Human Security: Defining the Elephant and Imagining Its Tasks

Tom FARER*
University of Denver, United States of America
tom.farer@du.edu

I. HARNESSING ROGUE TERMS

Like the apocryphal elephant defined by the blind men touching different parts of its anatomy, the content of the phrase "human security" varies with its users. In this sense it is rather like the phrase "self-determination", which is widely employed by and for diverse interests.[1] The lack of uniform definition or use stems in both cases not from intrinsic incoherence but from the way in which, from their first appearance, the phrases seemed to challenge the views, values, and interests of the practitioners of traditional diplomacy, powerful actors who then had a choice: resist them absolutely as rogue concepts threatening the very structure of international relations or neuter their revolutionary potential through an interpretation rendering them compatible with, even a reinforcement of, the basic structure of the status quo.

Phrases or labels or neologisms, as one prefers, acquire traction at any given historical moment, because they summarize, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they resonantly evoke, interests and values and worldviews that are force-marching towards the centre of global life from the dim peripheries of power and legitimacy. "Self-Determination" as a major theme of diplomatic discourse following World War II signalled the rise of powerful resistance to the European colonial empires in the wake of Europe's intra-mural slaughter, the humiliating defeat of British, French, and Dutch forces by Japan, and the spread of nationalist ideas with all their mobilizing power from Europe, where they had helped precipitate the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Americas to the countries of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. "Human Security" may not augur any such convulsive change in the political geography or the distribution of power or the public policies of consequential states and influential non-state actors. But it has acquired some traction, though just how much is very much in dispute among academic commentators. It has spawned, or at least been attached to, official and

---

*   Dean, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver.
1.   See Tom FARER, *Confronting Global Terrorism and American Neo-Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) at 176–7.

non-governmental conferences,[2] commissions,[3] reports,[4] a semi-formal association of states,[5] books,[6] articles,[7] and even lectures.[8] It is declared by several consequential countries as one of the important guiding concerns of their respective foreign policies.[9] Money has been spent in its name.[10]

The largest claims for human security are that it both expresses and, because of its resonant character, helps to advance challenges to several once regnant "paradigms", including one that for centuries has shaped the foreign policies of sovereign states and structured the Law of Nations. Instead of paradigms with its suggestion of impersonal patterns or structure, I personally prefer "concepts" or, even better, "ideologies", by which I mean a coherent cluster of values and ideas about the nature of reality which, as a consequence of being widely shared by persons able to deploy the principal instruments of social power, patterns the interactions of politically organized communities.

One such ideology is the conception of diplomacy and war as means properly dedicated to national security conceived as the protection of the spatial dimensions ("territorial integrity" in UN Charter idiom[11]) and the political independence of the state and the enhancement of its wealth and other sources of power. Power being relative, gains for some mean losses for others. Thus national security entails relentless competition with other nationally organized communities. It sounds like a

---

2. Global Environmental Change and Human Security, online: University of Oslo <http://www.iss.uio.no/gechs/conference-program/>; see also Gender and Human Security Issues Program, online: McGill University <http://gesh-ghsi.mcgill.ca/index_e/index_e.htm>.

3. Commission on Human Security, online: <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/>.

4. Heather OWENS and Barbara ARNEIL, "The Human Security Paradigm Shift: A New Lens on Canadian Foreign Policy? Report of the University of British Columbia Symposium on Human Security" in Majid TEHRANIAN, ed., *Words Apart: Human Security and Global Governance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

5. The governments of Canada, Norway, Austria, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Thailand have established the Human Security Network, comprising states and non-governmental organizations. See "Chairman's Summary" (First Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network, Bergen and Lysøen in Norway, 19–20 May 1999), online: Human Security Network <http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/docs/Chairman_summaryMay99-e.php>.

6. Peter STOETT, *Human and Global Security: An Exploration of Terms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

7. Oliver RICHMOND, "Emancipatory Forms of Human Security and Liberal Peacebuilding' (2007) International Journal 459–77; see also Roland PARIS, "Human Security Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" (2001) 26 International Security 87; Kanti BAJPAI, "Human Security: Concept and Measurement", Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, Occasional Paper, 19 August 2000; Gerd OBERLEITNER, "Human Security A Challenge to International Law?" (2005) 11 Global Governance 185.

