{29} Mahbubani, p.15. Such an emphasis on communitarianism has not escaped criticism. According to one critic: "The pre-industrial societies of Asia, as elsewhere, did place community and the obligation to it ahead of individuals and their rights. But this observation does not license a leap to the claim that modern East Asian societies are consequently not suited to the observance of human rights or liberal democracy because of residual
while ASEAN Foreign Ministers collectively support Alatas' idea of "balance" which is necessary not only to ensure "freedom, progress and national stability" within the region, but also to create a political framework "through which many individual rights are realised".  

A communitarian approach to human rights is also essential if the state is to fulfill its developmental objectives. To ensure economic growth, contends Mahathir, ASEAN states have been correct in placing "a high premium on political stability by managing a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of society as a whole." The multi-ethnic composition of states in Southeast Asia and the sensitive relationship between the dominant and minority ethnic groups adds to the need for governments to emphasise social stability and national security by exercising strict control over media and freedom of speech. Singapore and Malaysia have openly asserted the need for such control, citing examples from the past when inflammatory racial speeches had sparked ethnic riots (especially the 1969 racial riots in Malaysia).  

The salience of developmental objectives justify the need for a conception of human rights based on the principle of "non-selectivity", or the notion that political freedom and justiciable rights should not be stressed over the economic and the social. At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, Malaysia called for a universal conception of human rights to go beyond political rights, and establish "particularly its linkage with development". ASEAN Foreign Ministers, meeting in Singapore in July 1993, issued a statement contending that:

...human rights are interrelated and indivisible comprising civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. These rights of equal importance. They should be addressed in a balanced and integrated manner and protected and promoted with due regard for specific cultural, social, economic and political circumstances...the promotion and protection of human rights should not be politicised.

In championing "non-selectivity", ASEAN states' seek to detract attention from the emphasis placed by the West on the restrictions on political rights within ASEAN. Thus, as a report issued by the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), argues, "The emphasis placed by ASEAN countries on development and basic needs is a testament to the underpinnings of human rights in the region, particularly the right to development and the necessities of life in such areas as food, health, shelter education and employment." The argument is that without fulfilling the basic economic needs of their societies, developing countries cannot ensure the necessary conditions under which the political rights of citizens could be upheld. "Only those who have forgotten the pangs of hunger will think of consoling the hungry by telling them that they should be free before they can eat...economic growth is the necessary foundation of any system that claims to advance human dignity and that order and stability and essential for development."

At the same time, a linkage between human rights and development also provides a convenient and powerful justification for continued authoritarianism. An excessive concern with political liberalisation and human rights could subvert developmental objectives of the state. As Lee Kuan Yew argues: "The exuberance of democracy leads to undisciplined and disorderly conditions which are inimical to development."

Confucianism. This ignores the historical discrediting of Confucianism, the emergence of revolutionary left-wing politics and the development in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore of the most un-Confucian practices associated with rapid industrial growth such as corporate conglomerates with 12-hour working days for the executives, the breaking up of community through massive urbanization, the necessity of parliamentarism for legitimacy, government by military elites and the militarization of politics. Tremewan, p.27

30. Joint Communique of the Twenty-Sixth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Singapore, 23-24 July 1993, p.8
32. "KL will continue to speak up: foreign minister", The Straits Times, 22 June 1993, p.8
34. The Environment and Human Rights in International Relations (Jakarta: ASEAN-ISIS, undated),pp.13-15
36. China News (Taipei), 21 November 1992
leaders, (such as President Ramos of the Philippines, who reminded Mr Lee that the authoritarianism of the Marcos era contributed in no small way to the country’s economic ruin) there is recognition that the Western campaign on human rights could undermine the hitherto favourable economic climate for ASEAN. Mahathir in particular sees Western attempts to link economic relations with human rights as a new set of "conditionalities and protectionism by other means", aimed at undermining the economic prosperity and well-being of the East Asian region.  

