

The Idea of Human Security

Des Gasper

Prelude: The surprising spread of ‘human security’ discourse

Although the language of ‘human security’ that became prominent in the 1990s has encountered criticism from many sides, it has continued to gain momentum. One encounters it frequently now in discussions of environment, migration, socioeconomic rights, culture, gender and more, not only of physical security. Werthes and Debiel propose that: ‘human security provides a powerful “political leitmotif” for particular states and multilateral actors by fulfilling selected functions in the process of agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation’ (2006:8). I suggest that in order to understand human security discourse and its spread this specification of actors and functions should be broadened. The relevant actors include more than states and multilateral agencies. What was primarily a language in United Nations circles is now far more. Like the sister idea of human rights, human security could be becoming an idiom that plays important roles in motivating and directing attention, and in problem recognition, diagnosis, evaluation and response.

1 - The concept of ‘security’, in a human context

The concept of ‘human security’ redirects attention in discussions of security: from the national-/state- level to human beings as the potential victims; beyond physical violence as the only relevant threat/vector; and beyond physical harm as the only relevant damage. Scores of specific proposed definitions exist.¹ ‘Human security’ is discussed at different scales and with reference to threats of varying scope. Moving through from broader to narrower definitions: first, it can be treated as the security of the human species, or second, as the security of human individuals. Third, it may focus on severe, priority threats to individuals, as judged perhaps by mortality impacts or by the degree of felt disquiet. Fourth, the severe priority threats are sometimes limited to ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’, or fifthly, to only the latter. More narrowly still, sixthly, some authors wish to consider only threats to individuals

¹ See e.g. <http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf>, or the report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS, 2003).

brought through violence, or organised intentional violence, or, the narrowest conception yet (MacFarlane and Khong 2006: 245-7), only the threats to physical survival brought about through organised intentional violence.

In an earlier study (Gasper 2005) I organised a range of definitions in an analytical table, which Figure 1 now extends. The shaded cells show diverse possible definitions. Picciotto et al. (2007) for example cover both ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, using as weighting criterion the impact on human survival chances; and so they look at far more than direct deaths from armed violence.

FIGURE 1: ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS OF HUMAN SECURITY (HS) (See Shaded Cells)

	I	II	III	IV	V
	VALUED CAPABILITIES EXPANSION (e.g. <i>HDR 1990</i>)	HD IN TERMS OF UNDP’S LONGER LIST OF GOODS (e.g. <i>HDR 1996</i>)	BASIC NEEDS ONLY (in terms of types and level)	LIFE-PRESERVATION against structural, not only physical, violence	PERSONAL PHYSICAL SECURITY ONLY (& civil rights)
ATTENTION TO LEVEL OF SOME VALUED VARIABLES (snapshot or trend)	Sen’s Capability Approach in minimal form	Human Development Reports’ focus (includes physical security)		Picciotto et al.	Canadian & Norwegian government definitions of HS ²
HS IN TERMS OF STABILITY			‘Downturn with stability’ ³		
HS IN TERMS OF BOTH LEVEL AND STABILITY		Haq’s maximal definition of HS; Govt. of Japan definition	Alkire’s & Ogata-Sen’s definition	Picciotto plus	

Before considering further the alternative formulations of human security, we should reflect on the concept of security and the significance of the term ‘human’.

Objective/subjective. The ‘security’ concept began as a subjective concept, from classical Rome, suggested Wolfers (1962). A subjective security concept must cover the range of whatever are felt as threats (Hough 2005). So too must an objective

² The Canadian government and its Human Security Network partners sometimes add ‘freedom from want’ content to their ‘freedom from fear’ centred interpretation of human security (MacFarlane & Khong: 227). A Human Security Network of medium powers was formed in 1999 by Canada, Norway, and several others. Mack (2005)’s *Human Security Report 2005* from Canada considers only physical violence, but all its effects.

³ ‘Downturn with stability’, a phrase used by Amartya Sen, refers to a downturn that maintains stability of basic needs fulfilment for everyone.

security concept insofar as feelings typically correspond to real possibilities, even if they are often misinformed about probabilities. We must still distinguish objective security and subjectively felt security given this poor correlation of magnitudes, one of the core paradoxes of security. Latvia's Human Development Report on human security noted that Latvian employs distinct terms for the two concepts. The priority threats felt subjectively by Latvians are easily understood but not automatically predictable: inability to pay for major medical care and old age; and fear of physical abuse at home and of abuse by officials, such as police (UNDP 2003).

Means/ends. Two further categories are important. One concerns the means that are intended to achieve safety or feeling safe. The experience of not feeling safe from the state bodies that are supposed to promote security and felt safety—a second classic paradox of security—led women in Hamber et al.'s studies to make statements like: 'For me the word security in Arabic is not to be afraid. First, not to be afraid to be hungry, to move, to think, and to be misjudged'; '[Security is]...not being afraid, and that can be of physical violence but also feeling you have the right to do the things you want to do and say...'; and even to a positing of 'security' as a man's word and 'safety' as a woman's word. The Bangladesh Human Development Report on human security found similarly that poor people felt less secure thanks to the police.

The other necessary additional category concerns *being able* to be safe. The Global Environmental Change and Human Security project (GECHS) treats human security as the capacity of individuals and communities to respond to threats to social, human and environmental rights. This formulation leaves people with the responsibility to use that capacity, gives recognition to communities, and gives them space to prioritise threats.

