

**Human Security in Asia:
Conceptual Ambiguities and Common Understandings**

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As the 1990s drew to a close, a new concept of security began to haunt the academic and policy community around the world: the concept of human security. Developed as a new policy initiative that goes beyond the traditional economist yardsticks such as national GDPs and growth rates, and supported by Western governments seeking a new way of channeling their development aid, the concept of human security also became attractive to those who believe in human rights and democracy as the core trends in world politics. Human security has challenged the dominant paradigm of national security, with its exclusive focus on the state and its interests in political and territorial self-preservation. It has become something of a *mantra* for an emerging epistemic community of scholars, policy-makers and non-governmental actors who would like to see this as a comprehensive approach to replace the *realpolitik* mindset emphasizing the security dilemma, military alliances and the balance of power.

The debate on human security is relatively new to Asia. This region has traditionally been associated with the national security paradigm. Multilateral and normative concepts of security have not found much resonance in Asia except at a rhetorical level since the Gandhian notions of non-violence held sway in pre-independence India. Two factors, a desire to preserve the sanctity of the newfound sovereignty of the post-colonial “nation-state”, and a relative paucity of sustainable democracies, rendered Asia rather inhospitable to anything but a strictly state-centric agenda of national security. And these factors continue to plague the development and acceptance of the concept in Asia today, even as a growing number of scholars and a handful of states such as Japan, Thailand and Mongolia have shown an active interest in promoting this concept.

One of the key barriers to a meaningful debate over human security and its implementation strategies can be found in the differing understandings of the concept. Despite being increasingly visible in regional policy debates, this concept remains ill defined and poorly understood. Against this backdrop, this paper offers an analysis of the various understandings of the concept of human security in the region with a view to identify possible common grounds that could enhance its policy relevance.

Defining the Concept

The challenge for the advocates of human security is to define and present the concept to an international environment not readily conducive to radical re-interpretations of security. The earliest enunciation of the concept is traced to the Canadian psychologist W. E. Blatz's theory of "individual security" that defines security as all inclusive and all pervasive .. compensating for ... vulnerabilities or insecurities.¹ The UN Human Development Report 1994 defined human security as to include "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the pattern of daily life."² Later the concept was expanded to include economic, health and environmental concerns as well as physical security of the individual.³ Advocates of human security tend to be dismissive of old concepts of "geo-politics" and "nation-state" and stress on the need to confront and resolve challenges created by the changing nature of state system rather than on armed conflict, power balancing etc. Traditional security analysts defend the old order, and abhor attempts to dilute the established fields of security studies. "Security for whom?" continues to be the key question and traditional as well as human security debates address this in fundamentally different ways. For the Traditionalists state is central unit of analysis, security is commensurate with national survival, force postures and capabilities are the key tenants. Competition for power and relative gains are regarded as natural conditions within any state system. Human security, however addresses

¹ W. E. Blatz, *Human Security: some Reflections* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 112-116

² For details see United Nations, *Human Development Report 1994*, as cited in the report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995),

³ The International Human development Program Research Project on Global Environmental Change and Human Security synopsis on "What is 'Human Security?'" makes a complete inventory of the human security regimes. Available on the Internet at <http://ibm.rhrz.uni-bonn.de/ihdp/gechumansecurity.htm>.

more general threats to human existence and ways to overcome them. The emerging notion of 'world system' is based on the key human security postulate that peace and security need to be refocused away from the state toward human rights and equality in resources, health and environment, among other things.

National security approaches are often insensitive to cultural differences within the state. In today's world, state fragmentation is intensifying along socio-ethnic lines along with an increase in complex humanitarian emergencies such as what happened in Kosovo and East Timor. Hence a new emphasis on 'societal security' is demanding greater attention from policy makers. The present day conflicts are increasingly about defending ethnic and religious groups and salvaging the remnants of civilized life after natural disasters and intervention in inter state disputes with peace keeping missions. International politics is increasingly being conducted at diverse levels of international society, not exclusively by the state.⁴ The emerging international society integrates communications, cultures and economies in ways that transcend state centric relations. Globalization has precipitated threats to traditional institutions such as the nuclear family, religious groups and labour unions having devastating effects in developing nations where governments are often overwhelmed by the costs, technological barriers and social cleavages impeding their ability to provide even the basic necessities. The formation of more comprehensive security regimes and communities is required to meet the challenge.⁵

The widening gap between the emergent interdependence (courtesy globalization) in civil society, public order, economics, ecology, culture and human rights on the one hand and the legal/political structure of the nation-state system on the other, has exposed the inadequacy of the traditional security paradigm for generating an international consensus on order, security and justice.⁶ The search for an answer has now centered on issues that address human security concerns. Human security issues strike directly the individual largely ignoring state boundaries

⁴ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no.2(1992), pp.391-425

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge/Stanford: Polity Press/Stanford University Press, 1990); and Martin Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994)

⁶ Seyom Brown, "World Interests and the Changing Dimensions of Security," in Michael T. Klare and Yogesh Chandrani, eds. *World Security: Challenges for a New Century*, 3rd edn (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp.3-4

and requiring “action and cooperation at different levels- global, regional and local- if they are to be tackled effectively.”⁷

Attempts have been made to define human security variously as safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats and taking measures to reduce vulnerability,⁸ as involving “security of the individual in their personal surroundings, their community and in their environment,”⁹ and freedom from “structural violence” from non-territorial security threats. Human security targets attention on environmental degradation, food shortages, refugees or various pandemics,¹⁰ rapid population growth leading to the collapse of some of the world’s fundamental physical and biological systems, human rights violations, inter group hostility and class stratification and recognises that an individual’s personal protection and preservation comes not just from safeguarding of the state as a political unit, but also from access to individual welfare and quality of life.¹¹ Linkages are sought to be made with the concept of “good governance” that takes all individuals as stakeholders in security not on the basis of sovereign affiliation but as “members of a transcendent human community with common global concerns”¹²