Strictly speaking, human security calls for a shift of security thinking from state security to security of the people, which include both individuals and communities. The distinction between “people” and “individual” is not unimportant. A quick review of recent responses by the international community to human security challenges shows that they have addressed crisis situations in which the survival and well-being of entire societies or communities have been at risk. Human security protects the existence of entire social groups (including children, civilians in a war zone, ethnic minorities, etc.) from persecution and violence. This understanding of human security is eminently compatible with the alleged communitarian ethos of certain non-Western societies. Governments seriously believing in the society-above-the-self principle should have good reason to welcome the notion of human security as a prop to their cause, rather than as a threat to their belief and approach.

Neither is human security “Western” in the sense that it ignores the issue of economic rights, or the “right to development” that was once put forward as a counter to the Western emphasis on political rights during the heydays of the “Asian view on human rights. The “development as freedom” perspective of Amartya Sen (1999), a Nobel Laureate in economics and a member of the International Commission on Human Security, further underscores the crucial link between freedom from fear and freedom from want.

While not ignoring the rights of societies and non-political rights, human security does place a premium on human dignity. No serious advocate of human security would condone the pursuit of economic and communitarian approaches at the expense of the safety and dignity of individuals and peoples. The tolerance of human rights violations for the sake of economic development or social stability has no place in the human security paradigm.

This emphasis on human dignity should not be surprising; for it owes to four major developments which have converged behind the emergence of the human security idea. These are: (1) the growing incidence of civil wars and intra-state conflicts which now far outnumber conventional inter-state conflicts, (with the former more likely to cause civilian suffering than the latter); (2) the spread of democratization (democracies constitute a majority of state actors in the international system today); (3) the advent of humanitarian intervention, or the principle that the international community is justified in intervening in the internal affairs of states accused of gross violation of human rights; and (4) the widespread poverty, unemployment and social dislocation caused by the economic crises of the 1990s which have been blamed on the dynamics of globalization. Indeed, appreciating these developments as four related but different sources of the human security idea helps our understanding of the existing variations in the interpretation of the concept. For example, the Canadian notion is inspired by, and pays more attention to, the first and the second developments, while the fourth development motivates Japan and Thailand in their approach to human security. These approaches should thus not be seen as mutually-exclusive, but as complimentary and evolving understandings of a complex and larger paradigm of human security in response to emerging challenges, responses which collectively shift the focus of security analysis from national, state and regime security to the society and the individual.

In short, while differences in the understanding of human security and the relative emphasis on its key principles persist, these are not totally irreconcilable. The extent of such reconciliation, and the prospects for human security becoming the dominant security paradigm in Asia depends substantially on how human security as an emerging norm interacts with and impacts on existing beliefs and practices concerning security in the region. The acceptance and institutionalisation of emerging norms depend very much on how they resonate with existing norms and social identities. Thus, any

---

37. The Straits Times, 23 July 1991
consideration of human security in the Asia Pacific must examine its relationship with two prior ideas
which have had a considerable impact on security beliefs and practices in the region: the ideas of
Comprehensive Security and Cooperative Security.

Human Security, Comprehensive Security and Cooperative Security

At least in terms of a wider spectrum of security threats, the concept that comes closest to human
security is comprehensive security. The latter can claim even more of an Asian root, having been
developed by Japan. During the Cold War, several Southeast Asian governments also formulated
their own versions of comprehensive security. Comprehensive security in Japan reflected a concern
with economic issues, including the supply of international energy and food. It also reflected Japan’s
vulnerability to “major threats to economic livelihood and standard of living of the Japanese people
from the denial of access to markets for Japanese goods, the expropriation of Japanese property and
exclusion of Japanese investment projects abroad, and from a withholding of vital supplies of goods,
materials and services to Japanese enterprises home and abroad.” In ASEAN, comprehensive security
doctrines similarly focused on economic insecurities, but added important political dimensions related
to domestic stability and regime survival.

For comparison, economic and food security are the first two elements of the UNDP’s seven
elements of human security. Ironically, few doctrines of comprehensive security in Asia have been
more comprehensive than the UNDP’s seven elements. Asian formulations of the concept during the
Cold War period accorded little space to personal, community, and political security, the latter in the
sense of protection of basic human rights and freedom. This underscores a key variation between
comprehensive security and human security.

