

The Contribution of West Asia to the Concept of Human Security

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Introduction

In the new international context defined by rapid globalization, the traditional approach to security – that is, hard security, conceived of in military terms and operating primarily at the state level – is increasingly being replaced with new approaches focusing on soft security, in which *human security* is seen as forming the basis of national and international security. Human security is a new paradigm centered on the individual, rather than the state, and is inextricably linked to human and sustainable development, which has secured this concept a significant role as the focus of academic circles. International organizations, such as UNESCO, are endeavoring to promote human security within the societies of their Member States, and to convene regional conferences in this regard.

It may be argued that human security has long existed as a concept or an ideal, albeit without that specific name. After all, the constitutions of some countries, as well as some international organizations, tend to strengthen human dignity and fulfillment, and in this regard the Constitution of UNESCO stipulates that it shall “...contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture...”¹, epitomizing the collaborative, international approach found in human security. At the same time it explicitly states that “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”², thus

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¹ UNESCO. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. Paris; UNESCO. 2004. Article I, paragraph 1. p. 8.

² *Ibid*, Preamble, p. 7.

acknowledging the limitations to a state-level, militaristic interpretation of peace and security, and giving the individual a role of responsibility to play in achieving it.

Human security gained recognition as a concept on the publication of the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 1994*, which stated that "The world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives."¹ This concept, which focused on individuals and related their security to human development and human rights, defined the seven components of human security as being economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal (physical) security, community security, and political security. While this undoubtedly made a major contribution in defining and clarifying the concept, it remains controversial and sensitive subject whose exact definition is still disputed.

It is to be noted the primary architect of the concept of human security was Mahbub ul-Haq, the late visionary Pakistani economist, Special Adviser to the United Nations Development Programme and founder of the Human Development Report. The first references to the term "human security" are to be found in the 1993 and 1994 reports, and he expanded the concept in his work "New Imperatives of Human Security", published in 1994². This demonstrates that the scholars of West Asia have contributed to the initiation of this concept, although it was later to be interpreted differently. West Asian countries should therefore endeavor to give this concept their own signification.

Human security is related to the daily life of the citizens of the world, including those of West Asia, and this concept - which has been used in the evolving situation of the new international era - demonstrates the importance of looking at humanity as a whole. However, this issue should be regarded from the viewpoint that all nations and regions should contribute to the elaboration of this concept, and it should not be a concept to be used as an instrument or tool to be imposed on others. Thus, all developing countries

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994*. New York: Oxford University Press. Overview: An agenda for the Social Summit, p. 23.

http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en_overview.pdf

² Ul Haq, Mahbub. *New Imperatives of Human Security*. Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi. 1994.

should have an active presence in the process of defining the concept and its terms, which are linked to the destiny of human societies, and prevent the imposition of one particular approach on all humanity or the instrumentalization of this concept by certain powers. While various developing countries have some reservations about this concept, they should neither neglect nor reject it, but rather try to give it their own definition and moderation and to be active regarding the inclusion of their views for the promotion of this concept, so that it may include the views of all.

West Asia, as the centre of inter-cultural dialogue and the rise of great divine religions, particularly Islam, has a great role to play in the contribution to this concept. In a practical approach, if this concept is regarded from an inclusive and prescriptive point of view to encounter and solve many problems, such as disease, drugs, immigration and refugees, it can promote the social security of citizens in the region as well as in their own societies. Even if this concept has been raised by certain countries for political reasons or motivations, it does not mean that this concept has been monopolized by these countries and others cannot contribute to its promotion. We should take a passive approach to it in believing that because it has been created with some signification, it should either be taken as it is or rejected; instead, a proactive approach is required in which we should endeavor to contribute to this concept ourselves. If developing countries wish to have an active presence in the process of elaborating global concepts and international norms, and to avoid the imposition of some unilateral concepts, in this international era they should be more present in the conceptualization process within international organizations, for example by participating in drafting sessions, discussing terminology and approving international regulations. However, the concept of human security is not a new concept in West Asia, as it has its origins in the history of Islamic thought in the region.