Since the end of the cold war there has been attempts to demystify the western biased construct of social science that has become more or less segmented, rigid and remote from people’s actual needs and concerns.¹³ The need has further been reinforced by the emergent international economy wherein the dangers of globalisation has caused wide spread and uncontrollable system insecurity with negative cross over effects that a global economy can have

⁷ Lloyd Axworthy, The minister of foreign affairs, Canada in his address to a meeting of the Mid-America Committee “Global Action, Continental Community: Human security in Canadian Foreign Policy,” Chicago, Illinois, 9 September 1998, reproduced by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada.

⁸ Lloyd Axworthy, “Human Security: Safety for people in a Changing World,” a concept paper, April 1999

⁹ George MacLean, “The United Nations and the New Security agenda.” Conference paper on the Internet at <http://www.unac.org/canada/security/maclean.html>.

¹⁰ Michael Renner, *Fighting for Survival: Environmental Decline, social Conflict and the New age of Insecurity* (New york and London: W. W. Norton, 1996)

¹¹ George MacLean, “The United Nations and the New Security agenda.”

¹² Richard Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995) pp. 40-41

¹³ V. Y. Mudimbe, ed, *Open the Social Science: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

on environmental issues, domestic political autonomy and stability and military self reliance.¹⁴

The “new thinking on security” called for a society based agenda with cross disciplinary cooperation as well as integration with non social societies with wider range of issue areas from economic and environmental problems to human rights and migration. Since then concepts like ‘common’, ‘cooperative’, ‘collective’ and ‘comprehensive’ security are in vogue in the social science literature.

Neo-realists have criticised these approaches on the grounds that they are drawing security studies away from traditional focus, lack theoretical foundation and fail to show any true value in terms of concrete results.¹⁵ The fact remains that security of the ‘state’ in developing areas is more often than not at odds with the security of the nation. Although every state aspires to become a proper nation state, this can not be achieved if the people of the state can’t be protected, nurtured and cared for. World abound with examples of one ruling group weakening other groups by orchestrating political conflicts- military against civilians, bureaucrats against politicians – cultural conflicts, religious conflicts and economic exploitations. The ruthless economic development by authoritarian/ semi-authoritarian or pseudo-democratic regimes also produced a legacy of economic disparity, social inequality, poor growth of living standards, ecological degradation and environmental hazards. All these created a political environment calling for emergence of democratization further strengthened by penetration of globalisation and information technology into traditional societies. Emergence of a enlightened civil service, NGOs and human rights groups has succeeded in placing the issue of human suffering high on the agenda of the international community.

The Asian Context

Emma Rothchild has traced the concept of human security in Asia to the catastrophe of Hiroshima.¹⁶ Others have developed the notion on same lines arguing that human

¹⁴ Bary Buzan, “Rethinking Security After the Cold War,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 32, no,1 (1997), pp.23-25

¹⁵ Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, “Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies Politics and Methods,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 40 (1996),pp.229-230

¹⁶ Emma Rothchild, “Introduction,” in Tatsuro Matsume and Lincoln C. Chen, eds, *Common Security in Asia: New Concepts of Human security* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press,1995) pp.3-5

security represents a focus on human survival, well being, and freedom that it should be seen as the objective of all security concerns and other forms of security as means. Lincoln C. Chen has identified 3 key strategies to achieve human security -protection, promotion and prevention. In situations of acute insecurity progressive utilisation of protection measures for relief, establishing safety nets and supporting peace keeping. For chronic insecurity poverty should be the focus of concern and development likely cure. To protect established human security regimes and to provide a warning against future challenges a preventive course of action based on information, diplomacy and sanctions.¹⁷

Asia continues to present a fascinating and dynamic laboratory for evaluating human security challenges on incumbent Asian elite. The countries in Asia are wary less about the external threats of aggression than about the “enemy within.” Secessionist movements and movements for democratization (S. Korea in 1980s, Philippines under Marcos, Indonesia under Suharto and Myanmar under the State Law and order Restoration Council) have led to internal political repression and to the prioritizing of maintenance of political power neglecting safety and welfare concerns. Asia’s legacy is largely hierarchical thanks to the Sinic world order’s and thus Confucianism’s – predominance over much of it for nearly three millennia.¹⁸ “Asian Values” – tributary relationships, heavenly mandates and wars of state unification have been the basis of state legitimacy, not the individual.

Asia has been the world’s major success story for development and modernization but human rights issues (China, Myanmar and else where) make international head lines with allied problems of refugees, terrorism and drug trafficking. Various Asian regimes tended to emphasize self constructed cultural differentiation as justification for intimidating domestic political opponents and ethnic minorities. Forces of globalisation and the social change generated by new technologies and global communication seem to be bringing in a reorientation toward greater materialism especially in the younger generation. The continent is poised in a precarious balancing of issues- China’s increased defense budget against intensifying

¹⁷ Lincoln C. Chen, “Human Security: Concepts and Approaches.” in Matsume and Chen, *Common Security in Asia*, p 139

¹⁸ “The early Treaty System in the Chinese World Order,” John K. Fairbank, ed *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp.257-275

unemployment, strained service sector and pollution problems, the issues of balance between secular authority and religious fundamentalism of one kind or other in many parts of the region including haze, depletion of natural resources and food insecurity and the threats of religious nationalism fueling a nuclear arms race in the region. Newer challenges to human survival- famine, more common in developing areas, pandemics with new viruses defying standard medical defences – are proving to be beyond the manageable limits of traditional national security resources.

