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Diplomacy in the Age of Globalization

How can proponents of human security help overcome the limitations of traditional state-on-state approaches towards defense? According to Joseph Siracusa, they can encourage decision-makers to engage more deeply with the problems of world order and the consequences of an anarchic international system.

By Joseph Siracusa for ISN

In the 21st century, the speed with which information travels around the world and the complexity of global relations have forced states to change how they conduct diplomacy, both institutionally and substantively. Though state-to-state diplomacy remains alive and well, it has become difficult to ignore the proliferation of informal diplomacy that occurs beyond the confines of the traditional diplomatic system, whether through the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) or the interventions of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such as the World Trade Organisation. These new actors and organizations have important diplomatic networks which operate both within and outside the traditional diplomatic system.

The shifting terrain of global relations also ensures that security issues can appear unexpectedly and change rapidly in shape and scope. These security risks can usefully be thought of as 'polymorphous': challenges such as political violence or environmental scarcity can generate a host of other dangers – food shortages, economic hardship, crime, disease, or human rights abuses. In this context, defining a security crisis narrowly as either military, environmental, societal, or financial is to ignore the interconnected character of events, decisions, ideas, and beliefs that shape trajectories of risk. Because it foregrounds these kinds of interconnections, the paradigm of human security can help to overcome the limitations of traditional approaches that privilege state-to-state interactions.

If it is to appeal to decision-makers and researchers, however, proponents of human security must engage with problems of world order and the limitations imposed by an anarchic international system. To the extent that this engagement expands conceptions of diplomacy beyond the traditional matrix of inter-state relations, it promises a new synthesis in international affairs that can empower a new cast of actors to help solve complex global security challenges. Instead of a world mediated by states and statesmen, human security can thus provide a new global framework through which to impose order in a dangerous and uncertain world.

An era of complex crises

Today, security crises tend to 'cluster' around interconnected domains of risk. Drug trafficking, for example, creates a link between the fates of communities in the developed and developing worlds,

even if the numbers of persons involved are quite small. The total annual US drug control budget stood at US$12.5 billion in 2004, more than four times the value of total US contributions to the United Nations. This is a measure of the scale of the drug 'problem' in the USA which extends far beyond the number of addicts, to the corrosive influence of traffickers and the webs of criminal activity that envelop the addicted. Corruption in police ranks and among government officials corrodes law enforcement and public confidence in government institutions. At the regional level, drug production in Latin America destabilises legitimate governments and creates de facto 'narco states' in territory beyond central government control.

To take another example: according to World Health Organisation statistics, over 57 million people died from preventable diseases in 2006 – more disease-related deaths in one year than the combined total of combat deaths in the two world wars. UNAIDS estimates 33 million people worldwide are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), with the vast majority located in sub-Saharan Africa. While diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, and malaria can be treated, the virus that causes AIDS can only be arrested with antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) and remains—for the moment—incurable. The search for a 'cure' involves not just the pursuit of a wonder drug that can destroy the virus, but the reshaping of socio-economic environments in which the virus is known to thrive.

In addition to its political, social, economic, and even cultural roots, conflict can also be linked to radical changes in the natural environment. According to Jared Diamond, the underlying causes of the Rwandan genocide, which claimed the lives of an estimated 800,000 people in 1994, were land degradation and attendant population pressures which destabilised Rwandan society. In general, resource scarcity is likely to increase, and with it the likelihood of environmental refugees moving en masse across international boundaries.

Former World Bank economist Nicholas Stern has also laid out an alarming scenario regarding the potential economic and social impact of climate change. Stern's worst-case scenario is predicated on a 5-degree Celsius increase in the Earth's temperature, causing sea levels to rise, extensive inundation of low-lying coastal areas, and widespread water stress threatening food security in India and China with dramatic consequences for economic and political security at the regional and global levels. While these scenarios are increasingly accepted as plausible in even the most sceptical quarters, remedial steps have proved difficult to coordinate at the inter-state level. To help advance this objective, all G-7 countries have announced or proposed post-2020 climate targets, including the U. S. target to cut pollution by 26-28 per cent from the 2005 levels by 2025.

What is human security?

In its 2003 report, the Commission on Human Security recognized that conflict prevention, disease eradication, poverty alleviation, sustainable economic development, food security, and the promotion of human rights were interlinked security concerns. So defined, the scope of human security fits well with the objectives outlined in the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which rest on an overwhelming empirical case made by Amartya Sen as to the importance to human well-being of education, health, care, gender equity, economic opportunity, and respect for human rights.