The Different Theoretic Approaches to Human Security

While various academics have addressed this question, for the purposes of this paper we shall largely confine ourselves to the definitions and conceptualizations of human security developed by the different bodies of the United Nations, while briefly touching

on other important national and international approaches. A common feature of the approaches is their adoption of the individual, rather than the state, as the referent.

A. The United Nations System:¹

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, has stated that “Peace means much more than the absence of war.”² In moving away from an examination of human security in military terms, he expands its terms of reference to “encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament and respect for human rights and the rule of law.”³ In his report of the United Nations’ work in the year 2000, his assessment of perceived threats to human security included “Gross abuses of human rights, the large-scale displacement of civilian populations, international terrorism, the AIDS pandemic, drug and armed trafficking and environmental disasters...”⁴ In an international workshop held in Mongolia, he clarified human security widely as encompassing “human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential”,⁵ while reiterating the now widely accepted definition of human security as “Freedom from want, freedom from fear,” and furthermore “the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment”.

Ramesh Thakur, the Vice Rector for Peace and Security of the United Nations University, has defined human security as referring to “the quality of life of the people of a society of a

¹ See <http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf>

² Annan, Kofi. Millennium Report. Chapter 3, p. 43-44.
<http://www.un.org/millennium/sg/report/full.htm>

³ Annan, Kofi. “Towards a Culture of Peace”.
<http://www.unesco.org/opi2/lettres/TextAnglais/AnnanE.html>

⁴ Annan, Kofi. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization*. General Assembly Official Records, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 1 (A/55/1). New York: United Nations. 2000. p.4.
<http://www.un.org/documents/sg/report00/a551e.pdf>

⁵ Annan, Kofi. “Secretary-General Salutes International Workshop on Human Security in Mongolia”. Two-day Session in UlaanBaatar, May 8-10, 2000. Press Release SG/SM/7382.
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000508.sgsm7382.doc.html>

society or polity.”¹ Equally, “Anything which degrades their quality of life – demographic pressures, diminished access to a stock or resources, and so on – is a security threat.”² He conceives of human security as being two-fold, firstly referring to “safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression” while, secondly, “it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life...”³ He was responsible for defining human security as encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.

Sadako Ogata, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, delineated the four essential elements comprising human security as, firstly, “...the possibility for all citizens to live in peace and security”⁴, which she relates to the prevention and resolution of conflict in conjunction with reconciliation; secondly, people’s enjoyment of all rights and obligations; social inclusion, which is defined as “having equal access to the political, social and economic policy making processes, as well as to draw equal benefits from them”; and finally, “the establishment of rule of law and the independence of the justice system.”⁵ Regarding threats to human security, she notes those of a social, economic and environmental nature, as well as political and military, and gives the examples of landmines, small arms, drugs trafficking and HIV. She also stressed the necessity of political and security mechanisms to address conflicts.⁶

¹ Thakur, Ramesh. “From National to Human Security”. *Asia-Pacific Security: the Economics-Policy Nexus*. Eds. Stuart Harris and Andrew Mack. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. 1997. pp. 53-54.

² *Ibid.*

³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 2004*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 23.
<http://www.undp.org/hdro/1994/94.htm>>08/02/01

⁴ Ogata, Sadako. “Inclusion or Exclusion: Social Development Challenges for Asia and Europe”. Statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the Asian Development Bank Seminar. 27 April 1998.
<http://unhcr.ch/refworld/unhcr/hcspeech/27ap1998.htm>>08/22/01

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ogata, Sadako. “Human Security: a Refugee Perspective”. Keynote speech of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the Ministerial Meeting on Human Security Issues of the “Lysoen Process” Group of Governments. Bergen, Norway. 19 May 1999.
<http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/unhcr/hcspeech/990519.htm>

Louise Frechette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, defined human security as adequate food, shelter, good health, education, protection from violence, and "...a State which does not oppress its citizens but rules with their consent"¹, while Hans Van Ginkel, Rector of the United Nations University, with Edward Newman, described the concept as "security from fear, conflict, poverty, social and cultural deprivation, and hunger"².