Comprehensive security in Asia Pacific was a fundamentally statist notion despite claiming to
proffer an alternative to conventional national security. Moreover, while it went beyond military
threats, military defence remained a core component of comprehensive security. The Japanese idea of
comprehensive security was widely criticised for rationalising its defence spending. Its strategic rationale
were clear from the official Report on Comprehensive National Security submitted to Prime Minister
Zenko Suzuki in July 1980. The report enumerated six objectives of comprehensive security: (1) closer
military and general cooperation with the US; (2) increasing Japan’s own capacity to defend its own
territory; (3) improvement in relations with China and the USSR; (4) attainment of energy security; (5)
achievement of food security; and (6) measures for coping with major earthquakes. Similarly,
comprehensive security in various ASEAN member states put a premium on state security. A key
variation, as hinted earlier, was that unlike in Japan, state security in many ASEAN countries masked a
concern with regime survival and legitimation, reflecting differences in their domestic political systems.
Thus, national resilience in Indonesia represented, among other things, its “military-
dominated...regime’s quest for legitimacy and survival in the face of domestic competition for political
power.” Though comprehensive security was not used by ASEAN governments to justify higher
defence spending in the manner of Japan, achieving military strength remained one of its core priorities.
Thus, Malaysia’s defence minister proclaimed in 1992 that a comprehensively secure country had “to be
politically stable, economically strong and resilient...and last, but not the least...militarily sufficient.”

Singapore developed its own doctrine of “Total Defence”, in which several non-military instruments,
such as psychological defence, augmented military deterrence and defensive capabilities as part of the

---

39 J.W.M. Chapman, R. Drifte and I.T.M. Gow, Japan’s Quest for Comprehensive Security (London: Frances
Pinter, 1983): 149.
40 Ibid., xvii.
41 Muthiah Alagappa, “Comprehensive Security: Interpretations in ASEAN Countries,” in Asian Security
Issues: Regional and Global, eds. Robert A. Scalapino, et al., (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East
42 Najib Tun Razak, Address to the Chief of Staff Conference, Darwin Australia 1992.
overall national security strategy. In the case of Indonesia, national resilience consisted of “ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural and security-cum-defence aspects.”

In an important sense, the existence of a prior notion of comprehensive security facilitates the acceptance of the emerging idea of human security in Asia. Comprehensive security has laid the groundwork for a security concept that goes beyond defending against external military threats. But human security is certainly not new wine in old bottle. Comprehensive security answered to the question: which threats to state security. The core question of human security is “whose security”? The political element of comprehensive security focused on “order” and “stability”. Human security, on the other hand, is geared more to justice and emancipation. Thus, an important challenge for regional policy-makers is to redefine comprehensive security in ways that goes beyond a simple horizontal broadening of the threat spectrum, or “what the state should be protected from”. To secure greater synergy with human security, the comprehensive security framework also needs to be reworked and extended vertically - “who should be protected against such threats”, with individuals and communities placed at the heart of this extended framework.

Indeed, recent attempts by some of the Asia-Pacific region’s think tanks to reformulate comprehensive security have sought to dilute its statist bias. The Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), a non-governmental grouping that includes both Asian and Western policy think tanks, says that “...a problem may be regarded as a comprehensive security problem when it is perceived as threatening, or having the potential to threaten, the security of the vital interests or core values of the person, the community, or the state.” But this effort still falls short, and important ambiguities remain. If the values of the person conflicts with the values of the state, who prevails? And who defines what the values of the community are?