8. Bajpai, *supra* note 7; see also Paul HEINBECKER, "On Human Security: Protecting People" (lecture to the Masters Programme in International Public Policy (MIPP), Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, 14 January 2009); Keizo OBUCHI, "Toward the Creation of a Bright Future for Asia" (speech delivered at the lecture programme hosted by the Institute for International Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam, 16 December 1998).

9. For instance, Japan and Canada.

10. Japan has contributed more than US$227 million to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security; see Ben SAUL, "The Dangers of the United Nation's 'New Security Agenda': 'Human Security' in the Asia-Pacific Region" (The University of Sydney, Sydney Law School, Legal Study Research Paper No. 08/114), online: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1277582>.

11. Charter of the United Nations, art. 2(4).

call for narrow parochial allegiance, whether to one's fellow citizens or to an abstraction, "the nation", as an icon transcending the lives and interests of its inhabitants at any given moment because, by enduring over time, even as successive cohorts of citizens die, it lends them a measure of immortality.[12]

Particularly when juxtaposed against national security, human security is readily construed to imply cosmopolitan values, a concern for the wellbeing of people, not states, and of people irrespective of their citizenship. So construed, it could be understood as carrying much the same meaning and value as human rights, since the latter are generally understood as imperative claims available to all human beings simply by virtue of their human status.

II. HUMAN SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

If, in its most natural construction, human security speaks to the same cosmopolitan and humanistic values as human rights, and since the latter had achieved incorporation into the body of positive international law decades before human security began to appear in the discourse of international relations, how could a new way of referring to human rights enhance their realization? In what way could a commitment to promote human security differ from a commitment to promote human rights? Isolated from historical context, the invocation of human security might seem like nothing more than an effort to conscript into the service of human rights the universal sense of immediacy and quotidian urgency associated with the word "security".[13]

Persons who are living unself-conscious conformist lives as constituents of dominant majority communities may be inclined to associate human rights with the plight of "the other", of dissidents and rebels, people outside the comfortable circle of the respectable majority. The juxtaposition of human with security could be seen as an effort to expand the sense of ownership over human rights to all parts of a population, not only the part that is most conspicuously vulnerable at any given moment. For the vicissitudes of contemporary life and the warp speed at which local tragedies of every sort are photogenically communicated to a global audience assure that ordinary people even in relatively happy countries cannot avoid a residual feeling of insecurity.

A. *The Aetiology of Human Security*

In fact the term's history does not support so narrow a view of its purposes. Its first official appearance was in association with issues of development, not human rights, specifically in the 1994 Human Development Report of the UN Development Programme.[14] In that context it reinforced a long-gathering and increasingly successful

---

12. Jack DONNELLY, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) at 146; see also Hans MORGENTHAU, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1960).

13. Saul, *supra* note 10 at 10.

14. 1994 Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme, Chapter 2: New Dimensions of Human Security, online <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/chapters/>.

challenge to the identification of "development" with macro indicia of material growth rather than with improved conditions of life for the great majority of a country's population, but particularly for the chronically impoverished. Indeed, in the form of a challenge to the paradigm that had shaped the policies of the World Bank[15] and national foreign assistance programmes in the decades immediately following World War II, it could almost be seen as adding braces to a belt, since by 1994 even the sclerotic World Bank was at least nominally supportive[16] of a definition of development that focused on broad-based enhancement of what Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen was perhaps the first to call "human capabilities" rather than growth in per capita income statistics.[17]

Two of the UN's leading advocates and practitioners of "soft power"[18] (above all the power of ideas), Canada and Norway, helped give the new term diplomatic traction by identifying it as a main theme of their respective foreign policies and then encouraging other countries to join with them in teasing out its policy implications.[19] At about the same time, but somewhat independently, the government of Japan associated its foreign policies, particularly its development policies, with the pursuit of human security.[20] Neither scholars[21] nor diplomats[22] in general rushed as one to embrace these moves, in part on the stated grounds that it lacked a content clear enough to distinguish it from long-established policy initiatives in both the development and human rights fields. Critics asked what, if anything, it added to established ways of thinking about improving the human condition and defending vulnerable people(s).[23]