Claiming priority. Security claims are claims of existential threat (Buzan et al. 1998), meant to justify priority response, including overriding of other claims or rights. Attempts to limit such prioritisation to one type of threat (such as threats of physical damage from physical violence) and/or one type of referent/target (such as the state) are artificial. The root and usages of the term 'security' also validate no such restriction; according to Rothschild (1995) for centuries the term applied only to individuals. More recently, following suggestions by for example Juan Somavia and others in the South American Peace Commission in the 1980s, Lincoln Chen and Ken Booth at the start of the 1990s, and a generation earlier by Johan Galtung, Kenneth Boulding and others in peace research (Bilgin 2003), the UNDP's 1993 and 1994

Human Development Reports led by Mahbub ul Haq established a broad meaning for human security, in terms of a range of types of threat. Some formulations go so far as to discuss human security in terms of all threats to internationally ratified human rights, though this can weaken the prioritising thrust and has to be balanced by the next idea, that of basic thresholds.

Justifying priority:- understanding the human referent for security; normative thresholds. One must not merely claim priority but have a plausible basis for it. Some of the debate on human security considers at length the concept of ‘security’, and not enough the content of ‘human’, as if that has no relevance to the issue of justification. To mention the individual as one referent for the concept of security is not enough. Attention is required to the nature of the referent. Central to being human is that we are embodied persons, but not only that. Being human has various specific requirements. From these specific needs come socially-specific notions of a series of *normative thresholds* across a range of needs: minimum levels required for normative acceptability. So, ‘human security’ issues in the area of health, for example, do not include all health issues, only those up to a minimum normatively set threshold, even though that is to some degree historically, and often societally, specific. (See e.g. Owen 2005; Gasper 2005.) Lack of the threshold distinction leads to a concern to exclude whole issue areas like health from the remit of ‘security’, mistakenly believing that this is necessary in order to allow meaningful priority to anything (see e.g. MacFarlane & Khong 2006).

Justifying priority:- interconnection, nexuses and tipping points. A typical aspect of justifying priority is to identify a major causal connection from fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the highlighted factor, through to a qualitatively different set of other things that have clear normative importance. This is the notion of a *nexus*, a major connection, at least in some situations, between different ‘spheres’—for example between environment and peace or war—and thus from one thing to many others. The discourse of insecurity often proposes a particular type of connection: a *causal threshold, flashpoint or tipping point*, a stress level beyond which dramatic escalation of negative effects occurs, bringing even collapse. For example, beyond certain levels and combinations of stress factors, drastically increased damage happens to human health, including life expectancy; some combinations bring premature death. Violent death scenarios, let alone violent deaths intentionally promoted by others, are only one type of premature death scenario. Suicides by heavily indebted farmers have

become frequent in parts of India. Arguably, whole societies too can go over a stress tipping-point.

Structural limits are central to human security analysis. Beyond the limits, things snap. The ‘weak sustainability’ hope in environmental economics is inapplicable outside certain bounds; less environmental capital cannot always be substituted for by having more of another type: human, social, or human-built physical capital. Destabilization of the Earth’s regenerative and climate cycles cannot be compensated for by more of other capital types.

To review, ‘security issues’ concern risks of being or falling below minimum normative thresholds. Security means ‘holding on’ or ‘holding firm’, to core values. Especially serious are cases with significant possibilities of collapse; yet while a famine where a social system has collapsed is a prime example of lack of human security, chronic capacity-sapping malnutrition is an example too. Normative thresholds and causal thresholds can be connected; for when a normative threshold is breached a person may erupt, against others or herself, or collapse.

Justifying priority:– issues of responsibility and intentionality. Should we consider as human security issues all matters that involve threats to basic values, or only those which are intentionally caused and which are not the victim’s own responsibility (thus excluding for example smoking-related disease)? Matters which are victims’ own responsibility are already excluded by a focus on *capability* to be safe. MacFarlane & Khong’s definition—threats to our physical survival caused by intentional organized violence—goes further and excludes unintentional damage. Their definition is still a human security conception, since it concerns threats to persons, individuals; but is very narrow. It excludes climate change from our purview, not only because the threats are not (all) of physical violence but because there is no conscious perpetrator of harm, and supposedly in order to give ‘analytical traction’ (p.250). We return to their choice later, and suggest that it confuses short-term policy convenience with analytical power.

Security as a visceral concept. Security is not just a prioritising, claiming concept. The way that humans have evolved, the way our consciousnesses are structured, some events and things disturb us, destabilise us. Combined with ‘human’, ‘security’ conveys a visceral, lived feel, connecting to people’s fears and feelings or to an observer’s fears and feelings about others’ lives. ‘Human security’ thus evokes a sense of real lives and persons. Like ‘rights’, it touches something deep in our

awareness. Part of that may concern the human priority to avoiding losses more than making gains. Losses mean losses of meaning and identity, not merely of things.

Human security as an integrative concept. ‘Human security’ captures what some other concepts cover, and goes further. Like basic needs analysis it gives substance to the language of ‘development’, a language to talk about significant change that did not yet tell us anything about the contents of that significance. It then adds to what basic needs analysis conveys, by for example its stronger link to feelings (Gasper 2005). It helps to give a sense of direction and priority too within rights language, which is about the form of a priority claim but not necessarily about its content or rationale, and which otherwise can bring an absolutization of the convenience and property of the powerful (Gasper 2007).

The human security concept thus concerns the assurance for individuals (and societies, and the species) of normatively basic threshold levels in priority areas. It connects a series of ideas: objectively and subjectively felt security; normative priorities for what it is to be human, including a sense of meaning and identification; causal nexuses, tipping-points, and awareness of possibilities of collapse. We see thereby that there is a discourse of ‘human security’, not just a single concept. Indeed, if we highlight different inclusions and emphases we can distinguish a family of discourses.

2 - Components of the ‘human security’ discourse(s)

In an earlier paper I examined ‘human security’, in particular the UNDP human security approach, as a discourse that employs the concept and label but includes more (Gasper 2005). Elements of the discourse were specified as follows. The first four elements are shared with UNDP’s sister discourse of ‘human development’:-

- A heightened normative focus on individuals’ lives
- More specifically, a focus on reasoned freedoms, the ability of persons and groups of persons to achieve outcomes that they have reason to value
- ‘Joined-up thinking’ (Gasper & Truong 2005) that looks at the interconnections between conventionally separated spheres (different polities; polity-economy-society-ecosystems), and not least at the nexus between

freedoms from want and indignity and freedom from fear. Correspondingly it tries to build policy coherence across conventionally separated spheres.