Human security takes a broad view of security. Indeed, Roland Paris has argued that the scope of issues encompassed by the UN's conception of human security is too broad to be operational. Instead, Canadian researchers have proposed to limit the scope of human security to the 'incidence, severity, causes and consequences of global violence'. Placing human security squarely within the orbit of conflict studies, this approach attaches the greatest importance to humanitarian assistance for victims of war and to the conditions that promote peace within and between states. Paradoxically, however, this approach ensures that war remains at the top of the international security agenda. By narrowing the focus to the immediate causes and consequences of conflict, it loses sight of the

long-term trajectories of risk than can culminate in a security crisis.

Moreover, narrow definitions of war and conflict – particularly those based on statistical criteria such as the number of battle deaths in a given year – distort attempts to understand the 'health' of the contemporary global system. Based on such criteria, Swedish researchers have claimed that the incidence of war is declining and that, consequently, the world is becoming a safer place. But shots do no need to be exchanged for the conditions of war or armed conflict to exist. The potential for political violence to erupt and escalate into war must be taken into account. Indeed, a growing mountain of evidence from 'latent' and 'frozen' conflicts underlines the importance of understanding why people resort to violence and why states make war in the first place. Rather than concentrating upon the spectacle of violence and its consequences, efforts to assess the health of the global system must also attempt to anticipate the recourse to political violence by taking the 'early warning signs' of conflict or war into account.

In 'latent conflict' situations, a ceasefire, or even a formal treaty, might well exist between rival parties even though the grievances and suspicions that ignited the political violence have yet to subside. Indian and Pakistani troops, for instance, stare each other down across the disputed line of division in Kashmir, occasionally exchanging shells and rifle shot, while state-sponsored militant groups engage in terrorist violence on both sides of the border. Does this count as peace? In Sri Lanka in 2005, a four-year old ceasefire between the government and the Tamil Tigers, who were fighting for an independent homeland in the north and east of the island, broke down and both parties resumed their 20-year struggle. Thousands died before the government prevailed in 2009. These instances of periodic but persistent deadly violence can be found throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The security spectrum and the system-level

For the paradigm of human security to appeal to decision-makers and researchers, however, it must establish a conceptual link with notions of world order. To be serviceable at a policy level, the definition of human security must be anchored to an appreciation of the limitations imposed by an imperfect 'anarchic' inter-state system. This will inevitably lead to compromises in the prioritisation of human security issues—and to tensions between those disposed towards morality and ethics in international affairs and those who see the world in terms of power politics.

Of course, the concept of human security originated in this kind of context – in the foreign and security policies of small and medium powers. Without employing the term, the Australian government, for example, incorporated a prototypical human security framework into Australian foreign and defence policy in the late 1980s. The 1989 *Statement on Australia's Regional Security* drew attention to the interconnections between traditional and non-traditional risks confronting Australia and the Asian region, from under-development, to drug trafficking, to HIV/AIDS. Importantly, the policy prescription called for a positive 'multidimensional' response, incorporating military, diplomatic, economic, and technical cooperation, thus linking Australian security to the security of Australia's immediate neighbours. More recently, Canada adopted an explicit and comprehensive human security agenda, as did Japan and other member states of the Human Security Network.

In shifting the locus of security away from states and the pursuit of military power to the security of people or individuals, the human security debate creates opportunities for a more comprehensive and flexible definition of security in which local and global levels of analysis are distinguished. Even if, as globalisation theory maintains, place is diminishing in its significance, attachments to place, identity, and nation remain salient and potent realities. In 1945, five states—Britain, the USA, China, the USSR, and France—set the agenda for the United Nations. As of 2008, there were 192 UN member states out

of a total 207 nation-states worldwide. The five permanent members still wield enormous influence, but they must do so in a more complex environment in which attachments to national political space, real or imagined, have not subsided.

While the UN's millennium goals established policy priorities for the international community, their realisation depends upon the mobilisation of institutions and people. Between the individual and the international community stand states that may or may not hold the wellbeing of their citizens as a paramount national interest and may instead persecute or attack them. In the absence of a global sovereign, the advancement of a human security agenda requires international interventions ranging from development assistance to the deployment of peacekeepers. Governance thus becomes the challenge of brokering 'solutions' to a dazzling array of security challenges.

In the absence of a genuinely participatory system of global government, only states offer the prospect for the kind of liberal democracy lauded by those who decry the state for meddling in economic affairs. Effective national-level governance is an essential complement to the advancement of human security, but, as the Commission for Africa recognised, for instance, African under-development is a direct consequence of governmental failures spanning 40 years. The 'weakness of government and the absence of an effective state', so it concluded, was manifest in the 'inability of government and the public services to create the right economic, social and legal framework which will encourage economic growth and allow poor people to participate in it'.