The combination of its embrace by a few relatively influential countries, its rapidly proliferating invocation on behalf of or in opposition to various policy initiatives,[24]

---

15. Paul MOSLEY, Jane HARRIGAN, and John TOYE, *Aid and Power: The World Bank and Policy-Based Lending* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

16. John HARRISS, *Depoliticizing Development: The World Bank and Social Capital* (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

17. Amartya SEN, "Equality of What: The Tanner Lecture on Human Rights Values" (delivered at Stanford University, 22 May 1979); see also Amartya SEN, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

18. Joseph NYE, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); see also Joseph NYE, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

19. Farer, *supra* note 1 at 2.

20. Japan's economic development aid policies, manifested in the development assistance, which it has extended to Asia countries since the 1950s, traditionally incorporated aspects of human security promotion. Japan also set up the Commission on Human Security in May 2003, with a mandate to "develop the concept of Human Security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation"; Sharon ONG, "Securing Human Security in an Insecure World: The 'Asian Way'" (paper presented at the Second Biennial General Conference of the Asian Society of International Law, Tokyo, Japan, 1–2 August 2009); see also Diplomatic Bluebook 1999, Chapter II, Section 3 (A), online: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1999/>; "The Trust Fund for Human Security—For the "Human-centered" 21st Century", online: MOFA <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/index.html>.

21. Paris, *supra* note 7. See also Yuen Foong KHONG, "Human Security: A Shotgun Approach to Alleviating Misery?" (2001) 7 Global Governance 231.

22. Christian TOMUSCHAT, *Human Rights: Between Idealism and Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) at 56. (Tomuschat is a former member of the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN's International Law Commission.)

23. Paris, *supra* note 7. See also Owens and Arneil, *supra* note 4 at 2.

24. Bajpai, *supra* note 7.

and contention about its actual content led to the creation of a Human Security Commission.[25] Led by Amartya Sen, it tried to endow the term with distinctive operational content. The Commission's report[26] was useful in distinguishing human security from already established and successful campaigns to focus development assistance on extreme poverty[27] and on grass-roots instead of top-down development,[28] and to treat issues of governance and human rights abuse as ones that had to be factored into development policies.[29] What the report and Sen independently found distinctive in a human security agenda was a focus on humanitarian *crises* rather than the chronic pathologies of underdevelopment.[30] Moreover, as other writers have proposed, crises could be natural or man-made or, as usual, some combination of the two.[31]

B. *A Proxy for "Freedom from Want"?*

Read in this way, human security bridges between the economic assistance agenda (relief, rehabilitation, long-term growth, and welfare strategies) and the human rights agenda which includes both chronic and acute threats to personal security (protection from summary execution, torture, and other cruel and inhuman treatment, and punishment without due process.). It bridges in the following way. Any legal "right" for one subject of a normative system entails a corresponding "duty" for another. A tsunami can kill more people more quickly than most tyrants and leave many of the survivors in a condition of such vulnerability that they too are likely to die if relief does not flow to them. Their condition undoubtedly gives them a right to relief vis-à-vis their own governments to which those governments, because they have corresponding duties, must use their best efforts to respond. While other governments have a duty not to act in ways that aggravate the plight of survivors, *within the current human rights legal framework* they have no affirmative legal duty to assist even if the government with the paramount duty is unable to respond effectively. Thus a human security agenda can be seen as seeking to induce legal commitments that will fill a normative gap in the global system for protecting human welfare by protecting people from acute threats that do not emanate from persons or institutions owing legal duties to them.