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, has related the concept to that of development and emphasized the central role of education in human security, stating that "There will be no lasting peace without sustainable endogenous development, which attacks the root causes of division and of entrenched poverty and exclusion. Education fulfils its true purpose by allowing individuals to make their own decisions and take control of their own lives."³

B. National and International Approaches:

Among the states that have put the issue of human security on the agenda, we can refer to Canada. While broadly defining human security as "freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives"⁴, the Canadian government has gone further in identifying five concrete foreign policy priorities to strengthen human security, namely, the protection of civilians, peace support operations, conflict prevention, governance and accountability, and public safety (relating to transnational organized crime), thus rendering the concept more operational.

An Asian country, Japan, has also played a key role through means of an initiative to set up the human security fund at the United Nations in 1999, and at the national level has taken a broad

¹ Frechette, Louise. Statement by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General to a high-level panel discussion on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna International Centre. 9 October 2000.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1999/19991912.dsgsm70.doc.html>

² Van Ginkel, Hans, and Newman, Edward. "In Quest of Human Security". *Japan Review of International Affairs*. 14.1:79. 2000.

³ Matsuura, Koïchiro. Inaugural Speech by the Director-General of UNESCO at the First International Meeting of Directors of Peace Research and Training Institutions, "What Agenda for Human Security in the Twenty-first Century?" UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. 27-28 November 2000. p. 11.

<http://www.unesco.org/securipax/whatagenda.pdf>

⁴ Canadian Foreign Ministry website. <http://dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreignp.humansecurity/menu-e.asp>>

approach to the concept by emphasizing the importance of human dignity as well as the twin values "freedom from fear and freedom from want", while recognizing such threats as HIV/AIDS, refugees and land mines.

The Human Security Network comprises 12 full member states (Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and Thailand) and one observer (South Africa)¹. It has closely related human security to human rights and humanitarian law, which it believes to be its preconditions. It also emphasizes the importance of democratic governance. In this regard it bears some similarity to the Council of Europe, which has rather chosen to focus attention on the promotion of democratic security in relation to human rights. While, like human security, this is a non-military reconceptualization of security, it is essentially political - insisting on the primacy of one set of political values, which are Western in origin - and therefore potentially controversial.

Other organizations, such as the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement and individual states², have expressed reservations with or mistrust of the concept because they think it can be used as a pretext to intervene in the internal affairs of the countries or to violate their sovereignty.

C. Individual Scholars:

Steven Lonergan has stated that "Human security is achieved when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate, or adapt to threats to their human, environmental, and social rights; and have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options and actively participate in attaining these options."³ In the opinion of Norman Myers "...security applies most at the level of the individual citizen. It amounts to human well-being; not only protection from harm and injury but access to other basic requisites that are the due of every person on earth."⁴ Bertrand

¹ <http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/members-e.php>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_security

³ Lonergan, S., "GECHS Science Plan" (Bonn: International Human Dimensions Programme, 2000), cited in Weissberg, Matthew; *Conceptualizing Human Security*, p. 5. http://www.american.edu/sis/students/sword/Back_Issues/1.pdf

⁴ Myers, N. 1993. *Ultimate Security*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. Cited in Weissberg, Matthew; *op. cit.*

Ramcharan equated security with safety and protection, and “submitted that international human rights norms define the meaning of human security.”¹ Withaya Sucharithanarugse posited that “By focusing on people, ‘human security’ renders meaningless the consideration of traditional territorial boundaries; even the nation and the state cannot be accorded high priority. Human grievances are multi-faceted...”² Meanwhile Caroline Thomas makes a quantitative/qualitative distinction: “While material sufficiency lies at the core of human security, in addition the concept encompasses non-material dimensions to form a qualitative whole. The quantitative aspect refers to material sufficiency. The qualitative aspect of human security is about the achievement of human dignity, which incorporates personal autonomy, control over one’s life and unhindered participation in the life of the community.”³

In order to demonstrate more clearly the contribution of United Nations bodies as well as national and international approaches to the conceptualization of human security, it is useful to classify them in table one⁴.