In the 1980s the economic success in Asia was attributed to Asia's intellectual and social traditions – the better known concept of “Asian Values” that recognised attachment to family as an institution, deference to societal interest, thrift, respect for authority, value of consensus over confrontation and importance of education. Spurred by the remarkable success some Asian leaders and scholars even began to promote Asian Value oriented model as an alternative to and superior than, capitalism and liberal democracy which has brought about the breakdown of the family, intensified drug problems and increased violence and social decay. It was even argued that Western diplomacy focusing on human rights and democracy is simply part of an effort to assert political and economic hegemony over Asia. (The Bangkok Declaration-April 1993)

In Asia, the severe economic downturn of the late 1990s helped to bring a nascent debate over human security into much sharper focus. The crisis created a pervasive sense of insecurity with wide range of political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. The crisis affected a very large proportions of Asia's population, increasing poverty with fall in real incomes, destabilizing migrations food shortages and malnutrition, declining health and education, intensifying crimes and lack of confidence in existing political systems which proved to be beyond the state capacity to resolve through traditional security approaches. Coping strategies including state and private financial institutional restructuring precipitated an intolerable political climate and collapse of consumer confidence across the region. Rescue packages structured by the IMF were condemned by many intended Asian beneficiaries as unreasonable demands by Western industrialised states to force through social and political reforms alien to their own culture and values. This was then followed by a number of social and political crises like that in East Timor

that exploded into a genocidal warfare after an indigenous population exercised its democratic right to opt for self-determination. The response of the international community to forge a “coalition of the willing” to check pro-Indonesian militia sponsored killings underscored the increased role of *humanitarian intervention* in facing contemporary human security crises. The downfall of Suharto’s regime’s New Order in Indonesia in May 1998 provided a stark signpost throughout Southeast Asia that emphasis on economic growth without political freedom is ultimately unsustainable. This theme of individual freedom became an important aspect of the human security debate within the region. Finally, the Asian crisis established beyond doubt that such matters can not be solved by mobilisation of military forces nor by traditional power balances along state centric lines. Against this backdrop, the need for but alternative approaches to security focusing on the people’s needs became more recognized.¹⁹

The economic crisis has done much to demolish the appeal of the Asian Values concept. Attachment to family has now become “nepotism”, personal relationships have become cronyism, consensus has become the basis of corruption, conservatism and respect for authority has become rigidity and an inability to innovate. As critics of Asian values point out, in a region which make up more than 60 percent of the world’s population, it is absurd to argue that there is one set of Asian values that represents such a huge demographic composition. Besides such an argument was advanced by a select group (Singapore and Malaysia) not necessarily representative of the entire Asian view point. Asia is the most diverse region in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity and language and it is difficult to have consensus on the major norms and institutions governing human security ideals.

The key issue in human security is the social distance between the individual and the state. There is a tendency among certain Asian nations to exploit the traditional closeness between the state and the individual in their culture, rationalising it as a basis for maintaining non-democratic rule. However the role of the state in protecting the rights of the socially vulnerable is equally

¹⁹ “Opening Remarks by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi to an Intellectual Dialogue on Building Asia’s Tomorrow- The Asian Crisis: Meeting the Challenges to Human Security,” conference convened by the Japan Centre for International Exchange and the Institute Of Southeast Asian Studies, 3-4 December 1998, Tokyo.

important especially under the influence of globalisation in which the tyranny of the market threatens human security more than the state power.

At the same time, a human security agenda can not be the only approach to contemporary security threats. Attempts to address human security issues must be combined with traditional diplomatic and strategic approaches. Any number of events such as in Korean peninsula or in the Taiwan Strait may trigger direct military confrontation making human security issues less relevant. The key question is how to reconcile the two paradigms so that both agendas complement each other.

The task of “Asianising” human security depends on the extent to which the concept is promoted and explained to security policy makers so as to make them understand it as distinct from humanitarian intervention measures (which many Asian rulers distrust as a Western affront against their hard-earned sovereignty) and the need for the intended beneficiaries to play an active role in the formulation of policies designed to implement the concept (the issue of legitimacy). At the same time, an element of trust on the system of governance and the governments of the day must be created, replacing the existing mistrust of rulers who are often seen as insincere and lacking in genuine human security concerns. A human security approach should uphold the survival, well-being and freedom of the individual, values which often compete with the ethos of communitarianism in those parts of Asia which stress a “society over the self” approach. State and state organs are normally the agents and actors facilitating human security. But they can also threaten human security. There is thus a need for alternate groups-NGOs that possess broad networks that can be invaluable in coordinating and launching the types of international operations that human security approach embraces. Example can be of the Alternative ASEAN Network, the International Network of Political Leaders promoting Democracy in Burma, the Alternative Asia-Europe Meeting and the Asian Network for Free Election.²⁰

The task of actualizing human security could be facilitated if it is done incrementally and according to priorities. Unlike traditional security arrangements, human security undertakings are

²⁰ A detailed account can be found in Lincoln C. Chen, “Human Security: Concepts and Approaches.” in Matsume and Chen, *Common Security in Asia*. (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1995)

not contingent upon the occurrence of precipitating events in order to trigger a response (as in the case of direct conflicts, confrontations or outright invasions)

articulating the case for human security may well face opposition from those who believe too strongly in the non-interventionist philosophy. Ironically the intervention by invitation of the IMF in the restructuring of a number of economies has some what reinforced anti- interventionist approach.