- A global span normatively as well as for explanatory purposes; covering all persons, world-wide, as in human rights discourse.⁴

Human security discourse adds at least the following elements:

- A focus on basic needs
- More specifically, an insistence on basic rights for all. This strengthens the focus on individuals, compared to in the human needs and human development traditions, notes O'Brien in this volume.
- A concern for the stability as well as average levels of important freedoms.

These additional elements contribute to give a stronger motivational basis than in the original Human Development Approach. It helps to mobilise attention and concern and to sustain a global normative commitment, 'joined-up feeling'.

This is a complex package notion of 'human security'. It was too complex for MacFarlane and Khong, the international relations specialists who were commissioned to discuss the notion for the UN Intellectual History Project. They miss the basic needs point about minimum required levels, which differentiates human security work from the pure human development approach.⁵ Likewise, they suggest wrongly that the Commission on Human Security's report (CHS 2003) was concerned only with stability, not primarily with levels.⁶

Let us examine more fully the various elements and how they fit together. The first heading below relates especially to what O'Brien (2009) calls the equity dimension in human security thinking. The next two headings relate to what she calls its connectivity dimensions.

Humanism – I: integrating the international 'human' discourses. Human security work synthesises ideas from the preceding 'human discourses' of human development, human needs, and human rights (Gasper 2007). As Richard Jolly highlights, human rights language gave an independent value status to prioritised

⁴ I have called this 'joined-up feeling' (Gasper and Truong 2005, Gasper 2007). In recent work Sen calls it 'globally unrestricted coverage' (Sen 2007).

⁵ 'Human development, for example, is a sensible concept in its own right. Conflating it with security produces conceptual confusion. ... the rebranding of development as security' (MacFarlane & Khong, p.17).

⁶ '[we make] an examination of the report of the Commission on Human Security, which made a strong case for viewing human security as the protection of individuals from the vulnerabilities associated with sudden economic downturns' (MacFarlane & Khong, p.16).

individual freedoms, and a universal scope of consideration. It implied obligations on states to meet these priorities, and implied legitimate recourse by persons without those rights, to hold states accountable (Jolly et al. 2004: 187). To supplement this, ‘the human development approach introduces the idea of scarcity of resources, the need to establish priorities, and sequencing of achievement in the promotion of human rights’ (Jolly et al. 2004: 177). Human security language combines the human rights insistence on the importance of each individual, with a human development insistence on priority sequencing given the scarcity of resources.

The heightened normative focus on individuals’ lives gives human security thinking a radical thrust. Picciotto, for example, adopts a life-years denominator rather than the Human Development Index as primary performance measure. We should not trade-off extra years of life for people who live only forty years, against an increase in average per capita income. Instead we should take as a priority human right a life span of, say, three score years and ten, the natural span that is relatively easily attainable and only with much greater difficulty extendable. It is the life span that has been attained and assured at relatively low per capita income in places like China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Jamaica, Kerala and Sri Lanka.

Humanism – II: a holistic perspective at the level of the individual. We find in human security work an anthropological type concern for understanding how individual persons live, that provides microfoundations for explanatory macrotheory. People seek security, of various sorts: bodily, material, psychological and existential (including via family, friends, esteem, systems of meanings). All of this is long familiar, but regularly forgotten. One recent locus of such understanding has been the basic needs school in conflict studies from the 1970s on (John Burton et al.). Human security thinking has given it a more capacious home. This holistic perspective at individual-level gives a broader (UNDP) perspective on human security decisive advantages over a narrower (Canadian) perspective, let alone the MacFarlane-Khong variant.

Trans- or supra-disciplinary explanatory synthesis: a (selective) holistic approach at the level of larger systems. At supra-individual levels, human security thinking stresses the interaction of economic, political, social, cultural, epidemiological, military and other systems that have conventionally been treated separately in research and policy. This ‘joined-up thinking’ is holistic in spirit but not totalising in

scope; the particular interconnections to be stressed will be selected according to their importance case-by-case.

Several interviewees in the UN Intellectual History Project express this holistic spirit:

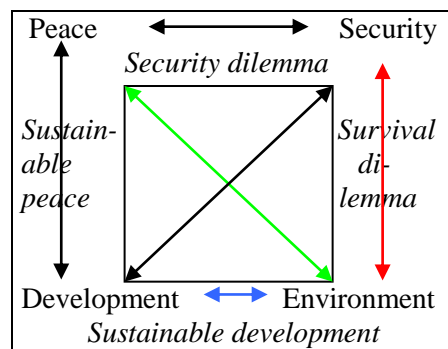
‘the basic premise of the [UN] charter, that you really can’t have peace unless the rights of nations great and small are equally respected. ... [and] the basic premise of the Declaration of Human Rights, that you can’t have peace within a country unless the rights of all, great or small, are equally respected’ (Virendra Dayal, quoted by Weiss et al. 2005: 151).

‘...all the conflicts that [some rich governments] are giving rise to in an interdependent world precisely by ignoring the human rights and the democratic principles that they supposedly espouse’ (Lourdes Arizpe, quoted by Weiss et al., 2005: 415).