From the above definitions it becomes clear that human security is necessarily interlinked with human development, and the latter is a major element in securing the former. While human development has been summarized as "freedom from want", this ideal is twinned with "freedom from fear" to give human security a broader scope. If human development is primarily understood in material terms, human security adds an ethical facet. In the same manner, human security is interwoven with human rights, with "security of person" explicitly stated as being a right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ref. article 3). However, the approach to human rights is primarily a legal one, while human security is multidisciplinary in nature.

¹ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2002. *Human Rights and Human Security*. The Hague; Martinus Nijhoff. 9. Cited in Weissberg, *op. cit.*

² Sucharithanarugse, Withaya. 2000. “The Concept of ‘Human Security’ Extended: Asianizing the Paradigm”, in Tow, Thakur and Hyun, eds. 55. Cited in Weissberg, *op. cit.*

³ Thomas, Caroline. 2000. *Global Governance, Development and Human Security*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press. 6. Cited in Weissberg, *op. cit.*

⁴ Adapted from: <http://www.pyinnya.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/human-security-comparitive-definitions.pdf>

Table one

Organization	Referent	Values	Threats recognized	Agents of insecurity
UNDP	Individual	Freedom from fear, freedom from want	Economic; food; health; environment; personal; community; political	States; individuals; societal groups; environment
Sadako Ogata, UNHCR	Individual	Prevention and resolution of conflict; enjoyment of all rights and obligations; social inclusion; establishment of rule of law and independence of the justice system	Political; military; social; economic; environmental; landmines; small arms; drug trafficking; HIV/AIDS	States; Individuals; rebels; international criminals; environment
Kofi Annan, UN	Individual	Economic development; social justice; environmental protection; democratization; disarmament; human rights; rule of law	Internal violence; nuclear weapons; mass destruction; repression; human rights abuses; population displacement; terrorism; HIV/AIDS; drug and arms trafficking; environmental disasters	States; individuals; environment
Ramesh Thakur, UNU	Community	Quality of life; human rights	That which degrades quality of life – demographic pressures, diminished access to resources	States; individuals; societal groups; institutional structures; international crime; globalization; migration; environment

Table One (Continue)

Organization	Referent	Values	Threats recognized	Agents of insecurity
Louise Frechette, UN	Individual	Adequate food; health; education; protection from violence; absence of state oppression	Poverty; disease; violence; political oppression	State; individuals; environment
Hans Van Ginkel, Edward Newman	Individual	Human dignity	Fear; conflict; poverty; deprivation; hunger	
Government of Canada	Individual	Freedom from pervasive threats to rights, safety and lives		States; rebels'; drug and weapons trafficker; individuals
Government of Japan	Individual	Human dignity; freedom from want; freedom from fear	Poverty; environment; drugs; organized crime; HIV/AIDS; refugees; landmines	States; rebels; drugs and weapons traffickers; individuals
Human Security Network	Individuals	Freedom from pervasive threats to safety and human rights	Economy; food; health; environment; drugs; terrorism; organized crime; landmines; gender violence	States; rebels