Reconciling Asian Conceptions of Human Security²¹

This paper argues that the task of advancing the notion of human security must begin with an attempt at clarifying the various understandings of the concept. This is also important if one's goal is to reconciling the various national perspectives. Many definitions of human security in Asia have adopted a broad definition of the concept, including, but not necessarily limited to, human rights, environmental degradation, poverty, crime, terrorism, gender and social biases and health and natural disasters. On the other hand, the very broadness of the concept has been criticised for detracting from its analytical utility.

Moreover, the definition of human security in Asia is marked by important conceptual ambiguities. Perhaps the most important point of departure in understanding human security is its focus on the human being. Human security is a concept that brings to the fore the safety and dignity of the individual human person, as opposed to the power and authority of the state or the regime. This point is also crucial to exploring the distinctive nature of human security and answering whether this is a new concept or simply old wine in a new bottle. Many Asian scholars argue that the broad range of threats constituting the human security paradigm is a rehash of the old Asian notion of "comprehensive security" developed by Japan and the ASEAN members. That concept was also noted for going beyond strictly military aspects of security and encompassing such non-traditional areas as economic development, political

²¹ This section of the paper draws heavily from a previous work, Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "Human Security in the Asia Pacific: Puzzle, Panacea and Peril", CANCAPS Bulletin (December 2000).

stability and environmental degradation.²² But it is the emphasis on human rights, which was missing from comprehensive security, which is crucial to a conceptual differentiation between the two notions.²³

In our view, the distinction between comprehensive security and human security lies in three areas. First, the difference is between a focus on human need (comprehensive security), as opposed to human rights (human security). Secondly, while comprehensive security answers to the question: which threats to security, the core question of human security is “whose security”? Third, while the political element of comprehensive security focuses on “order” and “stability”, human security is geared more to justice and emancipation. These differences, especially the salience of the “human person”, set human security apart from other, related notions of security that have emerged as an alternative to the traditional state-centric national security paradigm.

To be sure, Asian conceptions of comprehensive security have in the past incorporated human rights dimensions. For example, the definition of comprehensive security adopted by CSCAP (Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific) refers to the “dignity of the human person”. In this sense, Southeast Asian scholars have argued that their definition of comprehensive security does “take care” of the security of the individual, community and the state.

If so, then the question of priorities becomes important. A fair way of appreciating the distinctive nature of human security is to consider the historical context underpinning its emergence. Comprehensive security emerged at a time when many authoritarian Asian regimes looked at economic growth and domestic political order/stability as the chief “ideology” of security, whether national and regional. Comprehensive security thus served as a tool of national

²² An attempt to distinguish between the two concepts can be found in: Mely Caballero-Anthony, “Human Security and Comprehensive Security in ASEAN”, Paper presented to the ASEAN 2020 Conference on “ASEAN: Human Security in the Twenty-First Century”, July 21 – 22, Bangkok, Thailand.

²³ Rizal Sukma, an Indonesian scholar, makes a strong case for placing the “rights” issue at the centre stage of human security: “Human Security and Political Stability: Should There be a Tension?”, Paper presented to the ASEAN 2020 Conference on “ASEAN: Human Security in the Twenty-First Century”, July 21 – 22, Bangkok, Thailand.

security which was often a fig leaf for regime survival and legitimation. Human security, on the other hand, takes the dignity of the human person as an end in itself, not as an instrument, or by-product, of regime survival or legitimation.

As noted, the growing appeal of the concept of human security in Asia owes much to the Asian economic crisis. In the international arena, human security emerged out of the post-Cold War search for a new security paradigm, a process which was pushed by the spread of democratization and human rights norms, including prosecution of war crimes, and humanitarian intervention. The declining salience of state sovereignty vis-à-vis the rights of the individual contributed to this shift in thinking about security. Another important catalyst was growing recognition of the severe human costs of violent conflict, including acute human sufferings caused by land-mines, small arms and the proliferation of child soldiers.

But in Asia, recognition of the human security concept appears to have been a response to the financial crisis in the later part of the 1990s which dramatically increased the 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, in his opening address to the ASEAN 2020 Conference, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Surin Pitsuwan, stressed the link between the concept of human security and the need for social safety nets in the wake of the regional economic downturn.²⁴

These differences in context are extremely important to keep in mind when considering how far Asian policy-makers will embrace the notion of human security. In general, conservative Asian specialists see human security more in terms of its economic and social aspects (social

²⁴ Surin Pitsuwan delivered the opening address to the ASEAN 2020 Meeting in Bangkok on 20 July 2000.

safety nets, poverty alleviation) than its political dimension (e.g. human rights). But others, including younger academics, stress the political nature of human security, arguing for the need to separate it from state and regime security.

Such differences mirror debates about human security at the broader global level. Consider, for example, the substantive differences in interpreting the rationale for human security between Canada on the one hand and Japan and Thailand on the other.

The Canadian formulation²⁵ defines human security as “security of the people” and identifies the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions as the “core elements” of the doctrine of human security. Although it acknowledges the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report as the source of the “specific phrase” human security, and as such an important contributor to the post-Cold War thinking about security, it critiques that Report for focusing too much on threats associated with underdevelopment and ignoring “human insecurity resulting from violent conflict”. From this perspective, “the concept of human security has increasingly centered on the human costs of violent conflict.” Canadian policy documents have identified the campaign against landmines and efforts to create an International Criminal Court as two prime examples of human security initiatives.