Juan Somavia, who ran the 1995 Copenhagen summit on social development that took steps down the broader human security path, noted how ‘the constitution of the ILO...already in 1919, says that peace is linked to social justice’, and quoted Pope Paul VI’s declaration in 1969 at an ILO conference that ‘Development is the new dimension of peace’ (both cited by Weiss et al., 2005: 299). Outweighing such ideas though: ‘The whole system has pushed, pushed, in educational terms, towards specialization, when the reality of the world has been pushing more and more towards integration’ (Somavia, cited on p.429). Educational narrowing blinds us to interconnection and helps to generate new threats. As Zygmunt Bauman describes, extreme intellectual specialisation—‘close-focusing’ of the types done so successfully in science and technology—leads to waves of unforeseen effects when we act on the resulting powerful but narrow knowledge. It has led us into Ulrich Beck’s ‘Risk Society’, where every ‘advance’ creates new messes and ‘the line beyond which the risks become totally unmanageable and damages irreparable may be crossed at any moment’ (Bauman 1994: 29).

Figure 2 identifies more specifically the interconnections which are meant to justify and be revealed by ‘joined-up thinking’. Brauch presents four traditional foci, which imply six types of possible major bilateral interconnection. Though Brauch uses ‘security’ to mean security against violence (or even only inter-state violence), and his table presents the interconnections in terms of binary relations, each side of each binary relation is linked to all the other foci. The human security research programme posits that in at least some important cases the interconnections are ramifying and major, and require us to move beyond traditional problem-framings.

Figure 2: The Conceptual Quartet and Six Linkages (from Brauch 2005)



This holistic spirit has a grand sweep, but are the declared linkages adequately established? The linkage from carbon-based economic growth to global climate change is more than sufficiently demonstrated. Regarding economic performance and conflict, Paul Collier et al.'s 2003 study for the World Bank showed a strong correlation of violent conflict with both poverty and low growth.

By analyzing 52 major civil wars between 1960 and 1999 it found that the common thread was often a poor and declining economy combined with a heavy dependence on exports of natural resources such as diamonds, gold or oil. "Some countries are more prone to civil wars than others but distant history and ethnic tensions are rarely the best explanations," Paul Collier, lead author of the report, said in a statement. "Instead look at a nation's recent past and, most important, its economic conditions." ([World Bank Press Review: May 15, 2003](#))

Next, linkages to poor and declining economic conditions in low-income countries from aspects of international economic policy and other policies of rich countries have become increasingly obvious.

- Rich countries have restricted Southern trade access to their markets, notably in agriculture, and yet expected no consequences: no emigrants, no conflicts, no spillover of stress or suffering. Much recent literature has demonstrated how 'the new local wars that have come to dominate the global geography of violence are the natural consequence of formal rules that make the criminal economy of illegal trafficking in drugs, weapons and people far more attractive to poor and marginalised countries than legal economic pursuits' (Picciotto 2005: 3).
- Rich countries have energetically exported arms and imagined these will not be used. 'Most weapon-exporting countries provide export credit guarantees for weapons purchases by developing countries' (Picciotto, 2005: 6).
- Rich countries imposed bone-crunching economic structural adjustment on low income countries and expected no wider consequences. An income shock of -5%

raises chances of civil war by 50% (Picciotto et al., 2006). Prior to the 1994 Rwanda genocide, the country faced an income decline of 40% as IMF-imposed adjustment was piled on top of the effects of slump in the world coffee market. The economic impacts of civil wars are themselves so immense (e.g. ‘In Rwanda, Bosnia and Lebanon GDP fell to 46%, 27% and 24% of the pre-conflict peaks’, *ibid.*, p.6) as to thereby greatly raise the chances of perpetuation of the war.

- As a latest aspect of policy incoherence, international policies on governance have blocked aid to states that are adjudged to not already have good governance, and thereby undermined international security policy.

3 - Roles

The idea of ‘human security’ plays various roles: firstly it provides a shared language, that highlights and proclaims a new perspective in investigation; secondly, it guides evaluations, through its emphasis on certain priority performance criteria; thirdly, it guides positive analyses, through its emphases on which outcomes are important to explain and which determinants are legitimate to include; fourthly, it similarly focuses attention in policy design, by directing attention to a particular range of outcomes as being important to influence and a particular range of means as being relevant to consider; and fifthly, it motivates action in certain directions, through the types of value which it highlights and the range of types of experience to which it leads us to attend.

In earlier work on human security thinking in or linked to the UN system I have tried to elucidate these roles.⁷ The first column of Figure 3 below summarises the arguments, drawing also on the previous sections of this chapter. Behind the familiar features—a focus on individuals not only on generalized categories such as national income or averages, and a wider scope both of the areas considered under ‘security’ and of attention to contributory factors—lie the deeper commitments: the motivating concern of ‘joined-up feeling’, partnered by the holistic vision of wide-ranging attention to human experience and interconnections therein.

⁷ Gasper (2005, 2007, 2008), Gasper & Truong (2005).