Unlike comprehensive security, the idea of cooperative security emerged from the ashes of the Cold War. It represented an adaptation from the notion of common security developed in Europe through the institutional mechanism of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

43 Alagappa, op. cit., 62.
46 The CSCAP Memorandum defines comprehensive security as “pursuit of sustainable security in all fields (personal, political, economic, social, cultural, military, environmental) in both the domestic and external spheres, essentially through cooperative means”. The inclusion of “personal security” notwithstanding, it is hard to accept that even this reformulation of comprehensive security captures the post-statist, if not anti-statist, orientation of the human security idea. While the “security of person” is placed alongside security of “community” and “state”, with all the three elements viewed to be “multifaceted and multidimensional”, there is little question as to the relative salience of the three elements. A notion of comprehensive security is warranted “because...[T]he vital interests or core values of states are varied and comprehensive, as are the instruments and processes used to protect them and the capabilities required to assure them.” CSCAP, op. cit, p.3. This formulation hardly appears to be a people-oriented notion of security. To say that individual, community, and state each matter and have their place in the security paradigm is not the same as saying that its people who matter most – which is the essence of human security.

Cooperative security stipulates that security should be pursued multilaterally based on the principle of inclusiveness. Security policies should promote reassurance, rather than deterrence. Cooperative security also envisages a broad agenda of cooperation, encompassing military confidence-building, political dialogue and other forms of functional cooperation.

In a previous study, David Dewitt and myself defined the concept in the following terms:

There are three principal themes which form the core of cooperative security. The first is the acceptance and practice of inclusivity, referring both to participants - the non-like-minded as well as the like-minded - and to subject matter, thereby broadening the security discourse beyond direct and traditional military threat to encompass nonconventional security challenges such as environmental, ecological, and demographic phenomena that can exacerbate inter-state relations and even promote the application of armed force. The second is the promotion of "habits of dialogue" whereby the regional actors acknowledge the long-term benefits of undertaking regular consultations with the possibilities of establishing more formal and even official decision-making multilateral meetings on a regular schedule. The third is the premise that many - perhaps most - questions of security no longer are amenable to unilateral action but require cooperative approaches across actors within a country and as well as cross-national and intergovernmental.

Thus defined, cooperative security repudiates approaches to security that rely exclusively or predominantly on balance of power mechanisms. It emphasizes transparency over of secrecy and dialogue over confrontation. While a balance of power approach is ultimately reliant upon an ability to wage war, cooperative security relies on techniques and processes of conflict-prevention, management and resolution. It views security in broader terms than just defence against military threats, although it does not ignore or minimise the importance of military-related issues in domestic and inter-state relations.


What are the implications of the human security idea for the pursuit of cooperative security in the Asia Pacific? Unlike cooperative security, human security is not an essentially multilateral notion. Although human security can be and has been multilaterally pursued, including the UN and potentially through regional groupings like ASEAN, ARF and APEC, there are aspects of human security which may undermine the unabashed emphasis of cooperative security on the core multilateral principle of
“inclusiveness”. Unlike cooperative security, human security is often a vision of the “like-minded”. While cooperative security is non-ideological, in certain hands, human security could become a potent and divisive ideological instrument.

The precursor to cooperative security, the common security idea in Europe, stressed human rights as an important condition of inter-state confidence within an inclusive multilateral framework. The CSCE to an unprecedented extent linked the participation of member states in regional multilateral security cooperation with their domestic political behaviour. This linkage caused anxieties in the minds of some Asia Pacific governments about endorsing a OSCE-like multilateral security arrangement for Asia, and was therefore dropped when cooperative security was adapted from the European common security experience. As a consequence, the ARF has not developed anything like the CSCE/OCSE’s “human dimension”, which deals with issues related to human rights, democratisation and self-determination.

Thus, a key challenge for Asia Pacific policymakers is how to reconcile the inclusiveness principle of cooperative security and the like-mindedness criteria evident in the promotion of human security. In the absence of a common ground, attempts to push human security could conflict with the work of institutions whose ostensible goal has been to achieve “security with the adversary, rather than against them”.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has identified several obstacles to the promotion of human security. These include misgivings that the notion masks a “Western” political agenda not suitable, perhaps even detrimental, to the region. A second source of scepticism relates to a belief that existing concepts of security, such as comprehensive security, have addressed the same range of challenges that are highlighted by the human security framework. A third barrier is the fear that pursuit of human security – with its perceived association with humanitarian intervention - through regional collective action would undermine state sovereignty and the doctrine of non-interference, which continues to be the guiding principle of international relations in the region.