The differences in the understanding of human security are reflected in the policy programs undertaken by states to implement a human security agenda. Here again, one could draw useful lessons by comparing the Canadian understanding and approach with that of Thailand. Canada has been in forefront of the select group of countries that have adopted and promoted a broader neo-liberal framework for security dialogue. It has adopted “cooperative security” approach as a more inclusive and less military focused definition of security and applied the notions of “middle power diplomacy” to humanitarian, environmental and developmental assistance themes of human security. Canadian participation in all major UN peacekeeping operations stand witness to its support for collective security approaches to international peace and security. Later there was a shift from peace keeping to “peace

building”- preventive measures such as institution building as part of development assistant package- as Canada’s collective security goals. Peace building seeks to address complex challenges of societies in conflict by working to strengthen capacity to manage conflict without violence by focusing on the political and socio-economic context of internal conflict.²⁶

Canada has taken the route of debates over arms control and disarmament as points of convergence of the twin goals of cooperative security and middle power diplomacy with the expanded human security agenda. As focus on most major elements of the human security agenda i.e. human rights, environment, development assistance became increasingly bogged down in criticisms over economic opportunism and political interference, an active and constructive internationalism on disarmament issues became direct sources of political legitimacy for Canada both at home and abroad.

Canada’s sponsorship of a treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines in the shape of the “Ottawa Process” seek to “fast track” an international agreement banning landmines from the inventory of the world’s military arsenals. The initiative saw the Convention on the prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and Their Destruction signed by 122 states in December 1997 in Ottawa. Canada’s landmines initiative was based on specific social and economic concerns of human security- landmines as indiscriminate killer of civilians and as invisible barrier to economic development: disruption of food supplies; the contamination of soil and water and the economic loss of productive workers.²⁷ Most of the states in Asia have extended their full support to the campaign recognising the “appalling humanitarian consequences of anti-personnel landmines” that “far outweigh their military utility.”²⁸

²⁵ As outlined in a document “Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World”, (Ottawa, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, April 1999).

²⁶ DFAIT, Canada “Peace Building and International Security” at http://www.dfait_maeci.gc.ca/ONU2000UN/fa-07txt-g.html, 1998

²⁷ John English, “The Ottawa Process, Paths Followed, Paths Abroad,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 52, no.22 (July 1998), pp.121-132

²⁸ “Anti-Personnel Mines; What Future for Asia?” Press Release, DFAIT, Canada, 24 July 1997, at <http://www.mines.gc.ca/english/documents/declaration.html>.

The Japanese conception of human security²⁹ presents an important contrast with the Canadian notion. While acknowledging that “[t]here are two basic aspects to human security – freedom from fear and freedom from want,” it criticizes 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 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.

Thailand under the government of Chuan Leekpai, which assumed office in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis and ruled the country until January 2001, has been an active champion of human security. Several aspects of the Thai notion of human security can be discerned. Its approach to human security seeks a middle ground between that of Canada’s political approach and Japan’s developmental approach. The Thai formulation argues that state security is insufficient to guarantee human security. There is always the tendency that national and other resources that are often scarce are allocated for regime security at the expense of personal security. Globalisation induced fluctuations and shocks in the international economic systems can lead to wide spread crisis within the country and the regions around the world, seriously affecting security of the people. Human security should be recognised as the objective, the desired output of all other forms of security. Human security goes beyond national boundaries and state and human security are mutually complementary.

Human security is not only about survival, well being and freedom but also about dignity (rights) and confidence. It involves broader issues of human rights, crime and terrorism, poverty, gender and social biases, environmental degradation, health and natural disasters. Asian countries may have different priorities for their own human security concerns but some common policies and strategies can be drawn around issues like poverty reduction, productive

²⁹ Statement by Director-General (of the Foreign Ministry of Japan) and the International Conference on Human Security in a Globalized World”, Ulan Bator, 8 May 2000.

employment, equal human rights, economic and social opportunities for people as well as investing in human resources and securing natural resources for sustainable development.

In the Thai perspective, human security requires political as well as economic stability. System collapses or crises weaken security increasing individual vulnerability. Greater democracy and increased public participation lead to greater influence on human and social agenda. In this sense democracy and human security are mutually supportive. Besides human security is linked with growth and development. Effective and quality growth reduce poverty. Shocks from macro economic crises affect individual security. Following the Asian economic crisis millions of people fell into circles of poverty and misery. Crisis specific measures ultimately protected the groups that were already under some form of formal protection systems leaving the most vulnerable untouched.

In a crisis situation, the priority usually is on state or national security with the expectation that improving the conditions for national security will lead to human security later. Thailand gave priority to stabilising macro economic system and balance of payments and gave stress on improving self sufficiency and community strengthening as measures to increasing human capacity as well as that of the society to cope with the crisis. This must be supplemented by a political system with more open political space allowing greater popular participation in decision making.

While Thailand accepts that human security must be geared first and foremost to human need, unlike many other Asian states such as Burma and Vietnam, it does not see a contradiction between human need and the rights of the individual protected through a political system geared to human rights and democracy. Thailand in the wake of the Asian crisis has emerged as one of the most open and democratic societies in Asia. Here checks and remedies against the violation of basic human rights have been considerably strengthened. There is freedom for press and other social groups. The country has moved toward people centered policies prioritizing on education, health care, social welfare, community rights and participation as means to develop human resources. It is believed that as civil education increases, people will

be more informed and offer responsible participation in political life. Open education system linking all formal and informal institutes in the society can support political reforms.³⁰

In the emerging paradigm of development, economic growth is taken to be a means and not an end and people are put at the center. Thailand subscribes to the notion that economic growth with a holistic approach will improve quality of life and living standards, protect natural resources and provide opportunities for future generations. Thailand has been promoting the idea of growth with equity as well as implementing measures that protect the political rights of the individual. The advent of a solidly pro-freedom constitution, laws pertaining to freedom of information, a marked reduction of the role of the military in the political process and a political climate allowing greater space to non-governmental organizations have gone hand in hand with measures to alleviate poverty, strengthen social safety nets and restore investor confidence. In short, Thailand seeks to achieve human security through democratic consolidation, and tries to reconcile both the *need* and *rights* aspects of human security, viewing them as complimentary.