Figure 3: The Components and Roles of the Idea and Discourse of Human Security

ISSUE AREAS	GASPER (2005, 2007, 2008)	WERTHES-BOSOLD (2005, 2006, 2007)
Roles of an idea / discourse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide a shared language, for shared and mutually supportive investigation 2. To guide evaluations 3. To guide positive analysis 4. To focus attention in policy design 5. To motivate 	<p>Multiple roles of an intellectual framework: (Werthes & Debiel: 12)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explanation and orientation 2. Coordination and action-related decision guidance 3. Motivation and mobilisation
1 – To provide a shared language	<p>Besides a concept, ‘human security’ is also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A discourse, whose elements are asterisked below - * <i>A striking and evocative label</i> 	<p>Within this shared language people can flexibly respond to their own situation and own priorities. Yet it also provides, in overlap areas, a frame ‘for concerted policy projects, <i>par excellence</i> illustrated in the [Human Security Network]’ (Werthes & Bosold 2006: 23).</p>
2 – Provides a focus for looking at effects; this guides evaluations and analysis (to determine: what is security?)	<p>A normative focus on individuals’ lives, viz:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Focus on individuals’ reasoned freedoms * <i>A concern for stability as well as levels</i> (italics indicate extensions beyond the Human Development Approach) 	<p>(a) From state focus to individual focus; this is the first of <i>Werthes & Bosold’s four elements of a proposed shared core</i>, 2006: 25; also Bosold & Werthes 2005: 99). Policy language provides one instrument for holding its users accountable (Werthes & Bosold 2006)</p>
2* - Human focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * JUF: ‘Joined-up feeling’, for all individuals – this is the spirit of human rights (HRs) discourse 	<p>(b) ‘ People should have the opportunity to live decently and without threats to their survival’</p>
[Humanity]	Edson: ‘human security is about protecting the common good’ (2001: 84)	
Who decides what is security and what is a threat?	<p>Not necessarily only the state (though that is one major actor). Can be individuals, groups, ...</p>	
3 – Provides a principle for considering causes: it guides analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * JUT: ‘Joined-up thinking’ (Gasper 2008) 	Greatly expanded scope of analytical attention
4 – Provides a focus for policy response	<p>Prioritising (which is inherent in the ‘security’ label):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>A focus on basic needs</i> * <i>Basic rights for all.</i> <p>At the same time, Joined-up thinking →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broadly conceived policy response, and: - awareness of impossibility of full knowledge of relevant factors → a deliberative, learning style in policy (Truong 2005). 	<p>Policy style:</p> <p>(1) the large normative frame can influence other policy too (Werthes & Bosold 2006: 23); promote coherence;</p> <p>(2) impossibility of unilateral control [their point c; 2006:25] → ‘Safety threats must be addressed through multilateral processes... and by taking into account the patterns of interdependence that characterize the globalized world in which we are living’ [point d; Bosold & Werthes 2005: 89, 99].</p>
Whose responsibility to respond?	Not necessarily only the state, which may lack the capacity	
5 - Motivation	<p><i>Focus on basic needs and rights, including through an evocative label and concern for stability → stronger motivational basis, mobilizing attention and concern: sustaining Joined-up Feeling</i></p>	Werthes & Bosold (2006: 32): the focus on individuals appeals to a broader range of actors, not to states alone.
What relation to discourses of development?	Goes further than discourses of human development, in the areas indicated above in italics	
What relation to discourses of need?	Relies on a notion of need, as reasoned fundamental priority	
What relation to discourses of human rights?	<i>Basic rights for all</i>	

A human security research program in the universities of Marburg and Duisburg in Germany complements this UN-centred research through its investigations of the ‘Human Security Network’ of Canada, Norway, et al., and of the work of Japan and the European Union.⁸ Figure 3 compares the Marburg-Duisburg work and my picture of components and roles, and gives illustrations and extensions for both specifications. The German work too is organised by a perspective on what are the roles of a human security intellectual framework. It specifies three: 1. Explanation and orientation, 2. Coordination and action-related decision guidance, and 3. Motivation and mobilisation. They correspond to the last three roles I proposed. Let us explore some of these roles further.

Unexpected insights and situation-specific understandings. In explanation, the human security approach provides fresh situation-specific understandings and insights, by applying a non-conventional boundary-crossing perspective in ways tailor-made to specific cases. Jolly and BasuRay (2007) have reviewed the many national Human Development Reports focused on human security, to test what if anything the perspective adds. The mandate to look broadly at sources of insecurity, but to be selective according to the particular concerns, constellations and connections extant in a particular country, generates unexpected and practical diagnoses and proposals. The analyses are restricted neither by arbitrary *a priori* disciplinary habits in regard to scope, nor by fixed prescriptions or proscriptions from a global centre about what should be included or excluded. Further examples along these lines are found in work that uses a human security approach to consider environmental and climate change, such as by Jon Barnett and Karen O’Brien.

Focusing policy design on foundational prevention rather than crisis management. In policy design, a human security perspective emphasises system re-design to reduce chances of crises rather than palliative measures when crises have hit. Lodgaard (2000) argued that:

In the human security paradigm, a distinction may be drawn between *foundational* prevention and *crisis* prevention. [Ginkel & Newman (2000).] Foundational prevention is premised on the belief that prevention cannot begin early enough. It tries to address deep-seated causes of human insecurity. “Inequality, deprivation, social exclusion, and denial of access to political power are a

⁸ Coming from a state security / International Relations background, and with a focus on the Human Security Network countries, some of this work may underplay the Basic Needs and Human Rights aspects in the UN-Japan line of human security discourse, and mistakenly separate them from physical security -- as if physical security is not part of basic needs, and as if one does not fear lack of basic necessities (see Werthes & Bosold 2006, p.25; Bosold & Werthes 2005: 86.)

recipe for a breakdown of social norms and order. Not having a fair chance in life...being deprived of hope... are the most incendiary root causes of violence and conflict". [Ginkel & Newman (2000).] To remove such causes requires a long-term strategy for equitable, culturally sensitive, and representative development. ... [Paragraph 51]

Preventive action is vastly more cost-effective than belated interventions to try to solve crises once they have exploded, for example trying to supply emergency relief and build peace when a war has erupted (see e.g. Gasper 1999). Lodgaard warned however that 'textbook logic advocates preventive action while political logic suggests that action would have to wait till a crisis emerges' (paragraph 81); and that 'it is doubtful whether textbook logic and political logic can be reconciled unless the United Nations gets its own independent source(s) of finance' (paragraph 82).

In reaction to the record of political convenience and analytical ease being placed above policy coherence, the human security concept now serves 'as a focal point around which an integrated approach to global governance is emerging' (Betts & Eagleton-Pierce 2005: 7). Let us ask next: emerging from whom?

