

Human Security: From Idea to Practice

One Day Workshop

June 2010

Hosted by:
The Institute for Human Security,
La Trobe University

Session One

Human Security: Key Drivers, Antecedents and Conceptualization

Stephen James

Dr Stephen James presented the above paper as the basis for the discussion in the first session of the workshop. Beginning with the evolution of the concept of Human Security and placing it within the context of current challenges to Human Security such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, Dr James questioned the breadth of the current conception of Human Security. What should the primary focus of Human Security be in this period of environmental, political and economic uncertainty?

Dr James questioned the role of the state in providing Human Security, stating that it was possible to for the machinery of the state to serve both positive and negative in providing the basic freedoms and services that are required to guarantee an individual's security. Discussing the idea of the human state, James raised the implications to Human Security when a state's own security comes under threat.

Dr James went on to outline the very broad field that currently constitutes the understanding of what Human Security is, raising a number of concerns and questions. Although defined primarily as 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want', what should this encompass? And what levels of depredation need exist where Human Security is deemed to be under threat? James discussed the causes of threats to Human Security, stating that it is difficult to know how to prioritise issues when faced with such a variety of causes: environmental, cultural, institutional and the like.

A large part of the concerns expressed by Dr James centred around the conflict between state security and Human Security. James advocated for a change in the traditional concepts of security by states, moving away from the almost total focus on 'national security' and attempting to re-conceptualise the notion of sovereignty in order to effectively address issues of Human Security. James was also concerned with the level of intervention required by states to assist when dealing with Human Security.

Dr James also spoke to current debates around the interdisciplinary nature of studies of human security. Touching on the territorial nature of many areas of the academy, James advocate promoted the approach of complimentarity rather than competitiveness.

Response

Bill Durodie

Senior Fellow, Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, Nanyang University

Durodie opened his discussion by stating that it was only in recent discourse that Human Security had 'come of age' and been accepted in to the mainstream. Durodie attributed this to the shared political values and loss of faith in the state experienced by many individuals today.

Durodie was concerned with those acting within the field of Human Security, stating that although states were probably best suited to the role of providing security, they were often hampered by pressure from other states, national organisations and market forces. Durodie raised the difficulties involved with other actors in this arena: NGOs, although performing good work, are not representative institutions. How much influence should they be allowed to exert? And what about the role of the individual in securing 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear'?

Durodie discussed his criticisms of Human Security theory. Namely, that there exists a widening gap between rhetoric and reality and that modern states are prone to exaggerate 'emergencies' in order to build consensus for their actions. Durodie stated that there was a likelihood that the state's role would transform from a representative one to a managerial one if it was expected to lurch from one catastrophe to the next, without regard for its own institutions and national security.

Response

Stephanie Lawson

Professor of Politics and International Relations, Macquarie University

Lawson was concerned with the 'anti-statist' and anti-realist edge that she had encountered in many studies of the field of Human Security. Lawson stressed that the state was in the best position to provide Human Security through its traditional roles of providing basic services and protecting citizens from threat. Lawson stated that traditional concepts of security were also important, as a state is not able to provide security for its constituents if its own security is under threat.

Lawson discussed the different types of governments and their approaches to Human Security, emphasising the need to employ comparative politics in the study of Human Security. Lawson stated that, to date, there had been a large emphasis on international relations within the study of Human Security, and suggested that other approaches may be more valuable.

Discussion

Participants went on to an open discussion based on the views that had been expressed by the three speakers. Key issues that were raised during these discussions included:

- The definition of state capacity - government, public service, judiciary, legislature – and the role and limitations of such capacity in the provision of Human Security.
- Traditional liberal discourse and Human Security's place within this.
- Domestic vs international threats to Human Security, and the tendency for emphasis to be placed on the latter.
- Non-Western roles within Human Security.
- Human Security's role within existing disciplines of study:
 - The interplay of Human Rights, Development Studies, International Law and Human Security.
 - The packaging of current thought allows for the contribution of scholars from across many disciplines.
 - The limitations on the use of Human Security as a concept
- Human Security as a bureaucratic tool.
- Collective Security vs individual security.
- The possible use of Human Security by some regimes to advance their own ends.
- Human Security as a critique of the national security discourse.
- Human Security from below.

Closing

Joseph Camilleri

Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University

In closing the first session of the workshop, Camilleri discussed his own views of the evolution of the concept of Human Security from the Cold War period and its interplay with areas such as common, cooperative and comprehensive security. Camilleri discussed the relationship between the development of Human Security theory and the mass weaponisation of states during this period.

Camilleri stated that the modern concern with issues of Human Security served to remind states that, although they are important means, they are not ends in themselves. Although the state plays an important role in this arena, in Camilleri's view, it cannot achieve security for its citizens without the input civil society and regional and global institutions.

Session Two

New Directions for Human Security

Presentation One

Mark McGillivray

Professorial Fellow, Alfred Deakin Research Institute

McGillivray discussed the interplay between existing measurements of human well-being and Human Security, such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and health, poverty and education indicators. McGillivray suggested that human security be taken into account when assessing individual countries well-being outcomes and outlined possible ways of doing this.

Presentation Two

Andrew Brennan

Professor of Philosophy, La Trobe University

Brennan discussed the conceptualisation of Human Security within the context of the evolution of Western thought, with particular reference to concepts of morality during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Brennan outlined the dilemma for modern individuals when faced with growing consumerism and corporatisation of society, stating that modern challenges to humanity itself had immediate implications in the field of Human Security. It was also clear to Brennan that the death of the public sphere had caused problems with the definition of humanity itself and that this ought to be taken in to account when considering Human Security. Brennan also raised the issue of growing cosmopolitanism and the difficulty in providing Human Security for those who have no homeland.

Presentation Three

Elizabeth Reid

Visiting Fellow, State, Society & Governance in Melanesia Program, School of International, Political & Strategic Studies

Reid provided a profile of the current state of Human Security in Papua New Guinea (PNG) as experience through her humanitarian work in that country. Citing current examples of violence against women and a lack of food security, among others, Reid demonstrated that although a country may score highly in relation to current humanitarian indicators, such as democratisation, it does not necessarily lead to higher levels of Human Security.

Reid discussed that problems in dealing with issues of Human Security in the context of flailing states such as PNG, and raised the issue of foreign intervention. Reid was of the view that although assistance is indeed required, when applied in an ill-considered way, such assistance can cause more harm than good.

Discussion

Participants went on to an open discussion based on the views that had been expressed by the three speakers. Key issues that were raised during these discussions included:

- The exposure of developing countries to the most severe threats to Human Security and the challenges in addressing them:
 - Systemic change and cultural traditions.
 - A rethinking of development would be required to improve the situation. Grassroots action is needed.
- The 'spectrum' of Human Security: not a question of absolutes. How does one assess varying degrees of Human Security? And once a measurement is agreed upon, will that in itself affect the perception of Human Security?
- Where no traditional state role exists, how do we address issues of Human Security?
- Support for successful local initiatives: provision of space, financial support must be applied strategically, empowerment of local voices.
- Australia's role in assisting other countries to enhance Human Security
- Climate change and Human Security: global threats cannot be addressed on an exclusively local basis.