Turning to the relationship of the concept with that of national security, as previously stated, we may note that the referent of human security is generally agreed to be the individual

rather than the state, which is the primary actor in the concept of national security. Thus, the protection from harm of the well-being of the individual is sought, rather than the protection of the interests of the state or its very survival. This moves beyond the traditional “realist” paradigm, which prioritizes the security of individual states in the face of perceived threats to their sovereignty or integrity; this approach is necessarily military and defensive in nature, and a state’s power is conceived of in terms of these capabilities. Human security recognizes other forms of threats than military aggression, whether internal (such as internal conflict or oppression), transnational (such as organized crime or international terrorism) or natural (such as environmental disaster or degradation); it has been described as relating to persuasion where national security relates to power.¹ The realist paradigm, which can find its origins in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, was consolidated in the world defined by the Second World War and was further reinforced during the Cold War, which led to a bipolar system in which power was balanced between two superpowers; after this period, the altered nature of conflict – most cases of which were internal, and most of whose victims were civilian - the possibility of the development of a new concept of security arose, which would seek to protect human dignity. Human security seeks to respond to a globalized, increasingly interconnected world in which governance is seen as having a higher level than that of the state. Similarly, while in the traditional paradigm the world beyond the state boundaries was perceived as being uncontrollable and a potentially violently threatening, it is now acknowledged that the absence of an external military threat is not sufficient to ensure that the citizens of a particular state live in safety, as their other basic needs may be threatened. In this sense, the nature of the threats recognized in the concept has expanded from being conventional and operating at the state level, to that of also affecting communities and individuals. Equally, an overemphasis on national security could even counterproductive in that it could actually itself

¹ Acharya, Amitav. 2005. “Human Security, Identity Politics and Global Governance: From Freedom from Fear to Fear of Freedoms. Paper given at the international conference “Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance: Paradigms of Power and Persuasion. 1-2 September 2005, Canberra, Australia. <http://law.anu.edu.au/niss/acharya.pdf>

prove to be a threat to the human security of its citizens.

One may conclude that human security is complementary to the concepts of human development, human rights and national security, but is far more comprehensive than traditional concepts of security; it could briefly be summed up as freedom from want, freedom from fear and the right to dignity. Its primary referent is the individual, not the state. Fluid, interdependent and multi-dimensional in nature, human security is both indivisible and universal. It operates at an internal and transnational level, necessitating a collaborative and multilateral approach. The traditional conception of violence has been expanded to include “structural violence”¹, which is defined as violence without an actor which may be manifested as unequal power, and the concept of human security is capable of dealing with this where the traditional concept of security is inadequate. Still not clearly defined, the elaboration of this concept at the global level is a prerequisite for consensus on its indicators and the establishment of an analytical process by which threats to human security can be identified and acted upon.

The Region of West Asia

West Asia has historically formed the crossroads of cultures and civilizations and enjoys its own historical, cultural and social particularities. As a region of strategic importance, its peace, security and stability are necessary preconditions to achieving global peace, security and stability.

West Asia is composed of 5 sub-regions which encompass 24 countries, which are as follows: Afghanistan; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Georgia; Iran; Iraq; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Lebanon; Oman; Pakistan; Palestine; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Syria; Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; United Arab Emirates; Uzbekistan; and Yemen. The occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11 demonstrates the importance of this region and shows that it should be regarded as a whole. The destiny of this region is inter-related; the issue of Afghanistan cannot be regarded separately to that of Iraq. These

¹ Johan Galtung. “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” *Journal of Peace Research* 6. (1969). Cited in <http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf>

issues demonstrate that the new questions relating to this area should be addressed within a broader context, that of West Asia.

Another aspect of this region is that delineated areas, for example the Middle East, have been imposed by Western orientalist. The Middle East is in fact “Middle” on the basis of a Eurocentric vision, and thus the area has been assessed and defined from Europe’s own geographical position. This concept therefore does not originate in the region itself. Also, Central Asia is a concept that Russia used in order to state that it is in the North of Asia, and Central Asia lies between it and South Asia; it is thus an external vision, and Central Asia is not central by its own choice. Transcaucasia is also based on the Russian viewpoint; the South Caucasus is composed of the three countries to the south of this mountain range. While these geographical concepts have been generated by others, two other regions are not imposed, namely the subcontinent of South Asia and the Persian Gulf. However, these two sub-regions are very limited and need to interact with other sub-regions within a wider region, which we call West Asia, which enjoys a very long-standing civilization rooted mainly in the Islamic civilization and its dialogue with other cultures. The other geographical constructs, such as the New Middle East or the Greater Middle East, cannot reflect the reality of the region as these also are Eurocentric or Western conceptions. Moreover, the tendency in Western countries was to present the Middle East as a region separate from the Asian continent, whereas many countries of this region are geographically situated in Asia. There are various reasons behind the West’s attention to this region, among which we can refer to the fact that the Middle East had many rich sources of oil and gas, and it was considered preferable to separate it from other parts of Asia¹.