It has also been suggested that the idea of human security reinforces the claim that freedom from want should be deemed as much a human right as freedom of speech, association, movement, and other civil and political rights and therefore reaffirms the position taken by a nominal consensus of participants in the landmark 1993 Vienna

---

25. Human Security Commission, online: CHS <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/>.
26. Human Security Commission's Report, online: CHS <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/index.html>.
27. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals, online: UN <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.
28. Ong, *supra* note 20; see also the *ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution*, 10 June 2002, art. 3(5), online: ASEAN <http://haze.asean.org/docs/1128506236/ASEANAgreementonTransboundaryHazePollution.pdf/view>.
29. Mahbub ul HAQ, "New Imperatives of Human Security: Barbara Ward Lecture 1972" (1994) 2 Development 40; see also Bajpai, *supra* note 7.
30. Sen, *supra* note 17.
31. Ong, *supra* note 20.

Conference on Human Rights, namely that all human rights—economic, social, and cultural as well as civil and political—"are indivisible and interdependent and interrelated".[32]

This claim about human rights is not entirely uncontroversial. In 1977, when the defence and promotion of human rights first became an operational objective of American foreign policy, the Carter administration declared its support for the full range of human rights. Foreign policy spokespersons for the succeeding administration of President Ronald Reagan explicitly rejected this position.[33] They denied the appropriateness of using rights language with respect to poverty, however extreme, or indeed with respect to any other human welfare issues such as disease and infant mortality. Only the rights enumerated in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were real rights, the Reagan administration insisted. And among those rights democracy (the right of the governed to participate in their governance) was paramount.[34] The position of the Obama US administration on this issue is not yet clear.

The hostility of American conservatives to the equation of freedom from want with freedom from tyranny has at least three sources. One is the fear that conceding a right to economic assistance implies a corresponding duty on the part of governments to assist those in need. If that duty is held to fall only on the government whose nationals are in need that is objectionable to ideologues of the Right because it can lead to an increase in the size and scope of government, allegedly at the expense of private enterprise and to the detriment of free markets. (Twentieth Century American Conservatism sounds in the language of Nineteenth Century English Liberalism.) Moreover, if freedom from want is deemed to generate a duty on the part of the state, it makes the state's domestic policies, its acts and omissions, susceptible to evaluation and possible condemnation by the governments of other states and thus is an infringement of the rigid Westphalian conception of sovereignty that helps to define the Right in Western politics.[35] If that duty is held to fall on all governments with the capacity to respond, then it is objectionable on grounds of national sovereignty. It is objectionable not only for the aforementioned reason that it authorizes external appreciation of a government's policy choices concerning what the Right regards as a mere optional tool of statecraft, i.e. foreign assistance whether in the face of emergencies or chronic deprivation, but also because it implies obligations to the generality of humanity, that is the obligation to treat the needs of non-nationals as having normative value equal to the needs of one's own nationals. There is a suggestive connection between the views of contemporary American Rightists and

---

32. *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, World Conference on Human Rights, UN Doc. A/CONF.157/23 (1993), chapter I(5).

33. David CARLETON and Michael STOHL, "The Foreign Policy of Human Rights: Rhetoric and Reality from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan" (1985) 7 Human Rights Quarterly 205.

34. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 19 December 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 71, 6 I.L.M. 368 (entered into force 23 March 1976) [ICCPR], art. 1(1).

35. Jack GOLDSMITH, "Should International Human Rights Law Trump US Domestic Law?" (2000) 1 Chicago Journal of International Law 327; see also Michael IGNATIEFF, ed., *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Edmund Burke's declaration at the time of the French Revolution to the effect that he knew nothing of "universal" rights, but he did know about the rights of Englishmen.[36]

III. HUMAN SECURITY AND USE OF FORCE NORMS

Human security-inspired norms could conceivably complement human rights norms in another way. Human rights law and associated diplomatic discourse move along a track separate from the discourse about war and peace. The two tracks connect only with respect to means for conducting war, that is through the law of armed conflict which is regarded by both intergovernmental and non-governmental entities concerned with the protection of human rights as part of the complex of norms they are mandated to enforce.[37] Yet the only thing certain about the use of force, whether or not the use is legitimate under the Charter,[38] is that it will destroy and cripple lives, including the lives of non-combatants, the "collateral damage" incident to every use of force however "legitimate". So as a consequence of a decision to wage war, thousands, possibly tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of women and children, ancients and invalids, non-combatants of all kinds, will be summarily executed or partially dismembered, or horribly scarred without any legal responsibility accruing to the belligerent governments or their officials so long as non-combatants are not targeted and collateral damage from any single belligerent action is not disproportionate to the military advantage gained.