This chapter has shown that some of these concerns are misplaced. Unlike other security concepts of the post-Cold War era, human security can claim a significant Asian pedigree. Moreover, the belief that human security offers nothing new to a region which might have invented the notion of comprehensive security is flawed. Despite sharing some attributes with existing Asian security concepts such as comprehensive and cooperative security, human security should be seen as a broader notion which goes the furthest in stressing human freedom as the core element of security. Human security demands a much more people-centred approach that the old notion of comprehensive security which privileged state and regime security. As such, whether governments in the region will shift towards such a people-oriented approach will depend very much on their domestic political agenda; greater democratisation will make the region more receptive to human security defined as freedom from fear as much as freedom from want.

Not all responses to human insecurity require intervention against the sovereign state. Collective action is more acceptable when it is viewed as a matter of pooling sovereignty than diluting it. Concerns with sovereignty are likely to be strongest, however, when dealing with situations of violent conflict. And it is precisely in this area that Asian states urgently need to develop policies and resources to respond to threats to human security.

The Canadian approach has been found to have fewer adherents in Asia than the Japanese perspective. But there is now a real need to view the two understandings as being complimentary and mutually-reinforcing. Promoting human security through a need-based approach does not negate the case for pursuing human security as a ways of reducing the costs of violent conflict, especially in a region where the danger of conflict, both internal and inter-state, remains very, very real. There has been increasing Asian acceptance of some of the measures that ameliorate the human costs of violent conflict, such as the international norms and agreements concerning land mines, small arms and child
soldiers. But thus far in the Asia Pacific, freedom from want has outweighed freedom from fear in the understanding and promotion of human security. Some Asian governments and analysts were right in criticizing the initial Canadian approach as being too narrow, and in stressing the understanding of human security as freedom from want. But they should also bear in mind that efforts to pursue the latter dimension could not succeed if violent eruptions of the region’s conflict zones were to extract a severe human cost which could spill-over to their own domestic arenas and immediate neighbourhoods. Pursuing freedom from want in the absence of freedom from fear is bound to be of limited utility.

**Human Security and Transnational Challenges: The Case of Forced Migration**

Let us now examine how the idea of human security correspond to the evolution and function of the international refugee regime centred around the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), especially when it comes to employing the human security concept to frame a new approach for the institution. This supports my claim that mainstream IR theory follows real world dynamics, and that policymaking by national elites and international institutions is often shaped by prevailing dominant theoretical assumptions and that how a supposedly universal concept of human security remains contested in this vital transnational issue area.

Despite acknowledging forced migration as a threat to international order, the international community has had great difficulties in translating its normative elements into policy responses of liberal democracies to this challenge. As a review of the asylum policies liberal democratic states by Matthew Gibney concludes:

> In the face of citizen anxiety about the economic, cultural and political costs of admitting strangers…many states have done little more than fulfil their international law duty not to return to a dangerous state or territory (refouler) the seekers of asylum who make it to their borders…Many states have simply avoided its full demands by using indiscriminate measures – such as visa denials and carrier sanctions – to prevent asylum seekers from arriving at frontiers where they can claim entry…Worse still, the principle does nothing to encourage states to deal with the actual causes of forced migration, particularly those states that are not faced with large numbers of asylum applicants. (Gibney 1999:169-70)

Such criticisms also raise the question whether the liberal vision of international order is able to sustain an efficient and just refugee protection regime. Is there really much evidence to support its claim, whether explicit or implicit, that liberal democracies are better able to offer protection to forced migrants than non-democracies? Or are liberal democracies because of their inherent desire for unity and sharing of values more likely to turn into exclusionary alliances such as the EU?