Roles for, and in relation to, whom? In motivation and mobilisation, the human security approach finds listeners more readily amongst some types of audiences than others. Firstly, many general purpose international organisations, notably in the UN system, are seeking to integrate and make sense of their endeavours (and existence), justify and prioritise their activities. This includes, not least, the UN system apex and UNESCO. In addition, some special purpose international organisations seek to identify key interconnections that decisively affect their area of responsibility and to identify the connections which show their own importance.

Secondly, some types of government have been attracted to the human security language: notably medium- and small-powers who are seeking a distinctive identity for their foreign policy, a purposefulness, meaningfulness and moral tone, and a niche for distinctive value-addition. Since the human security framework draws attention to a great range of possible interconnections, it is perhaps not surprising that a relatively high proportion of observed users should be states, for their responsibilities span this range.

Thirdly, we see uses by various social movements and civil society actors. The approach appeals to some progressive social movements trying to influence national and global policy directly or via influencing national and global society. It appeals to some feminists, and to a considerable variety of academics and intellectuals—in international relations, development studies, global social policy, public health, peace studies, etc.—seeking a policy-relevant intellectual framework for the 21st century.

Who has not adopted a human security language and framework? Relatively speaking, the big powers—compared to their degree of use of human rights discourse—but increased attention to global public goods might be changing this. Perhaps also private corporations, again in comparison to the take-up of human rights language, but this too may be changing. In research circles, human rights studies does not seem much aware of its sister framework, while mainstream security studies has often resisted it, as we see later. Arguably, the framework has also been less taken up by national governments in their domestic analyses, compared to human development and human rights discourses. Lee stresses that ‘most Asian governments are unlikely to adopt a human security definition that contains political constraints or economic directives’ (2004: 37-8), i.e. that is seen to imply international rights to intervene or sanction a country in light of externally adjudged violations of either civil rights or economic-social rights, or to overrule countries’ own cultures and traditions. The

situation may be gradually changing. The very fear of undiluted human rights regimes makes some Asian governments prefer the more complex human security perspective. And while the national Human Development Reports that have taken human security as their theme are not directly owned by governments—the exercises have a quasi-autonomous status in order to ensure independent creative work—they have had significant government consultation and involvement.

Overall we could say that a human security perspective, like the thinking around human development, uses a global context and globally-oriented criteria of relevance. It tries to bring integration within the thinking of internationally-oriented agencies, by reference to priority criteria. In particular, it is guided by concerns with major threats and risks of crisis. According to Bosold and Werthes, the core use then of a human security approach has been in multilateral action to address priority threats to individual humans. Perception and formulation of what are the priority threats will vary; that flexibility provides space for diverse participants, and a sharper definition is not needed for a policy movement (Bosold & Werthes 2005: 100-101).

Werthes and Bosold check how far the talk of the Human Security Network countries is only talk. They conclude that it has some real impact. It ‘has resulted in processes and developments which bring claims/pretension and substantiveness more in accordance with each other’ (Werthes & Bosold 2006: 28). As an example: after the success of the 1990s Ottawa process to ban anti-personnel landmines, the Network moved on to try to control trade in small arms and light weapons. This was done only with reference to illegal trade, for several leading members (Austria, Switzerland, Canada, even Norway; as well as observer South Africa) are major small arms exporters, and several have not been distinguished for membership in or implementation of international agreements. Yet despite that restriction, the human security rhetoric has provided a valuable instrument for holding its users accountable for their other actions (Werthes & Bosold 2006).

4 - Attacks on the idea of ‘human security’

I: Attacks on the very idea - by claims about definition or about value priorities

Some attacks on human security thinking concern the scope of issues it covers, but some object to the very notion, even when more narrowly conceived. Conventional security studies authors often assert that security is essentially a national-level and military notion. Sometimes their claim is about established usage: ‘...human security emerged in a context in which security was predominantly conceived of in national terms’, propose MacFarlane & Khong (p.233). In reality the term ‘social security’ is long and deeply entrenched, and the concept of psychological security has been in use for yet longer (cf. Rothschild 1995). MacFarlane & Khong themselves still adopt a notion of human security, though one of narrow scope, as we will see. Second, some claim that indisputable priority is a necessary condition for use of the ‘security’ label, and that to use the term ‘security’ for non-military matters greatly overvalues their importance, which should be left to be judged instead in democratic elections. But then should not military threats also be judged through elections? Further, there is no reason why any prioritising mechanism will always prioritise military above non-military threats. The perspective of considering key threats to persons can be applied in many arenas. It is presumptuous for any one arena to claim proprietorial and exclusive rights.

A second form of attack proposes that security is a fearful ignoble craving, compared to the true ethical currency, freedom. The attack lacks foundation, for freedom rests on security, and, further, we wish to secure freedoms—though indeed basic freedoms, not everything. Both freedom and security have been emphases in elaborating human development discourse; both are prominent in for example Amartya Sen’s work.

II: Attacks on policy grounds: Human Security discourse is part of a dangerous agenda for world government, or no government – and is un-American...

As with human rights discourse, mistrust comes from more than one side of the political spectrum. The G77 carry suspicions that Human Security discourse legitimates intervention by stronger powers. In contrast, a Heritage Foundation report on human security (Carafano & Smith 2006) complains—despite having cited the UN

Charter's commitment 'to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'—as follows:

Over the course of decades, the U.N. bureaucracy has come to see its role as facilitating not only peace and security, but also human rights, development, and social equity. ... it is understandable that Americans question the U.N.'s seemingly constant pursuit of binding documents on themes that purportedly would advance security or development but in actuality would restrain U.S. power and leadership and undermine America's democratic and free-market practices. ... Providing for the security and public safety of citizens is a principal attribute of national sovereignty. Indeed, nation-states that are democracies are best prepared to fill this role because their leaders are held accountable by the governed. ... Shifting the focus of security policy from the collective will of free people to provide for their common defense to one of protecting a range of individual and collective political, economic, and cultural "rights" as defined by international bodies or non-state actors like NGOs confuses the nature of the modern state's roles and responsibilities. (Carafano and Smith, 2006)

Similarly, MacFarlane & Khong insinuate that human security discourse can undermine the authority of the State, the only body able to do much about human security concerns. In reality fact human security discourse is clear on the primary role of the national State. [The critics appear to believe implausibly that talk of any limits to the role of the State will undermine it.

