Human Security and Intrinsic Biases: A New Domination

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Abstract: Human security has now come to establish itself as a widely accepted branch of security studies, which until the cold war had kept itself preoccupied with military understanding of security with state as the main referent object. Now the individual or the community at large, have become the point of reference and security broadened to include social, political, economic and environmental aspect. But the question is if this shift of focus has brought a change in the western-centrism of the whole concept. In this paper, we argue that though initially human security looked to be a point of departure from the unequal and biased international system, it was but a continuation of the same, indeed even more intensified.

Keywords: Human security, Western centricism, Military-Statist agenda, Non-Traditional understanding

INTRODUCTION

Two things are important to remember about security before we start off with any discussion about it. First, as Buzan [1] writes, like IR, ISS mainly is a western subject, largely done in North America, Europe and Australia with all of the western-centrisms that it entails. And therefore has an understandable western bias. Second, during most of the Cold War era, understanding security remained mainly confined to the military security of the borders of the territories. The state remained the main referent object through out. Security was defined by a largely military agenda of questions surrounding nuclear armaments and a widely embedded assumption that the Soviet Union posed a profound military and ideological threat to the West [1-3]. The alternative or non-traditional understandings of security emerged and came to be widely accepted only towards the later part of the Cold War, more precisely since late 1970s when the rivalry between the two super powers subsided. The scope of security studies and the understanding of security itself came to be broadened away from the military-statist agenda. Such alternative understandings of security originated in Europe which had turned out to be the battle ground in any probable conflict between the two super powers, and wanted a broader scope to come under the purview of security that would help ensure their own survival and vital interests. Economic and environmental securities became established, if controversial, and were joined in the 1990s by societal security, human security, food security and others.

In this paper, we shall deal with human security in detail. Our central argument is that though initially the shift from state-centric military understanding of security to a broader scope to include individual as the referent object and bring human, societal, food, economic, environmental securities under purview marked a departure from its general western centrism, in the years gone this trend has come to establish and institutionalize itself in a way that is no longer flexible, inclusive and relational. A new kind of western centrism has arisen we can say. The new concept of human security has come as a ground to intervene in the internal affairs of the developing world and further legitimize the liberal-democratic form of government. It has undermined the differences of history, region, culture, nationhood, language, society, and even, politics. And it has embarked upon a race of homogenization, a new form of imperialism in the name of development.

We first give a historical overview of the evolution of the concept of human security in the first section. In the second section, we put forward our central argument and the explanations therein.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The security studies during most of the cold war was more of Strategic studies in which all theorization and academic debates regarding security were shaped by the concern with military security, of the nation states. The whole subset of non-traditional security, human security included, owes back its

intellectual genesis to a tradition of Peace Researchers under the umbrella of security studies. Criticisms arouse to the strategic studies both from within and without in the form of Arms Control. The peace research aspect of Arms Control approached the whole subject from the standpoint of peace, both negative and positive. 'Peace research took a more radical view, analytically as well as politically, arguing that governments on the both sides of the Iron Curtain held their populations and the planet-hostages to nuclear disaster. This constituted 'humanity' or the individual as the referent object other than the state' [1]. It was the positive peace concept that actually later led to the broadening of the concept of security. Much is owed here to Johan Galtung and his concept of 'structural violence'. Galtung defines violence as the 'cause of the difference between the potential and the actual' realizations. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance [4]. Structural violence was then seen as unintended harm done to human beings as a process, working slowly as the way misery in general and hunger in particular, erode and finally kill human beings [5].

Structural violence and other such non traditional understandings of violence and peace gave a new dimension to security. Once established that violence might be generated from sources that lie not necessarily, and more often than not, in direct conflict and warfare, the need was for a broader scope of security that would secure not only the territorial boundaries and armaments of a state, but also, and more importantly, the people, from violence generating from the structures and affecting their very lives, was felt needed. Human insecurity results directly from existing structures of power that determine who enjoys the entitlement to security and who does not [6]. It was the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report (HDR), in which, Dr. Mahbub ul Haq first drew global attention to human security. 'People in rich nations seek security from the threat of crime, spread of deadly diseases, soil degradation, rising levels of pollution, the fear of losing their jobs' and so on, and those of poor nations 'demand liberation from continuing threat of hunger, disease and poverty' [7]. The Report changed the understanding of security in two fundamental ways, 'from an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security', and, 'from security through armaments to security through sustainable human development'. 'Freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' became the watchwords. 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).