Similarly, the cosmopolitan ideal of a world without political boundaries can only be realised with some other political machinery by which decisions can be made and differences resolved at the local and global levels. States remain the essential building-blocks of global order, and there are serious questions as to whether the dynamics of inter-state relations have evolved to the extent that their military forces could ever be decommissioned. While power is becoming more diffused in the international system, and governance networks more sophisticated and extensive, people and states continue to pursue or wield power for the most self-interested and nefarious of purposes.

A new cast of diplomatic actors?

To address a wider spectrum of human security challenges, new diplomatic practices and actors – including civil society organizations and transnational corporations – are increasingly coming into play. These entities have important diplomatic networks operating both within and outside the traditional diplomatic system whose capacity to amplify – and complicate – traditional efforts must be acknowledged.

Civil society organizations

NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and INGOs (international non-governmental organisations) – also referred to as CSOs (civil society organizations) play a significant role in filling service gaps in the provision of education, health and welfare, disaster relief, and small-scale infrastructure development left by governments with insufficient resources or political will. The roles of these organisations are varied. They pursue humanitarian missions and are distinct, in theory, from purely political or economic associations or organisations. Differentiated from protest movements, social clubs, and criminal gangs by virtue of their non-economic and humanitarian social objectives, these non-state actors have attracted significant attention because of their capacity to influence and mobilise social networks.

In the areas of service delivery, these transnational actors have won increased credence at the UN

and the multilateral banks (the World Bank and regional development banks) which rely upon NGO/CSO assistance to implement development projects and gather 'local' information. As the end to the Cold War generated humanitarian crises in parts of the world previously inaccessible to Western governments and multilateral institutions, I/NGOs could draw upon long-established social networks, were mobile, and, in the cases of avowedly neutral agencies like the International Red Cross and Medécins Sans Frontières, were able to operate in warzones. Added to this was an increase in development funds available to NGOs—from the World Bank especially—but also from public donations. Put simply, transnational service and advocacy organisations complemented international development objectives at a time when the development agenda was lengthening.

Transnational corporations

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are companies engaged in production across two or more international boundaries. By 2006, there were an estimated 78,000 such corporations, headquartered predominantly in Western Europe, North America, and Asia. Transnational companies routinely transfer materials, components, and completed products across national boundaries, and these 'internal' transfers account for a substantial proportion of world trade.

Foreign direct investment, from the West and from Japan and Korea, was a major factor in Asia's rapid late 20th-century economic growth, notably in Thailand and Vietnam. However, corporations stand accused by development, environmental, and human rights groups of engaging in practices detrimental to the wellbeing of people and communities across the developing world. To a limited extent, the *OECD Convention on the Bribery of Foreign Officials* drew attention within the global private sector to the damaging effects of corruption and the potential costs of bribery by companies headquartered in countries that are signatories to the convention. International efforts to bring to account companies that perpetrate or are complicit in environmental destruction, child labour exploitation, and political violence meet with stiff opposition from within the business community. Yet without cooperation from the transnational private sector, it is difficult to see how the UN millennium goals and other security objectives can be achieved.

During Kofi Annan's tenure as Secretary-General, the UN embarked upon a programme of business consultations under the umbrella of a 'Global Compact'. The considerable human and financial resources of transnational corporate actors and their undoubted influence could, it was thought, be harnessed towards the achievement of humanitarian objectives. Yet, the degree to which corporations, or private enterprise of any kind, can subscribe to such efforts is paradoxically limited by the nature of business competition. Free market advocates, like economist Milton Friedman, argue that the social responsibility of business is to be profitable, because from profits come employment, government revenues, and rising consumption. Yet, when the corrupt activities of corporations undermine United Nations programmes, such as the infamous UN Iraq Oil-For-Food Program, or support brutal regimes in return for access to natural resources, not only do they contravene international law, they undermine human and global security.

Conclusion

Human security recognizes a dazzling complexity of concerns from which it can be difficult to tease out meaningful theoretical abstractions. Global patterns and trends, historical trajectories, and correlations of risks can be schematized and mapped out. Arguments can be composed about how to advance the cause of human rights, peace and good governance. Courses of events can be illustrated in rich detail. But human security cannot always offer an approach that is predictive – and, in the marketplace of ideas, prediction is what sells. Nevertheless, the growing inability of traditional inter-state approaches to anticipate future challenges points to the need to recognize a wider set of

concerns. This should make integrating human security concerns with issues of world order – and recognizing the significance of new diplomatic actors – an urgent priority for the Global South and the developed world alike.

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