III: Objections to a broad conception: further claims from definition

MacFarlane and Khong do not seek to restrict security language to the national level, but they attack the UN-UNDP-Japanese conception of human security which provides for inclusion of a broad range of threats. Sometimes, formally, they accept that allocation to threats of the priority status of 'security' language must depend on one's values, but in general they are not content with this.

First, they often presume terminological proprietorship. Thus environmental threats are explicitly marginalized: 'the core of the debate on human security revolves around development and protection', they stipulate (p.141). They try to reserve the term 'protection' exclusively for protection of life against violent attack, as if protection of health, and protection of anything else against anything else, does not constitute 'protection'. Proponents of such a narrow conception 'make the shift to the individual in theory, but ignore it in practice by subjectively limiting what does and does not count as a viable threat ... [It] is communicable disease, which kills 18,000,000 people a year, not violence, which kills several hundred thousand, that is the real threat to individuals' (Owen 2005: 38). Owen here means military style

violence, and we should add that: ‘It is estimated that each year 1.5 to 3 million girls and women are killed through gender-related violence’ (Hamber et al, 2006: 499). Climatic movements combined with planned neglect by colonial regimes to leave tens of millions dead in the late 19th century (Davis 2001); we face a parallel prospect in the 21st. MacFarlane and Khong’s approach is thus better entitled a ‘security studies approach’ rather than ‘protection-based’. It reflects the proprietorial claim that conventional ‘security studies’ feels toward the term ‘security’.

IV: Attacks on policy grounds – lack of prioritising power?

MacFarlane and Khong claim that broad human security discourse renders itself vacuous by including everything. Does it divert us from prioritisation? The work on Millennium Development Goals shows otherwise, both for prioritisation of areas and within areas. This operationalisation of parts of a human security perspective by Haq and his close associates (originally under the title ‘International Development Targets’ in the mid 1990s) centres on prioritising. MacFarlane and Khong fail to distinguish between prioritising between areas and within areas. Priority belongs not to a whole issue area *per se* but to basic levels of achievement therein. They recurrently misunderstand this, as in their attack on ‘redefining human development or health or environmental issues as security issues’ (p.264). Attainment and maintenance of the basic standards in these areas, but not of every matter in them, are issues of human security.

Prioritisation between areas is especially controversial. It represents the type of textbook logic that Lodgaard reminds us runs up against political ‘logic’, the convenience of established interests. For Picciotto et al. (2007) and Jolly et al. (2004) such comparisons are central. A broad-scope human security concept is needed to generate the required types of comparison: can we better promote security through military spending or through women’s education or democracy education or... ? Jolly reports how smallpox was eradicated in the late 1960s and 70s for just US \$300 million, a cost equal to that of three fighter-bombers.⁹

While keen to prioritise between areas, human security analysis mistrusts invariable prioritizations of large areas. Beyond the elementary priorities such as mass immunization and access to oral rehydration therapy it prefers a case-by-case

⁹ Speech at the New School University, New York, 20 September 2007.

approach. Broadness of general focus allows relevant prioritisation *in situ*, because one can then seek to identify the particular vulnerabilities that are actually prevalent, and felt as priorities, in particular cases (Jolly & BasuRay 2007). Its broad approach is not a call for total analysis but for flexible analysis, instead of focusing by *a priori* disciplinary habit or prioritising by global over-generalisations.¹⁰

V: Attacks on grounds of scope and explanatory force

MacFarlane and Khong, Mack and others claim that the broad conception ‘lacks analytical traction’. It adopts ‘the predictive/explanatory hypotheses that a broad set of aspects not conventionally connected in theory are often importantly connected in reality: including that the economic, social, cultural, medical, political and military are not separate systems; and that neither national nor personal security will be secured by military means alone’ (Gasper 2005: 228). A growing number of analysts, of many backgrounds, find this broader framing fruitful, though typically with some selective focusing according to the case considered. Health impact assessments of foreign policy, including international economic relations, are one important illustration¹¹; assessments of climate change’s consequences for conflict are another.¹² The connections in Brauch’s conceptual quartet (Figure 2) or any similar sketch mean that interest in any one of the set will typically require deep attention to several of them.

VI: Attacks on policy grounds – lack of influence?

In the short run, human security notions are often hard to apply in policy, because of problems concerning who cares and disagreements over who is responsible for action and who pays, reflecting the boundary-crossing character of the issues considered. Mack proposes it is better to have a narrow vivid focus (on violent threats to

¹⁰ For example, while a global econometric study might find no relation between inequality and conflict, in reality in some situations inequality may conduce to peace and in other situations to conflict, so that we need differentiation rather than a global generalisation. See also Barnett (this volume) on misdirection through over-generalised analysis.

¹¹ See e.g. special issue of *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, March 2007, 85(3).

¹² Note for example the broadening of the range of threats and pathways considered in a 2007 CNA report on the security implications of climate change: ‘The report includes several formal findings: Projected climate change poses a serious threat to America’s national security; Climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world; Projected climate change will add to tensions even in stable regions of the world; Climate change, national security and energy dependence are a related set of global challenges.’ (ECSP News, 14 June 2007, Woodrow Wilson Center; <http://securityandclimate.cna.org/>)

individuals) because that captures attention and builds up sympathy which may later spread to dealing with other types of threat (MacArthur 2007: 3); broad scope is considered not politically feasible in relation to rich country audiences. Implicit here is a short-run perspective of immediate appeal to current powerholders. Ignoring prevention and threats other than physical violence may in fact be shortsighted rather than hardheaded; it may lead not to eventual spread of concern, but to waste and later panic and evasion. Concentration on military interventions and subsequent 'patch-up/botch-up' efforts does not give a basis for building sympathy. It matches the short-run convenience of dominant interests in rich countries, who do not want to have causes of disasters traced far and fingers pointed at them.