In this manner the concept of the region of West Asia can encompass all the countries of the region in their self-determination. If we observe some conflicts in the region, which were previously based on external rivalry and now on external projects, this was due to the fact that the Middle East is regarded very separately, and not in interaction with other parts of West Asia, and it becomes clear that the Middle East is almost a political

¹ Majidi, Mohammad Reza, “Integration in West Asia: Challenges and Solutions”, in *New Approach to West Asia*. Undergoing publication.

term rather than a geographical one. Furthermore, the concept of the Arab region, which was proposed to define this region, intends to distinguish between Arab and non-Arab countries to give an Arab colour to the region, whereas it is a mosaic of diverse ethnicities and races; the progress of this region necessitates interaction between Arab and non-Arab countries. Another example is the recent use of the geographical concept of the Mediterranean basin; this is now based on European interests rather than those of the other countries concerned, as Europe wishes to look at the Mediterranean as a location in which the resources of the region may be utilized for European countries, rather than resolving the security problems of the Mediterranean countries; it also intends to bring Israel out of its isolation by including it in the Mediterranean region. Thus, to achieve human security in the region of West Asia, we should look ahead to institutionalization of the interaction of its various sub-regions¹. Success in this path necessitates an intrinsic vision of the countries from their own viewpoints, from diverse aspects, taking into account the social and cultural particularities of the region.

The Contribution of West Asia to the Concept

There is great concern in West Asian countries, as is also the case with developing countries of other regions, that the concept of human security may be misused by virtue of its very inclusiveness. They believe that it can undermine the national sovereignty of developing countries and could be used to justify external intervention in their internal or domestic affairs; in this connection the emphasis of some proponents on the political nature of human security, namely the instrumentalization of democracy, is a cause of concern. By the same token, they are concerned that great powers may intervene in the name of human security and thus endanger their national interests.

Due to the fact that the majority of the inhabitants of West Asian countries are Muslim, Islamic concepts and theology can contribute to the development of the concept of human security. The word Islam itself derives from *salam* and *salama*, which respectively mean peace and being in peace, and one of the main

¹ *Ibid.*

pillars of Islam is *iman* or belief, which comes from the word *amn*, meaning secure or safe; together, these are the origin of *amniat* or security. Thus, based on Islamic principles, having a peaceful and pacific life will complete security for humanity. Islam considers security as one of the major principles of human rights and a vital element for human societies to be able to benefit from their lives, and considers security as a prerequisite for the progress of human beings. This security exists not only at the horizontal level – namely, the relation of a human being with other citizens and also with their governments - but also at the vertical level, which refers to the relation of a human being with his or her creator.

One of the contributions of West Asia is to give a multi-dimensional aspect to human security, which means that human security should also be regarded in the context of the linkage between individual and national security, as well as horizontal and vertical security¹. It becomes clear that this concept had its own origins in Islamic thought, but it is the new interpretation of this concept that has led to this particular term. Although this concept is seen as being new, it is new in terminology rather than as a concept, as it had already been in existence as a concept in West Asia.