The immediate contexts that led to such a drastic change in the scope of security must be understood here well. First, the cold war had come to an end by the last part of the decade of 80s. However, it had not heralded in an era of peace and wellbeing. Instead there was growing chaos; huge stocks of weapons, and once the mad nuclear race halted, attention went to the host of problems that had plagued the lives of the people at large and not just the states, developed and developing alike. In such circumstances the meaning of the security too had to be broadened so as to address these problems ranging from poverty, diseases like HIV AIDS, environmental degradation etc. Second, this time also saw the rise of a new international economic order and the revolutionizing impact of globalization. Now there was nothing called a local incident. Everything was interconnected and the socio-politico-economic condition of one place, its repercussions and any incident therein, affected the world at large. Hence was an even greater need was felt to address the issues hitherto unheard, especially in the third world or the so called failed states [6, 8, 9].

It is widely agreed in the academicia that the concept of human security has not a single coherent understanding. Instead it is claimed to be so vague and broad that it tends to lose its very integrity. 'Existing definitions of human security tend to be extraordinarily expansive and vague, encompassing everything from physical security to psychological well-being, which provides policymakers with little guidance in the prioritization of competing policy goals and academics little sense of what, exactly, is to be studied' [2]. However, we can not discount human security as such. It has significant accomplishments including anti-personnel land mines convention and the imminent creation of an international criminal court. Here we can put up a definition of human security as given by Sabina Alkire:

> "The objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfillment". [3]

While accepting this broad view of human security, we must simultaneously keep in mind few things. One, human security has fundamentally shifted the reference from state to individual or the community. Two, the present concept of security does not stand in opposition to the state nor implies its declining role. Most of the current work in fact argues that the state

remains the most effective guarantor of people's human security needs [10-12]. Three, human security has a close link with human development though they are not the same, "progress in one area enhances the chances of progress in the other" [3, 7]. Four, 'while material sufficiency lies at the core of human security, in addition the concept encompasses non-material dimensions to form a qualitative whole. The qualitative aspect is about the achievement of human dignity which incorporates personal autonomy, control over one's life and unhindered participation in the life of the community [6].

HUMAN SECURITY AND THE BIASES

Human security, with all its achievements and humanitarian claims, carries with it the age old western-centrism that has dominated all the important concepts in social sciences. In this section, we shall see this bias face of human security masked under the ornamental literature of the betterment of all humanity. First we put up the ethical and moral order inherent in the concept. Second, the universalisation of the liberal democratic system in the name of development is taken. Third, the role globalization has come to play, and the pretext for global intervention. Fourth, we present a conflict between Western and Asian understandings of human security. Fifth, human security is shown not as a paradigm shift, but a mere continuation of prior security policies of domination. Lastly, we argue human security being used as biopower by the developed western nations over the developing lot.

A) Human security is an 'ethico-political' concept [10]. Edward Newman [8] calls it a normative ethical, movement. It has set in motion a universalizing notion of common humanity. This is but politics of promoting a certain understanding of livelihood and lifestyle, values, freedom, rights, as universal and common to everyone. It undermines the specificity and individuality of different peoples. As we shall see in the following pages, this has been a major criticism that has come from the Asian nations. This, and the very idea of the 'individual man' at the centre of everything. This resonates more to Keynes's Economic man. As Des Gasper [13] writes, 'the term 'human' is inherently global in coverage and contains, for humans, a moral appeal. Combined with "human", the term "security" too makes a normative appeal….a message about basic life quality and a claim for its priority in policy'. Human security, thus, has ethical connotations, a kind of ethics that shows a certain kind of life and values as paramount and hence to be pursued, thereby, relegating others to the dark and undesirable.

B) As has already been said, human security has close inseparable links with human development, so much so that, today both the concepts are talked of together, not in isolation. And as an instrument of development, human security has relentlessly been an epitome of liberal economy. This completely fits in place if we look at the context when it arouse in its full vigour in the global domain. The cold war had left the global landscape with an intensification and reconfiguration of pre-existing economic, social and political inequalities. In such situation a drive to tackle these intensifying problems and a deep faith in liberal policies led to human security policy adoption. Neo-liberalism became the new mantra. And what does this ideology do? 'Neoliberal ideology presents a set of essentially local, western norms as universal (freedom based on private power and market, not collectivity or society)…….it supports global economic institutionalism (WTO, IMF, WB etc) and presents it as the universal path towards economic growth, and therefore towards development, for all humanity' [6]. So, human security served as a double edged sword to tackle the humanitarian problems, and that in a certain way, the liberal-democratic way. How far this 'false legitimacy' goes on is doubtful (Thomas, 2010). And once development becomes a security issue, traditional security actors- militaries, strategic studies experts, police etc- will have a privileged voice in dictating who should address human security concerns and in what manner [10].