In the short run, albeit perversely, the Japanese-backed broad picture such as in the Ogata-Sen report was 'marginalized by the ongoing war on terror' (Bosold & Werthes 2005: 97). The 'narrow' Canadian version appears to have been used at the 2005 World Summit of the United Nations, as well as by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1674 in April 2006 (MacArthur 2007: 3). Responsibility to protect from severe threats of physical violence is taken on, but with no mention of other types of threat. The broader version so challenges vested interests that it represents a longer run agenda, just like human rights work has been since 1948.

Restrictiveness would endanger the human security perspective of interconnection, and is thereby less suitable as a perspective for research, mobilization, and civil society engagement – the way towards major long run impact. Bosold & Werthes (2005) suggest that the narrow focus can be better for short-run campaigns on immediate graspable goals, like the land mines ban and the International Criminal Court; whereas the broader Japanese focus is better for the longer-run, since it sees deeper causes and effects, and can appeal to wider constituencies. As theorised in the Great Transition Initiative's scenarios of how a shift to more sustainable societies could eventually transpire (e.g. Raskin et al., 2002), young people provide the energy for social movements, which generate and transmit the pressure and ideas for change, which can be picked up at times of eventual crisis and openness to reorientation when Governments and other agencies must seek new responses. Discourses that make more radical points are likely to be ignored in short run policy, but have a different rationale and time perspective.

5 – Concluding thoughts

The powerful opposition encountered by the broad human security discourse was our starting point, for why then does it continue to spread despite limited powerholder patronage? We looked at actual employment of the concept, since: ‘The meaning lies not in what people consciously think the concept means but in how they implicitly use it in some ways and not others.’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 24.) We have teased out a number of aspects in addition to the prioritising role of any ‘security’ concept:- the artificiality and arbitrariness of claims that security is exclusively a national-level and military notion, and of attempts to restrict ideas of human security to one type of threat or one type of harm; the idea of basic normative threshold levels, across a range of needs, typically related to ideas of danger and vulnerability around causative threshold levels or tipping-points in systems marked by ramifying interconnections; and the visceral charge of the idea of ‘human security’, as reflection of the vulnerabilities of human bodies, identities and personality.

Section 2 followed up the insight that ‘human security’ is a discourse, not merely a single concept. We highlighted an equity dimension, in which ideas from human needs, human development and human rights are combined, including a priority to living a life of normal human span; and two connectivity dimensions, including a holistic perspective on real individuals’ lives and a trans-disciplinary approach to explanation at the level of larger systems. Section 3 examined roles of this discourse: in generating situation-specific and unexpected insights, and in focusing policy design on foundational prevention rather than on palliative reaction to already erupted crises; and we considered who currently are the users and non-users.

Section 4 reviewed attacks on the idea of human security, especially on the broader versions. Against the claim that broad versions are unusable for analysis and explanation, we saw that they are increasingly used, often combined with case-specific focusing, and can be dramatically insightful (see e.g. Picciotto et al., 2007). Against the claim that broad versions are bad for establishing priorities, we saw that they emphasise prioritisation within sectors (as in the MDGs work) and, precisely thanks to their broad formulation, also between sectors. Against the claim that broad versions are politically impotent, we saw that while ramifying explanation tends to be unpopular with established interests, a short term orientation to immediate graspable

goals is not the only relevant stance. A broader approach has potential for eventual broader and deeper support, towards longer term change.

Werthes and Debiel conclude that ‘human security’ is a political leitmotif. ‘[O]veremphasising the shortcomings of leitmotifs means to underestimate their potential, which exactly relies on its ambiguity/flexibility’ (2006: 15; sic). This formulation is similar in spirit to Alkire’s definition which was taken over by the Commission on Human Security. Thus, Japan can handle the leitmotif in a way that reflects its own history, culture and politics, with a focus on human needs and human development (Atanassova-Cornelis 2006; Werthes & Debiel 2006); whereas the EU must give a strong role to human rights in whatever human security orientation it adopts (op.cit.). Not every flexibly interpreted version of human security will attain impact in its environment. The Japanese and Canadian interpretations have led to some real movement, in different arenas, but whether the EU’s human security talk makes any difference is still open to doubt (ibid.: 18).

Werthes and Debiel helpfully point us to multiple users, interpretations, and uses. But their focus on direct policy uses by current policy users understates the potential of human security discourse, which has become a motivating framework in diverse sectors and professional contexts. Like some other commentators from international relations, they may insufficiently consider the ‘human’ perspectives in ‘human security’. Human security thinking operates then both at more general levels—as a widely used concept, ideal and discourse in description, explanation and policy design—and at more concrete levels, as specified in particular research programmes and policy programmes. The more general levels of thinking inspire the more concrete and specific research and policy; they motivate integration across boundaries: organisational, ideological and disciplinary. They do this in varied, unpredictable, niche-specific ways, as we see from the work in spheres such as violent conflict, AIDS and public health, climate change and migration. Concrete and precise research and policy programmes do not require that we establish a single narrow conception of human security, let alone one that is centred on safety from intentional physical violence. The causes and knock-on effects of damage through violence are so ramifying that while violence appears convenient as focus for data collection and subsequent model-building, the associated research and policy are forced to ramify. A narrow frame provides no selfenclosed analytical coherence. We cannot afford to ignore wider causes and effects and to treat the latter as externalities that will be

absorbed by the human and natural environments. The world contains too much interconnection, fragility, and risk of straying past tipping points.

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