It hardly requires repeating here that like most international institutions of the modern era, the origin of the UNHCR had to do with the concerns and interests of Western nations. As Adelman argues, the UNHCR’s basis template” was laid down in the Western effort to deal with people fleeing first Nazi and then communist persecution (Adelman 2001:11). This in turn shaped the definition of what is a refugee, enshrined in the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defined refugees as a group who for a variety of reasons are outside of their country of nationality and unable to return to it. (Gibney 1999:170). Thus definition instituted a cognitive prior that shaped the UNHCR’s initial policies and resisted recent attempts to adapt it to the new realities of the global refugee
environment, especially the issue of internal displaced persons, which would more accurately
describe conditions in the non-Western world. IDPs are a product of internal conflicts, which
does not fit within the security framework of the state-centric mainstream IR theories, but
which are the predominant form of conflict and insecurity in the Third World (Ayoob 1995).
Yet another example of the Westerncentrism in the international forced refugee regime is the
difficulties of reorienting UNHCR and Western countries to accept what Acharya and Dewitt
have labelled as the “distributive-developmental approach” to burden-sharing, relative to the
alliance and multilateral approaches. (Further elaboration in Acharya and Dewitt, 1995;
Acharya and Dewitt 1997)

Let me now turn briefly to some recent attempts to develop concepts and approaches that
may better equip mainstream IR theories to deal with transnational issues like forced
migration. I will focus on examine two such attempts, both of which come from security
studies: human security and securitization theory of the Copenhagen school.

Human Security: The meaning and policy implications of human security, introduced in
the UNDP’s Human Development Report in 1994, remains contested, with one school
favouring freedom from fear, and the other stressing freedom from want. Although some
constructivist and critical approaches claim it as their own, human security falls squarely
within the liberal theory of international relations order for three main reasons. The first is its
claim that the individual, rather than the state, should be the main referent object of security.
Human security acknowledges that there can be important tensions between state security and
the security of the citizens. Second, there is a close link between human security and the human
rights. Third, human security at least in some formulations subsumes humanitarian
intervention, an integral part of liberal internationalism.

The concept was introduced into the UNHCR by Sadako Ogata as the head of the
organisation. It reflected Ogata’s background in Japanese officialdom, as Japan was one of
the nations that had endorsed and promoted the concept of human security. Later she was to
come the co-chair of the Commission on Human Security set up by the UN to develop a
common understanding of the concept and prescribe policy measures to implement it. The
1997 issue of The State of the World’s Refugees, an initiative of Mrs Ogata as High
Commissioner, was subtitled A Humanitarian Agenda, and devoted an entire chapter to
“Safeguarding Human Security”. It argued that

Refugee movements and other forms of displacement provide a useful (if imprecise)
barometer of human security and insecurity. As a rule, people do not abandon their homes
and flee from their own country or community unless they are confronted with serious
threats to their life and liberty. Flight is the ultimate survival strategy… (UNHCR 1997)

In a speech at Bergen in May 1999, Ogata argued that while “‘Human security’ is not defined
in international law…it does provide a useful complement to the legally based concept of
refugee protection” (Ogata 1999:1). Observing that the concept of human security
“today…commands the same respect and attention as the more traditional one of state
security” (Ogata 1999: 2), she also argued that the concept accurately described the new
challenges her office faced:

The importance of human security as a concept is clear if you consider that my Office
deals on a daily basis with people who are, by definition, “insecure”. Refugees and
internally displaced people are a symptom of human insecurity crises. Because homes,
personal belongings and family ties are such as important part of everyday’s security, it
takes considerable pressure to force people to abandon them, and become refugees.
Refugees are doubly insecure: they flee because they are afraid; and in fleeing they start a precarious existence. (Ogata 1999:1-2)

Ogata went on to give a rather dramatic example of the refugees and human security:

To me, a powerful symbol of the tragic insecurity which pushes people to flee, and the fragile security they live as refugees, are the tractors on which so many ethnic Albanians flee Kosovo, and which you have certainly seen on TV screens. Refugees cling to their tractors. Tractors are often the only possession left to them; in many cases, they are their new home, on which they sleep and keep their children and travel; and surely they are the tangible sign of their hope to return home soon. (Ogata 1999:2)