The connotations of the phrase "Human Security" provide what human rights and humanitarian law do not, namely a normative basis for condemning even "legitimate" recourse to force, legitimate in the sense that it is defensive or has been authorized by the Security Council under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter. They also provide a normative basis for indicting tactics and strategies arguably allowed by humanitarian law. This normative basis is not, however, new in substance. Rather it is the old wine of the Just War doctrine[39] in a new bottle.

A. *Human Security and Just War*

After all, for a war to be "just", it is nowhere near sufficient to have a just cause, e.g. self-defence. That is only the first test. An equally important test is whether, on balance, it is reasonably envisioned as doing more good than harm. "Good" refers to moral values, not national interests. Suppose, for instance, that terrorists supported or trained or simply acting with the acquiescence of security officials in country P enter country X and commit terrorist acts resulting in the death of a thousand people.

---

36. Tom FARER, *Confronting Global Terrorism and American Neo-Conservatism: The Framework of a Liberal Grand Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

37. See "Human Rights Watch Reports on War Crimes / Crimes against Humanity", online: Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/en/publications/reports?filter0=712&filter1=**ALL**>.

38. Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 7.

39. Tom FARER, "Un-Just War Against Terrorism and the Struggle to Appropriate Human Rights" (2008) 30 Human Rights Quarterly 356; see also Michael WALZER, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Viking, 1978).

And suppose country P refused thereafter to surrender to the authorities in country X the organizers of this atrocity and fails to take such decisive action against the organizers as to provide X with reasonable assurance against future attacks. Then let us assume X learns that another terrorist infiltration is about to occur. I would argue that under those circumstances, X has the legal right under the Charter to launch a pre-emptive strike. Suppose, however, that the terrorist leadership is dispersed around a large city in P, far from the powerfully guarded frontier with X, and different groups of leaders and supporting militants live in thickly populated areas near hospitals and chemical plants producing chlorine gas. Assume that by far the most efficient means of pre-emption is air and missile strikes against the buildings where the militants are living. But the predicted collateral damage, including the danger of the release of chlorine, could be upwards of a hundred thousand people. The military objective may be important enough to satisfy the proportionality rule of humanitarian law. Nevertheless, I would argue that, under the circumstances, one may doubt that the operation would satisfy just war standards. If human security incorporates those standards, it would perform the gap-filling role I have proposed for it in this area.

Or consider the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in early 2009. Israel cited missile attacks from militants in Gaza as a justification for its action and dismissed as irrelevant the huge disproportion between civilian casualties in Gaza (which it insisted resulted from the location of Hamas fighters in the midst of heavily populated areas) and the cumulative casualties to its own civilian population. Putting aside for the sake of argument the question of whether Gaza can be analogized to a foreign country rather than a huge prison within the current de facto boundaries of Israel, the Israeli argument is easier to make within the framework of humanitarian law than it would be if human security were construed to apply to such cases and to equate the value of all the lives involved. In other words, where humanitarian law requires a showing of gross disproportionality between legitimate military objectives and non-combatant deaths, a human security optic could be held to require a showing that the legitimate objective, in this case ending missile attacks, could not be achieved by other means (e.g. opening Gaza's borders to the free flow of goods and people, offering to negotiate total withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, treating Hamas as the legitimate government of Gaza, or a full-scale occupation of the territory with all the attendant costs and responsibilities or a painful ground attack unsupported by missiles and artillery). Note that I am not insisting that there is presently a legal norm of this character; I am merely suggesting that a human security optic could be construed to imply such a norm.