We have different conceptions of human security today: one focusing on the *human costs* of violent conflict, another stressing *human needs* in the path to sustainable development. A third conception, approximating the first more than the second, emphasizes the *rights* (meaning human rights) dimensions of human security without necessarily linking to the costs of violent conflict. The Thai approach effectively reconciles all these elements and offers a credible Asian way of developing a comprehensive human security agenda. While the Canadian approach may be dismissed as “Western” model and Japan’s approach – despite being more acceptable to Asia due to its emphasis on economic security – may be less paradigmatic for Asia because of Japan’s position as a developed state, the approach of Thailand, a developing state with a strong element of traditional Asian culture – may be viewed as a more credible model for Asian countries as they seek to reconcile the political and economic dimensions of human security to emerge from the Asian crisis.

In this context, it is noteworthy that many some younger scholars in Asia, especially from the relatively more open societies, are now highlighting the *rights dimension* in the context of the Asian economic crisis. In their view, the Asian crisis brought the notion of human security

³⁰ C. Samutawanich, “Good Governance and Education Reform-Political Reform,” Vachirawut; 1999 Bangkok.

dimension into sharp focus not simply because it increased the incidence of human poverty and misery. More importantly, the Asian crisis exposed the *intellectual poverty* of ideas which had held sway in the region earlier. These ideas include “performance legitimacy” (the belief that rapid economic growth and political stability – a shorthand for strong, authoritarian government - would take care of threats to the human person), and “society over self” (associated with the “Asian values” school, which privileged regime security over individual choice). According to this view, the key lesson of the Asia crisis is that human rights and democratization must now be regarded as being indispensable components of human security. To pursue a notion of human security through economic growth and political stability alone and without regard to human rights and political participation, would be counterproductive. Governments which follow such a path could ultimately suffer the fate of Suharto’s Indonesia, featuring a dramatic collapse of political stability and human security.

ASEAN and SAARC

One useful way to illustrate the diversity of Asian understandings of, and approaches to, human security, is to compare the positions and predicament of ASEAN and SAARC, two subregional institutions in the region. At first, the differences between them are striking in several respects. ASEAN has gone much further than SAARC in developing an institutionalized framework for dialogue and cooperation covering both economic and political issues. Its record in managing intra-mural conflicts is far more impressive than SAARC’s. Yet, both institutions are rooted on a strict concept of state sovereignty which stresses the principle of non-interference of states. Now both institutions face a growing need to move beyond this doctrine if they are to develop more meaningful approaches to regional cooperation. In both region’s the doctrine of non-interference remains a powerful obstacle to the deepening of regionalism.

While non-interference this might have served ASEAN’s need during the Cold War years, its relevance in the post-crisis climate has come under growing attack..The East Timor crisis (which ASEAN failed to respond with any collective measure) highlighted the need for a regional peacekeeping training centre, which could become an important aspect of human security defined in terms of reducing the human costs of conflict. ASEAN has initiated some

steps recently to pursue a more assertive role in conflict management, the most important being the adoption of a “Troika” system of representatives which could offer good offices in a regional conflict.³¹ But doubts remain as to how effective will such an instrument be, given the sensitivities about sovereignty prevailing in the region. By most indications, the use of such instruments could only be envisaged if there are clear transnational spill-over effects of a regional crisis.³² Collective regional mediation may not prove acceptable in some situations involving sensitive bilateral relationships? Will a Singaporean representative in the ASEAN troika be acceptable in dealing with an internal conflict in Malaysia, given the traditional animosities between these two states?

In the wake of the Asian economic crisis, Surin Pitsuwan, the then Thai Foreign Minister, advocated a policy of “flexible engagement” as a framework for regional cooperation. Flexible engagement is not a proposal for human security per se, although it calls for more “frank” discussion within ASEAN about sensitive political, economic and social issues, including human rights problems in troubled states like Burma. But this approach has aroused opposition from other ASEAN members, notably Vietnam and Myanmar. Without a less stringent view of its non-interference doctrine, ASEAN may find it difficult to develop a meaningful approach to human security. Yet, the need for such an approach has never been stronger. The challenge to ASEAN’s non-interference doctrine comes from three sources. First, the global political context which made the norm so crucial to ASEAN during its formative years has changed. The norm was adopted from the UN Charter at a time when the newly independent ASEAN members still harbored vivid memories of colonialism and saw themselves as potential or actual victims of superpower rivalry. Non-interference provided a shield against the Cold War and offered an important basis for conducting intra-regional relations without challenging the post-colonial

³¹ Herman Josph S. Kraft, “Human Security and ASEAN Mechanisms”, Paper presented to the ASEAN 2020 Conference on “ASEAN: Human Security in the Twenty-First Century”, July 21 – 22, Bangkok, Thailand.

³² Ali Alatas, the former Foreign Minister of Indonesia, cautions that the “Troika” could only be used in situations with a genuine spill-over effect that pose a clear danger to neighbouring states. Cited in Amitav Acharya, “Is there a Lack of Focus in Indonesia’s Foreign Policy?”, The Straits Times, October 2, 2000., p.44.

territorial status quo that would have proven especially destabilising. But with international norms, including those of the UN moving away from a strict adherence to non-interference, ASEAN can ill afford to remain inflexible.