The UNHCR’s embracing of the doctrine of human security did lead it to expand the scope of its mandate and operations, including involvement “in a range of activities which might have previously been considered beyond our mandate” (Ogata 1999:6). One such shift was of the concept of “safe havens”. As a UNHCR Working Group report put it in the context of the Bosnian crisis, “the overriding principle… should be to bring safety to the people, rather than to bring the people to safety.” (Cited in Stevens 2006) Howard Adelman argues that within the UNHCR, the human security approach led to “a shift in emphasis on the meaning of protection. Protection of refugees is now primarily defined as security of refugees and refugee operations rather than in terms of the legal asylum process.” (Adelman 2001:7) In the minds of critics, this shift had grave negative consequences. In a critical review of Ogata’s 2005 book: The Turbulent Decade, Jacob Stevens writes:

“The new framework for dealing with large refugee crises involves containment in camps and ‘safe havens’, quickly followed by repatriation….Fleeing from genocide, imperial aggression and civil war, only to be herded into camps or sent back to the country they were escaping, these asylum-seekers and returnees are part of a seemingly endless human tragedy. If it was originally a guarantor of refugee rights, unhcr (sic) has since mutated into a patron of these prisons of the stateless: a network of huge camps that can never meet any plausible ‘humanitarian’ standard, and yet somehow justify international funding for the agency.” (Stevens 2006).

Similar criticisms have been levelled against the two other new dimensions of the UNHCR’s role, preventive protection and temporary protection. The experience of Iraq and the Balkans influenced the rationale for preventive protection which recognises “the right to be allowed to remain in one’s home”, rather than be given asylum abroad. In essence, this meant keeping refugees in an area of active conflict. Temporary protection was just that, a temporary form of asylum which was meant to encourage European states to take in at least some of the refugees. It was a form of limited protection without rights, including the right to remain.

The impact of human security on the international forced migration regime should not be exaggerated. As the State of the World’s Refugees 2006 puts it, “Since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, state security concerns have come to dominate the migration debate, at times overshadowing the legitimate protection needs of individuals.” (UNHCR 2006: Introduction). But what is striking from the above discussion is that a seemingly benign notion like human security, whose moral purpose is to empower the individual, including people fleeing conflict and persecution, could end up creating further misery for them. This also attests to the difficulties MIRTs face in rising above their limitations by broadening the meaning and scope of security.
We see similar problems with securitization theory. Developed by the so-called Copenhagen School, this is a constructivist project, reflecting the orientation of its main exponent, Ole Waever. While there had been ongoing effort to redefine and broaden the traditional concept of security, securitisation theory dealt with questions such as how, and by whom, does security acquire a broader meaning. Securitization is a process under which a “security issue is posited (by a securitising actor) as a threat to the survival of some referent object (nation, state, the liberal international economic order, the rain forests), which is claimed to have a right to survive.” (Buzan and Waever 2005:71) Securitisation involves taking extraordinary measures, while desecuritization refers to the reverse process whereby issues already labelled as such are taken out of the emergency mode and put back into normal political sphere (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998).

Although European in origin, securitisation does not lack applicability to other regions. And while it was not formulated specifically for investigating issues related to forced migration, it does lend itself to an analysis of the politics of forced migration, especially to the extent it has shaped the immigration and asylum policies of Western nations. To quote from *The State of the World’s Refugees, 2006*:

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen a number of new developments with regard to refugee security. For one, UNHCR has become much more involved in security issues, especially as they affect ongoing operations. For another, the emergence of new security concerns of states, such as terrorism, has led to the ‘securitization’ of practices related to asylum. Lastly, issues of migration, development and relief have become more closely linked to security. Indeed, there is an increasingly widespread view that the viability of the refugee protection regime hinges on its real and perceived impact on international security. (UNHCR 2006, Chapter 3)

The above quote offers a graphic statement of the securitization process operating not just in the UNHCR itself, but also in the immigration, asylum, development and relief policies of individual nations, especially the Western donors and asylum providers. And this has dramatic consequences. To critics, the securitization dynamic evident in the shift in the UNHCR’s role from finding asylum to creating safe havens can also be seen as the ‘militarisation’ of its mandate and role at the expense of some of the fundamental objectives of the international forced migration regime such as asylum and refugee rights protection.

**Bibliography**


Krasner, Keohane and Katzenstein in the journal International Organization, identi


2008.


