TO WHAT EXTENT DOES HUMAN SECURITY CONSTITUTE A FUNDAMENTAL RETHINKING OF SECURITY?

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ABSTRACT

After the Cold War era, the security agenda, which had traditionally centred on the state and the use of military force against armed external threats, started to change. The narrow focus of security throughout most of the 20th century was broadened and resulted in a greater focus on the 'individual'. While this widened perspective has been valuable in theory, this essay will posit that when considering the practical implications of human security, it would be an overstatement to suggest that the agenda has been significantly reformed.

KEYWORDS: Human security; The Cold War; Individualism; State-centrism; Securitisation theories

INTRODUCTION

The traditional, state-centric concept of security, which focuses heavily on military statecraft, force and armed external threats, remained the dominant security agenda up until the post-Cold War era (Booth, 1997). This period witnessed the gradual demise of inter-state conflict, warfare between states, and instead, intra-state conflict, warfare within nations, started to dominate (Liotta, 2002). This shift coincided with a greater focus on individuals, many of whom facing the consequences of localised violence and the increasing risk of non-state threats, as the referent of security, and the development of an increasingly significant concept: human security. For example, since the end of the Cold War period, statistics highlight that more individuals have been affected or killed by ethnic conflicts, disease, or the proliferation of small arms (Krahmann, 2005). This essay will consider to what extent this new element of the security agenda constitutes a fundamental rethinking of security.

This will be addressed in terms of principle and practice. The first section of this essay will posit that, in theory, human security represents a divergence from the traditional understanding of security, in that it offers a deepened focus on what can be considered a security threat, and idealistically, encompasses a host of concerns that threaten millions of individuals. This new perspective is important as it highlights cases in which traditional security measures lead to greater insecurity and ultimately, provides a refined understanding of why national security threats may occur due to a lack of human security.

Despite this changed outlook, the overall argument of this essay will suggest that to consider human security as a fundamental rethinking of the security agenda is an overstatement. The practical issues of this concept will be addressed throughout the second section of this essay. It will be argued that despite the introduction of human security, which intends to shift the central focus of security studies to the individual, the foundations of the traditional agenda continue to exist, with the self-interested state as the central focus. Moreover, it will be postulated that although the human security narrative has highlighted a wide range of issues in the Global South, in practice, this has failed to increase the voices of individuals in these areas and, in fact, has furthered their suppression to the North's traditional securitisation practices. Indeed, human security has influenced policy-making and has been used to justify the self-interested actions of states in the North. Therefore, this narrative has simply consolidated both the traditional security agenda and the Liberal world order.

A DEEPENED UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY

Although many scholars argue that a shift from the national security paradigm took place as early as the 1970s, the concept of human security has come to greater prominence since its articulation in the UNDP Human Development Report in 1994 (Persaud, 2016). This report presented a deepened understanding of security and included economic, food, environment, health, community, personal, and political security as key areas of the security agenda (Persaud, 2016).

In theory, this perception of security, which focuses on the needs of the 'individual', highlights a potential rethinking of security and the concept evidently diverges from the narrow, traditional discourse. Wibben suggests that deepening security considerations disturbs the traditional, state-focused security agenda (2008). Furthermore, it can be argued that human security exposes the way in which traditional security measures make people more insecure. Armed forces in Canada, for example, have invested in radar stations in the Arctic, which from a traditional security perspective may be considered an attempt to increase security (Christie, 2010). However, by adopting a human security lens, and recognising the resulting damage to the environment and the displaced indigenous groups (Christie, 2010), it is evident that this investment has created insecurity for many individuals.

This concept opposes the rigid, state-centric understanding of security, and instead, offers a malleable framework that helps in understanding why, for example, foreign lands, groups or individuals may pose a threat (Christie, 2010). In the case of 9/11, human security, or a lack thereof, resulted in the "global terror machine" and ultimately, led to the threat imposed on the North (Christie, 2010: 174). Indeed, the individuals that constitute this 'terror machine' are recognised to have faced human insecurity in the global South, and such vulnerabilities have transitioned into the

contemporary terrorist threat that endangers the North presently. This suggests that to gain a deeper understanding of threats to national security, human security, across the world, must be considered. Liotta suggests that internal vulnerabilities can lead to national security threats and considers human security as fundamental to the security agenda, to the point that national and human security will increasingly blur (Liotta, 2002).