Secondly, ASEAN's founding members were relatively strong states who could cope with internal instability through a measure of repression and economic performance. Today, ASEAN counts a number of weak, or "near-failed" states as its members, states which require positive and pro-active assistance from other ASEAN members even if this will entail some degree of interference in their domestic affairs. Finally, ASEAN needs to deal with a host of new problems which were not salient during the initial years of its existence. Some of these problems may originate within the domestic realm of its members, but could have a clear regional implication and cause serious tensions among them. The haze problem, or the contagion effect of falling currencies resulting owing to domestic economic mismanagement by a member state, clearly falls within this category. A strict adherence to non-interference can ill position ASEAN to deal with such challenges.

Overall then, the need to rethink non-interference should be seen not as an abstract moral concern associated with human rights protection, but as a matter of "practical" necessity without which ASEAN cannot stay relevant and address real world changes and challenges facing human security.

While the principle of state sovereignty remains a powerful obstacle to the promotion of human security in the ASEAN region, at least the debate over flexible engagement was a healthy way of desensitizing the region from a strict state-centric view of regionalism. In the long-term, the ASEAN debate could prove beneficial in opening new thinking on, and approaches to, regional cooperation. In contrast, there has been little debate within SAARC over such issues. This has partly to do with the fact that SAARC remains essentially stagnant in recent years, with the India-Pakistan bilateral problems casting a huge shadow over its future survival. SAARC's smaller members remain afraid that any dilution of the principle of non-interference might give India a license to interfere in their domestic affairs. India's role in SAARC in this respect has scarcely resembled Indonesia's policy of restraint towards its smaller neighbours. But SAARC

can do more to address human security concerns in the region, especially in the area of *human need*.

The fact that the notion of human security has not found a central place in the official dialogues among South Asian governments, especially that of the two key states, India and Pakistan, is ironic, because two leading economists from the subcontinent, M. Haque and Amartya Sen, were architects of the UNDP's human development report which provided the initial conceptual impetus for the human security paradigm. But Indian and South Asian scholars are increasingly cognizant of the timeliness and importance of the human security approach. According to an Indian scholar, Suranjan Das, the advent of human security is nothing short of a 'paradigmatic shift ...in notion of national security based on military power or ideological and military confrontation to an understanding of security based on human concerns transcending state frontiers like socio-economic development, human rights, gender equity, terrorism, and environmental degradation. Security, in the end, is freedom from threats to one's survival...'³³ In general, however, the advocacy of a human security perspective in South Asia by non-governmental scholars derives from two factors. The first is the recognition of the salience of non-traditional threats to regional security, many of which are domestic, rather than external in origin. According to respected Indian strategic thinker P.R. Chari,

In South Asia, politics is in a state of violent flux. The rise of regional parties ensures parochial interests gaining ascendancy over national interests. The weakening of secular ideology has strengthened religion based parties leading to a struggle between liberal and the revivalist sentiments. This struggle draws sustenance from caste based politics. Democratisation of politics in South Asia has not led to empowerment of the people. Power has been usurped by the traditional elites; they are opposed to any meaningful decentralisation. There has been a wide spread breakdown of institutions of governance with administrative processes under strain. The phenomenon of governance processes being appropriated by criminal elements explains the inability of state to counter threats to both national and human security. The inadequacy of a state centric, military, oriented concept of security has inspired individual centric non -military broad based concept of security.³⁴

³³ "Evolving a theoretical perspective on Human Security", Report of the IPCS Seminar held on 30 June 2000, Compiled by Suba Chandran & Sonika Gupta, Article No.394, New Delhi, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, 30 July 2000, www.ipcs.org

³⁴ *ibid.*

The case for human security in South Asia is also a reaction against the perceived destabilizing effects of the nuclear ambitions of India and Pakistan. While acquiring a nuclear deterrent has broad support from within the Indian public, there also remains well-reasoned opposition to the doctrine of deterrence among opinion-makers. Echoing the views of the Nobel Laureate Sen himself, Praful Bidwai, an Indian journalist, argues:

Embracing the doctrine of nuclear deterrence means seeking security through insecurity, terror, and threat to cause havoc on a mass scale with pitiless disregard for life. This is incompatible with civilised, humane values....Real security can come only through democracy, pluralism, equity and social cohesion, caring and sharing, compassion and justice. Food security, minimum entitlements, gender security, human capacity-building and empowerment are more important here than military security.³⁵

Sceptics subscribing to a realpolitik view, which is predominant in Indian strategic thinking these days, might argue that a human security perspective is inapplicable to South Asia given the intractable quality of the India-Pakistani conflict. What role can such a concept play when the two most powerful states of the region stand on the nuclear brink? Muchkund Dubey, a former Foreign Secretary of India, has outlined the difficulties of applying the concept to the India-Pakistan rivalry:

The Indo-Pak relationship established has the balance of power in the South Asian region. Since this concept of balance of power necessitates a high level of armaments it has led to an arms race between the two countries. There is also no common interest between the two countries, with terrorism and jihad becoming part of the Pakistani agenda. The most important variable in changing the national security agendas of the two countries will be a change in the perceptions of their governing elites.³⁶

This view is challenged, however, by others who believe a human security paradigm can lead to meaningful dialogue between India and Pakistan and hence will be highly relevant to

³⁵ Praful Bidwai, "Pokhran in retrospect: The high costs of nuclearism", *The Times of India* 13 May 2000.