To expand the point just a bit further, take the United States' invasion of Iraq. Quite aside from the question of whether it was a use of force permitted by the Charter[40] (or, if one wonders, like the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, whether the Charter norms restraining the use of

---

40. I have joined the generality of commentators in finding that the invasion violated the Charter norms and that those norms enjoy sufficient support among states and other influential actors to be deemed positive law. See Farer, *supra* note 36 at 43–78.

force ever became positive law,[41] then permitted by residual customary law), the failure to protect the artistic and cultural legacy of the Iraqi people, much less the failure to insert sufficient troops to protect the population, are utterly irreconcilable with the implications of a human security perspective. Whether those failures constitute violations of humanitarian or human rights law is much more problematical.

IV. CO-OPTING HUMAN SECURITY: THE STATE AS HUMAN UTILITY MAXIMIZER

I noted at the outset of this article that the insinuation of a new term into the discourse of global politics is not fortuitous but rather the consequence of changes in material elements of global life that alter the way influential individuals, groups, and institutions understand their respective interests and the policy options available for defending them. For more than half a century changes in those material elements have been eroding both absolutist conceptions of national sovereignty and the associated premise of foreign policy "Realism", namely that in an anarchic international system international norms and institutions have at best a transient utility and mask underlying unequal power relationships rather than channelling them.[42] Or, to state the premise slightly differently, it is the improbability of institutionalized long-term co-operation in the face of the irreducible incentives to seize transient competitive advantage. Any enumeration of ideology-shifting material elements would include the following:

- The development and proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

- The increasing difficulty of controlling frontiers (in a globally integrated economic system).

- The deep penetration of a nationalist sensibility that facilitates the organization of death-by-a-thousand-cuts insurgencies against occupying forces which in turn affects the cost-benefit ratio of occupying foreign territory and of interventions generally .

- Advances in technical intelligence acquisition and the growth of epistemological communities of technical experts that vastly increase the transparency of national military-related investments and deployments.

- The global integration of production systems.

- Consumption (rather than production) as the driver of economic growth in post-industrial societies.

---

41. *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, UN Doc. A/59/565 (2004), at 52–5, see especially paras. 186 and 196.

42. Donnelly, *supra* note 12; See also John MEARSHEIMER, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

- The increasingly close tie at the national level between economic growth and political legitimacy, particularly in non-democratic states.

- The proliferation of conspicuously transnational non-traditional threats to individual security, such as pandemics, global warming, water and air pollution, mass-casualty terrorism, and organized crime.

I believe that these changes (or in some cases dramatic intensification of pre-existing tendencies) have collectively strengthened to a remarkable degree the benefits to national governments of sustained co-operation, and to a roughly corresponding degree increased the costs of policies designed to exploit fleeting tactical opportunities to make relative gains. And, I hypothesize, the behaviour of governments, although lagging behind change in the objective factors, evidences growing elite appreciation of the need for institutionalized co-operation.

The recognition of change in objective national interests can be found in language as well as behaviour. As I noted earlier, some writers have seen the invocation of human security as an assault on the very core of the classical national sovereignty/national interest conception of international relations and, more than that, an assault on the idea that the principal loyalty of all people, including state officials, should be to the generality of the human race rather than a national subset thereof, in short an assault on the national state as icon.[43] But there is an alternative way of construing and hence of using human security. In this alternative view, rather than defending themselves from its invocation, state elites can appropriate it for their own interests by emphasizing the continuing, even enhanced, importance of states as the *organizers of co-operation*[44] and the defenders of the interests of their citizens in a world where individuals have progressively less capacity as individuals or even as groups to defend themselves against the multiple threats of global dimension to their security. Of course, once a commitment to human security becomes the litmus test of governmental legitimacy, state elites can no longer speak openly as Charles de Gaulle was said to have done in conveying the belief that he owed his allegiance to France rather than the French people of whom he thought not very much. *In other words, the state as icon is replaced by the state as human utility maximizer.*

Readiness to adapt human security to reinforce state legitimacy was heralded by other catch phrases like "comprehensive security" and "common security".[45] Their employment by states in their discourse signalled an appreciation of the much-heightened need for *institutionalized* co-operation against threats from sources other than other states and thus a partial recasting, or at least a softening, of the classical national security paradigm which emphasized interstate threats as the principal transnational risk from which the state protected its citizens. Institutionalized co-operation requires states to accept diffuse long-term benefits rather than constantly

---

43. Arabinda ACHARYA and Amitav ACHARYA, "Human Security in Asia: Conceptual Ambiguity and Common Understandings" (2001) Centre for Peace and Development Studies, online: York University, Toronto ⟨http://www.yorku.ca/robarts/archives/chandigarth/⟩; see also Amitav ACHARYA, "Human Security: East versus West" (2001) 3 International Journal 442 at 459.