Again to quote Caroline Thomas [6], the shift in focus to human security also highlights the importance of scrutinizing global processes that may affect, even jeopardize security, and the global governance structures which drive them. A proper understanding of the process of global economic integration and of the distribution of associated costs and benefits is crucial. Has this liberal global integration and universalisation heralded in an era of well-being and equity? 'The divide between developed and developing countries persists: a small subset of countries has remained at the top of the world income distribution, and only a handful of countries that started out poor have joined that high-income group….One of the most surprising results of human development research in recent years, confirmed in this Report, is the lack of a significant correlation between economic growth and improvements in health and education. Our research shows that this relationship is particularly weak at low and medium levels of the HDI [14]. The answer to the question would be a no. This shows two things. One, the liberal economic growth has not led nations to ensure for its people equitable, just and standard lives. Two, what this process has done is given rise to a global elite, similar in tastes and preferences. It has created 'a North in the South, just as a South in the North. This is part of a historical process underway for centuries: the expansion of capitalism across the globe. Technological developments speed up the process' [6]. The rest of the masses, almost four-fifth of the globe, lives and dies in scarcity, fear and want.

C) Globalization has given yet another dimension to this western-centrism. Globalization is an era of 'pervasive interconnectedness'. What happens in one part of the world equally and simultaneously affects every other part. What can be a better instance than the terrorist attack on the Twin towers on September 11, in New York, in which, of the casualties, more than two-thirds were non-Americans and which, within, hours began the process of devastation of another state in another part of the world. As bad plight of the people came to be regarded as security threat, globalization made this threat global. Now, the west became equally susceptible to the threats emanating from the backward socio-economic condition of the third world. Hence, there came 'a basic human obligation' to extend security to people 'perilously lacking' in it [8]. This obligation is seen to be fulfilled in two ways. One is the humanitarian intervention. UN Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, can authorize military action in response to severe atrocities and other humanitarian emergencies that it concludes constitute a threat to peace and security (NATO's intervention in Libya recently in March). Also are there unauthorized interventions like NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 on the pretext of protecting the minority Albanians. The other is the scrupulous politics of giving financial aid. This assistance was just 'an extension of western foreign policy' to control the developing economies for their own interest [15].

D) We are witnessing and we are part of the process whereby the ideology of dominant groups, presented as universal, is used to legitimize the marginalization and neutralization of competing visions and values… the global power favours a Western representation of events and processes [6]. That human security is generally understood in Western terms does not mean that there are no or have not been any alternative understandings, but the point is of being favoured. 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… 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 [16]. Canada defined human security as "safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats". Human security does not replace national security. They are rather mutually supportive and reinforcing. On the other hand, according to Japanese foreign policy, "human security covers all the menaces that threaten human survival, daily life and dignity,… and strengthens efforts to confront these threats" [17]. 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 which of it has come to prevail is clear to us.

E) Human security can be no longer considered to be a break from the traditional western security concepts. 'The moment where human security might have served as a heterodox challenge to mainstream security practices has passed, and the concept has itself become a new orthodoxy' [10]. Christie proposes an interesting argument that actually human security was never a departure; instead it has been 'largely consistent with the broader international process of global interventionalism to alleviate poverty and resolve the causes of conflict. Human security practices do not represent a break with security practices that were well under way prior to the concept's emergence'. It was completely consistent with the preceding international security policies of the North. For instance, Canada's appropriation of this ideal into its foreign policy, under foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy in the early 1990s, paid good dividend. It had wanted to play a vital role in international politics and human security made the platform. It was a right policy at the right time. Such continuation of prior ideals can also be seen in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams sent by western countries to Iraq and Afghanistan.

F) The most interesting part of the discussion about western centrism of the human security concept brings us to discuss it as Biopower. And probably Mark Duffield [18] gives us the best explanation. 'Liberalism is a technique of government that supports freedom while governing people through the interconnected natural, social and economic processes that together sustain life…it attempts to govern people through its freedom'. Thus liberalism controls the lives of the people through the very freedom it guarantees. But it is also conscious of the chaos too much freedom can cause. 'If biopolitics uncovers the dynamics of life at the level of population, and liberalism seeks to govern life through its freedom, then development provides a solution to the problem of governing too much or too little'. In the decolonized world, the age old instruments of domination like conquests or imperialism does not work. Now a new form of trusteeship entered the political foreground following the renewed wave of western humanitarianism and peace intervention. Thus, human security became the new trusteeship… 'A moral, educative and financial tutelage that aid agencies exert over the attitudes and behaviour of those subject to such development…an educative trusteeship that aims to change behaviour and social organization according to a curriculum decided elsewhere' [18].

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have tried to put forward the western-centrism and the unequal terms inherent in the whole concept of human security. It is time for the third

world countries to break off the age old domination by the west in every aspect- social, economic and political. For this we must uncover the biasness of the concepts generally presented as global ideas. What we must stand for is contextual and relative understanding of the concept of human security, not an overarching universalized concept which is nothing but a summation of western-liberal ideas. If the west continues to dictate the terms of the world that it co-habits with the developing countries, can there be any real meaning for the third world to survive and develop? Human security aims to ensure a life with dignity for everyone. Would this biasness leave the third world with any feeling of dignity and pride? If, not, its time to question what it is and why has it come to stay.

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