In this regard, one of the contributions of Islamic thought to this concept is to add a spiritual approach to it; this spiritual aspect is also internal security and tranquility. That is, although human security is an objective matter, it should also be regarded from a subjective point of view; if we have internal security and tranquility of mind and heart, this will lead to objective human security and peace. Thus, morality constitutes a linkage between these internal and external, or subjective and objective, approaches to security. One of the prerequisites of this concept is justice, which means giving everyone what they deserve, or putting everything in its proper place. The principle of justice requires human beings to benefit from nature and the planet earth to the fullest extent possible, and at the same time to try to preserve the environment for sustainable development. In fact, if we wish to explain the

¹ By horizontal security the authors mean transnational security among the peoples of the region, from diverse sub-regions. By vertical security they refer to the relationship of the human being with its creator, so that by through his or her connection to God, the human being may attain internal tranquility.

contribution of West Asia to the concept of human security, we may say that although there are two definitions of human security, namely freedom from fear and freedom from want, there should also be a third approach, namely freedom based upon human dignity and justice for all. In this perspective, human dignity takes into consideration all the material and spiritual aspects of human beings, their prosperity and perfection, so that it brings about the *khalifatullah* – the regency of God on earth. This comprehensive approach to human security, based on divine precepts, allows human beings to be the authors of their destiny without any external imposition or coercion. Thus, if we want to establish a comprehensive human security in the region, one of the conditions is that it should arise from the interior of this region itself rather than being imposed from the exterior.

Another contribution of West Asia to human security is that this issue, and also that of human development, should be implemented within the context of cultural diversity. This means that we should respect the diverse norms and values of each culture in the region and favour a voluntary approach, without any imposition. In this manner, human security would not endanger either the national security or national sovereignty of the countries concerned, as they should decide for themselves, voluntarily, to reach this phase. If we pay attention to such issues, this concept will not be able to be misused for political objectives or ends, and developing countries will not see it in a negative light as it will arise from their own free will.

A further contribution of West Asia to the elaboration of the concept is the linkage between the individual and society. In some regions this is based on individualism, and some others may say that it should be based on collectivism, whereas the contribution of this region is that it should be regarded as a linkage between a social or societal perspective, while also taking into account the perfection of each individual in this context. Thus we should adopt a comprehensive view so that we may see its results at the regional level, and it is for this reason that we believe that social justice can respond to all the individual and collective needs of human societies at the national, regional and international levels. As we have previously mentioned, it becomes clear that intrinsic solutions are the key to the development of this region. These intrinsic views should be coupled with the aim of interacting with other regions;

this is not a closed human security, but instead should be based on a new regionalism, on interaction and trans-regional cooperation. However, it must be stressed that this view should extend from the internal to the external, rather than vice versa; if the view is imposed from the exterior, it could lead to tension and create conflict in the region.

Another contribution of West Asia is in the constitution of this region itself, as it is composed of five sub-regions, namely Central Asia, Caucasia, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf region, and part of the Indian subcontinent (South Asia), of which Iran constitutes a pivot which can interact between all these five sub-regions. In this regard this region is an arena of interaction between five sub-regions, each of which can contribute to human security based on its own social and cultural contexts.

It should also be noted that in the region an order based on justice was the foundation of the ancient Persian concept of political power and governance, which has been said to have contributed to the Western concept of democracy¹. The Persian Empire enjoyed a tradition of governance based on justice, tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity, in which freedom and equality were decreed throughout its territories. Thus, a concept of statehood and a system of governance compatible with the promotion of human security are indigenous to the region.

In order for human security to be implemented in the form of operational policy, the concept itself must first be agreed upon. Given the controversial nature of any political definition, we propose that human security be defined by a social approach. This would allow consensus on the subject to be built at the regional level, which is a precondition to devising any collaborative strategy.

As previously mentioned, in transcending the material, human security can be said to have an ethical and moral dimension, as is evidenced by the stress commonly placed on social justice by some of its proponents. This would form a useful starting point for the development of policy appropriate to the region. In the same connection, human security can be said to correspond to Islamic

¹ Mojtahed-Zadeh, Pirouz. 2006. *Boundary Politics and international Boundaries of Iran*. Boca Raton, Florida; Universal Publishers, 2006. See Chapter I.

precepts, as Islam is the major religion in the region, and is a comprehensive way of life in which people are required to live together in peace while pursuing self-development. This can be seen in the importance Islam accords to education, which according to UNESCO is the cornerstone of human security. By placing emphasis on the spirit of community and recognizing individual and collective rights, Islam has a holistic approach to the development and empowerment of the human being and society which is reflected in the comprehensive approach of human security, and can prove a powerful ideological motivational force in the quest to attain peace and security for humankind.