The arguments of Liotta (2002) and Wibben (2008) portray the principle of human security as a significant contribution to the security agenda and, in theory, it is important to recognise that traditional security measures may cause insecurity and emerging vulnerabilities can lead to national security threats. However, as will be addressed throughout the following section of this essay, in practice, human security is exploited by powerful states and the 'individual' remains silent, showing little change from the traditional security agenda.

SELF-INTERESTED SECURITISATION

Liotta's (2002) argument, which promotes the convergence of human and national security, can be considered naïve and impractical. As Grayson states, the concern should not be that vulnerabilities may develop into threats, but rather that the national security agenda will consider vulnerabilities as threats (2003). Identifying vulnerabilities as an impending danger to national security is often used to justify traditional security measures adopted by self-interested states (Slim, 2001). In such cases, the humanitarian ideals, associated with the concept of human security, offer traditional security actors credibility (Slim, 2001). The US continuously exploits this type of justification, in that their security policies, which increase national security whilst causing insecurity for thousands of individuals, are defended through the narrative of human security. For example, the invasion of Panama was claimed by George Bush to be in defence of democracy (Meernik, 1996).

Such examples suggest that human security reinforces the traditional security agenda and the narrative is exploited to increase national security.

THE VOICES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

This idea that security continues to be state-centric and securitisation practices are used to fulfil the national interests and motives of Western states is supported when the individuals and communities that face insecurity as a consequence are analysed. Although the human security discourse seeks to shift away from the traditional focus of security: the state, and place the 'individual' as the referent object, in practice, the marginalised individual is not understood or listened to. While the human security narrative highlights the insecurities and needs of individuals in the South, this is not countered with an increased voice of such vulnerable people (Christie, 2010). Instead, this narrative has consolidated the South's subjugation to the North's traditional practices of securitisation (Christie, 2010). This issue of individuals and communities continuing to be silenced when concerning their security and securitisation, despite the development of the human security narrative, is prominent in many postcolonial studies, in which the colonial population are regarded as the subaltern (Shani, 2017).

An example of those in the Global South being silenced and securitised for lies in the case of the trafficking of individuals and narcotics within post-Soviet Central Asia. In this region, the most common type of trafficking involves women and children that are exploited for prostitution or sexual abuse (Jackson, 2006). Central Asian Governments have largely overlooked this issue of trafficking and often disregard such violations of human rights (Jackson, 2006). This has created a space for others, such as the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union (EU) (Jackson, 2006), to securitize for such exploited individuals. However, those 're-presenting', despite asserting that they will prioritise the needs of such vulnerable individuals, frequently allow their own intentions to prevail (Bertrand, 2018). For example, the EU started to prioritise countering narcotics trafficking and border-management programmes in Central Asia after a report determined that 1.5 million heroin addicts reside in Europe and 90% of heroin was being imported from Afghanistan (Jackson, 2006). This example highlights that powerful Western governments and NGOs remain at the centre of the security narrative, demonstrating little change from the traditional agenda. Human security cannot constitute a major change to the security agenda until the voice of the subaltern is amplified and the protection of insecure individuals is truly the central focus and motivation of securitisation.

The 'silence-problem' is an element of a much larger issue that, ultimately, prevents the principle of human security from being operationalised effectively and contributing to a major change in the security agenda. This greater issue lies with the hierarchical, state-centric system. Connections exist between present-day humanitarian interventions and the 19th century 'civilising mission' of Imperialism which endeavoured to inflict a 'Western civilizational standard' upon non-Western entities (Hobson, 2012). The actors of this modern-day mission are the powerful Western nations who unify under the banner of an 'international community, the United Nations, and establish liberal peacebuilding practices in unstable post-colonial countries (Shani, 2017).