³⁶ "Evolving a theoretical perspective on Human Security", Report of the IPCS Seminar held on 30 June 2000, Compiled by Suba Chandran & Sonika Gupta, Article No.394, New Delhi, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, 30 July 2000, www.ipcs.org

South Asia's insecurity predicament. According to a report by the New Delhi-based Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies:

The focus of human security should go beyond the State and should target civil society. Even if the states are unwilling to initiate, the people could. For example, the governments in Indian and Pakistan may be reluctant to take certain steps, but the people in both countries could force their respective governments in this direction, as exist a significant population in both countries believes in such initiatives.³⁷

Indeed, there has been a proliferation of such Track-II initiatives in South Asia in recent years. Even if these initiatives have yet to produce significant results, this augurs well for a region where the traditional state centric notions of security have held sway. Moreover, some scholars have argued that the human security model can be applied to boost economic and technological cooperation among South Asian states, which in turn would stabilize the region.

While SAARC faces many of the same political constraints in operationalising human security as its ASEAN counterpart, there is an ongoing effort within SAARC to address a wide range of common human security concerns as poverty, environment, education, disease control, drug trafficking and drug abuse, and terrorism. Beginning in 1989 as the SAARC year for combating Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse, SAARC has designated successive years on Women in Development, Shelter, Environment, Disabled, Youth and Poverty to focus attention on important thematic issues of human security.

Poverty alleviation continues to be the most formidable challenge for South Asia. SAARC set up an independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation with the mandate to develop a strategy of social mobilization, and policies toward decentralized agriculture and human development that could alleviate the impact of an open economy and structural adjustment strategies pursued by the SAARC member countries. 1995 was designated as the "SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication". The protection and development of children in South Asia has also received priority by SAARC with particular emphasis on gender disparities. The SAARC Decade Plan of Action was adopted to promote the welfare of the "girl-child" as well as the priority concerns in the areas of health and nutrition, education and

³⁷ *ibid.*

literacy, and marriage and motherhood. The concerns of women are also being addressed with a view to bring them into the mainstream of the development process.

SAARC has also sought to promote a balance between development and environmental protection by commissioning two studies: one relating to the causes and consequences of natural disasters and protection and preservation of the environment, and the other dealing with the "greenhouse effect" and its impact on the region. The Committee on Environment identified measures for environment management, including the establishment of a relief and assistance mechanism for natural disasters and regional cooperation on the development of modern disaster warning systems. At the same time, SAARC's initiative on Health and Population Activities treats disease as a major security threat, and calls for the control and eradication of major diseases in the region such as malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis, diarrhea diseases, rabies, AIDS, and iodine deficiency disorder.

A coordinated regional strategy involving law enforcement, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for combating drug trafficking and drug abuse has been in place with SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. A Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) has been established in Colombo to collate, analyse and disseminate information on drug offences. Policies of media and community mobilization against drug abuse, preventive education, school curriculum development, treatment and relapse prevention and exchange of information on indigenous and innovative methods of treatment.

Significant barriers to the implementation of SAARC's human security initiatives remain, especially due to a scarcity of resources and continued political tensions among its members. Yet, for a regional institution unwilling and incapable of tackling hard security issues (due to intra-mural tensions), SAARC has usefully concerned itself with a human security agenda as a functional mechanism that could ultimately prove beneficial to political stability and regional order in South Asia.

Conclusion

In Asia, state responses to the human security paradigm remain cautious. There remains a strong belief that the state will retain a crucial role in promoting human security. Moreover,

state security remains an important goal of many governments. As some Asian specialists point out, sometimes the state too faces genuine security challenges. For the weaker states such as Cambodia or Laos, for example, building state capacity is crucial to addressing issues such as poverty, environmental degradation and other threats associated with the human security paradigm. Neglecting the state or opposing state action can be a prescription for misery and anarchy.

Moreover, throughout Asia, notwithstanding the economic crisis, communitarian views of politics, governance and security remain important. Some Asian analysts also think in terms of a positive nexus between state and human security. While the concept of human security arises from the belief that state security is insufficient at best and detrimental at worst and while there may be an inverse relationship between increased state security and promotion of human security, state and human security can also be mutually supportive. Ultimately, the relationship depends on the nature of the state. If a state is genuinely democratic, valuing its own people, protecting minority rights, it can enhance human security. At the same time, enhancing human security would strengthen the legitimacy of the state.

Due to the above considerations, governments in the region continue to be ambivalent and divided in their attitude towards human security. Official attitudes of Vietnam and Laos, for example, towards the norms of human security are marked by a fair degree of suspicion. Their representatives stress the need for the ASEAN to “stick to its principles”, especially those of non-interference and comprehensive security. Their governments see human security as a challenge to regime survival.

Asian security discourses remain at a flux, reflecting divisions between the traditional statist and the emerging people-oriented conceptions of security. This paper has identified and distinguished between three conceptions of human security: emphasizing “human need”, “human cost” and “human rights”. The Thai concept of human security comes closest to reconciling the various understandings of human security in the region today. South Asia, on the other hand, is yet to develop a common understanding of human security, which limits its relevance in addressing key security challenges facing the region. Over the long-term, the concept of human security can make an important difference to the regional security environment in Asia. But the

need to reconcile differences and develop a common understanding of the human security paradigm remains an important challenge for Asian and Western governments and peoples. In a region where traditional conceptions of sovereignty remain paramount and where the pace of democratisation lags behind other economically dynamic part of the world, such as Latin America, Asia will take its time in embracing the notion of human security.