Challenges to Human Security in the Region

West Asia suffers from diverse threats, of which the most important can be said to be related to education, poverty, terrorism, climate change and infectious diseases.

Education is key in developing human resources and thus ensuring human security. It is of concern that enrolment in primary education remains relatively low in comparison to other regions, and gender parity in education should also be enhanced. Education plays an essential role in reducing poverty, which is a great threat in West Asia, and available resources should be targeted for human development. Efforts must be made to reduce malnourishment and illiteracy, which should be collaborative in nature, and involve both state and non-state actors in order to be effective.

Improving human development will also serve to remove the external roots of terrorism, caused by external powers, which poses a threat to the region due to the fact that these powers do not respect the sacred norms of nations in the region, provoke Islamophobia by the pretext of combating terrorism, and sometimes deal with terrorists in order to provoke them into carrying out inhuman actions with the intention of distorting the image of Islam. While obviously posing a direct threat to the lives of individuals, terrorism also creates social instability and propagates a climate of fear. Related to this issue is the problem of the proliferation of small arms in the region, which are widely trafficked, and which – together with drug trafficking – have reached such a level that they threaten internal stability. However, it should be noted that a contemporary challenge to human security is to be found in the

“war on terror” resulting from the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001; while terrorism is a human security threat in that it is transnational, non-conventional and its victims are often civilians, the objective of “freedom from fear” has overtaken “freedom from want”, and it has been noted that “freedom from fear now engenders a fear of freedoms”¹. That is, a sense of fear is used to justify disproportional responses (such as the occupation of Iraq, increased surveillance and detention without charges), and has indeed been expanded to cover other threats. At this level the war on terror actually undermines human security as it poses a direct threat to civilians, the focus on the related military expenditure leads to development aid being neglected, and double standards are to be seen concerning the promotion of democracy in the region.

Another issue to be taken into account in the region is the increase of drug addiction and its adverse effect on the population of the region should also be addressed in any comprehensive approach. Mention must also be made of landmines, which have claimed enormous numbers of victims in neighbouring countries and directly threaten the civilian population. A related issue is that of the large numbers of refugees in the region and the problems that the displacement of populations gives rise to.

Environmental threats are also a growing menace, and range from natural disasters such as earthquakes – which are common in the region and can have a devastating and long-lasting effect – to the necessity of access to clean water and the particular problems posed by global climate change. Access to sources of energy should also be assured in order to underpin development.

Mention should also be made of the damage that can be done through the propagation of negative stereotypes intended to cause or exacerbate division between peoples, and the principles of cultural diversity and tolerance should be strengthened.

A people-centered approach to these problems would first consist of identifying the vulnerable groups of people concerned, subsequent to which appropriate action plans and policies could be formulated.

¹ Acharya, Amitav, *op. cit.*, p.1.

Conclusion

A social approach to human security is needed for the concept to gain acceptance, which can be based on the principle of social justice, is compatible with Islamic principles which represent the best values and thought in the region and interacts with the ideas of other divine religions, and will ensure state sovereignty. Agreement on the definition of the concept is a prerequisite to the development of common policy and its implementation, and regional and sub-regional approaches such as this one are essential in this regard. They also serve as a forum in which we may identify the greatest threats posed to the human security of the region's inhabitants, subsequent to which we may take a collaborative approach in dealing with these problems. Enhanced cooperation is essential as the efforts of individual countries will prove insufficient to deal with such pervasive issues, and the role of non-governmental actors in this regard should also be stressed.

A human security which connotes the promotion of human dignity can be realized in West Asia within the context of cultural diversity, and therefore requires a multidisciplinary approach which will enable it to contribute to development and the establishment of a lasting peace.

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