Canadian peacekeepers on a mission in Somalia, for example, inflicted acts of torture and brutality, and were exposed through the media, videos and numerous stories, but were still defended by the Canadian public who presented the situation as Canadians offering civilisation upon a savage population (Bertrand, 2018). This example highlights that human security cannot fulfil its purpose of protecting vulnerable individuals within a Westernised, state-centric international system. Despite the introduction of human security, powerful states from

he Global North continue to speak and 'securitise' on behalf of the subaltern. This demonstrates that human security has failed to dissociate itself from the traditional, hegemonic perception of security as it persists that individual security can only be ensured by the practices of a functioning, Western state.

A current example that emphasises the continued dominance of the Western world, and its traditional security practices, refers to the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organisation (WHO) suggested that the pandemic has affected Africa less severely, with lower mortality rates compared to other parts of the world (WHO, 2020). Some of the proposed reasons for this include Africa's younger populations, warmer climates and the presence of greater levels of pre-existing immunity (Njenga et al. 2020). Despite the less severe effects of COVID-19 and the fact that Africa already faces more critical threats, it appears that many African countries have emulated the lockdowns of the Global North. In Uganda, for example, the measures introduced, such as shop and hospitality closures and nationwide home confinement, closely follow the restrictions of countries in the Global North (Haider et al. 2020). Using the example of Uganda, it is clear that COVID-19 is not the most imminent human security threat. For example, one in five Ugandans continue to live in extreme poverty, with more than a third surviving on less than $1.90 per day (The World Bank, 2020). Despite such grave circumstances, African countries have largely followed the Westernised securitisation trend and imitated the economically damaging lockdowns of the North. This highlights the continued influence of Western powers and their securitisation practices within the security agenda, and the failure of human security to generate a change that empowers weaker states to independently tailor security policies to local conditions.

In terms of application, this essay would echo the argument of Richmond (2011), in that for human security to constitute a fundamental impact, the concept must involve a flexible process of cooperation between the liberal and local. In many cases, a sense of security and how it can be achieved varies, and often differs from the dominant view of security, depending on the individual or community (Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 2006). Therefore, it is important for intervening states and NGOs to negotiate with insecure communities, taking into consideration both men and women, and the patriarchal structures (Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 2006). A more inclusive and influential form of human security could be incorporated into the existing institutions and security practices, such as those held by the UN community, but must be contextualised and consider "local alterity, resistance and accommodation, norms, customs, culture and identity, and an international social contract as the basis for HS and peacebuilding" (Richmond, 2011: 54). This suggests that human security may have the potential to offer a fundamental rethinking of security, however, this cooperative element would have to overcome the obstacles of existing within a Euro and state-centric system.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, human security, in principle, offers a deeper understanding of security. The concept changed the security discourse and identifies the vulnerabilities often caused by national security measures. However, in practice, human security does not constitute a fundamental rethinking of security and often this concept reinforces the traditional agenda and securitisation practices.

In theory, human security expands on the traditional understanding of what constitutes a threat. This is important as this perception acknowledges that traditional security practices may create insecurity, and consequently, such vulnerabilities can lead to national security threats. However, the significance of this term only exists in principle.

In practice, human security fails to offer a radical rethinking of security. Firstly, there is the practical issue of viewing vulnerabilities as threats. This narrative allows powerful states to justify their traditional securitisation practices, which increase national security and make others vulnerable. This highlights that human security legitimises the motives of the traditional security agenda and national security remains the primary objective. Furthermore, the issue of insecure individuals being silenced within the security agenda remains, despite the development of human security. This results in self-interested Western states and NGOs securitising for such individuals and further silencing marginalised communities.

To conclude, this essay would suggest that for human security to truly influence the security agenda, it must involve a flexible process that takes into account various opinions, cultures and languages. However, it is still questionable as to whether, even with such considerations, human security would be able to constitute a rethinking of security within the existing Westernised, state-centric system.

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