44. Farer, *supra* note 1 at 2.

45. David DEWITT, "Common, Comprehensive, and Cooperative Security" (1994) 7 The Pacific Review 1.

balanced quid pro quos from their international agreements and correspondingly restrains the impulse to extract relative advantage from every occasion.

V. HUMAN SECURITY IN ASIA

In its declaration of the intellectual foundations of its Second Biennial General Conference, the Organizing Committee of the Asian Society of International Law asked:

> How will the international legal order transform itself amidst such a shift of power [from the West to Asia] and *values* in the global community? … It is an urgent issue requiring serious deliberation, especially for the Asian people, who are expected to play an important role in the diversification of power and *values*. What should we do to bring about a desirable transformation of international law? (emphasis added).[46]

That question-begging interrogation reinforced the Conference's main theme: "International Law in a Multi-Polar and Multi-Civilizational World—Asian Perspectives, Challenges and Contributions." Question and overall theme assume that the immensely numerous peoples and states with all their diverse languages, histories, political systems, and social structures that Western political geographers first bundled under the heading "Asia" constitute a socio-political-cultural entity sufficiently homogeneous to be contrasted with the "West". But is it self-evident, for instance, that India's values are more like China's than like those of the United States or Japan's are more like Burma's than like England's? Which values are in question? Putting "values" aside, for the moment, although the organizers placed great emphasis on them, what about interests?

In the early stages of post-World War II development in the so-called Global South, uninhibited transnational trade and investment tended to be urged by the West, particularly by the United States and the United Kingdom, and resisted by newly industrializing countries like India. In doing so, however, India was following a course marked a century earlier by Germany when it was catching up industrially to the UK and the US in the second half of the nineteenth century and resisting British calls for laissez-faire in international economic transactions.[47] But today, as the West wrestles internally with political demands for the protection of certain agricultural and industrial assets, can one generalize across the length and breadth of Asia or the West about the balance of interest in the broad area of international trade and investment?

Is "democracy" a value or interest that differentiates Asia from the West? Not if you include India, Indonesia, and Japan (to name the three largest non-Western democracies) under the Asian umbrella. How about individualism or entrepreneurial ebullience? Surely no one who has spent time in Shanghai or Mumbai would find the culture in these respects radically different from the one in Silicon Valley.

---

46. Second Biennial General Conference of the Asian Society of International Law Prospectus, online: ⟨http://www.law.nus.edu.sg/asiansil/doc/AsianSILBiennialConference2009.pdf⟩.

47. Harold PERKIN, *Individualism versus Collectivism in Nineteenth-Century Britain: A False Antithesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

However culturally specific the historical development of politically organized communities during the long centuries of generally immobile peasant masses and limited political/military contact among governing elites and economic contact among merchant classes, is it not at least arguable that the globalization of communication, transportation, trade, and investment are eroding legacy differences in values and interests, but doing so very unevenly *within* nations? Two clashing assumptions about the centrality of economics and technology may be at work here. On the one hand, you have writers such as the American Thomas Friedman[48] who believe that changes in the character and diffusion of technology and the related play of economic forces are transformative. On the other you have the view epitomized by the late Sam Huntington when he wrote that Japanese people eating at McDonald's in Tokyo did not by virtue thereof become a jot more like Americans who dined at McDonald's in New York.[49]

We are dealing here with anything but self-evident truths about the contemporary world. The truth, I suspect, is that groups of people within each country are far more like each other in values and in interests than they are like their fellow nationals. There is nothing new about that; rather the contrary. Through most of the last millennium, the European upper classes had much in common with each other and hardly anything in common with the peasants among whom they lived. To be sure, as the Europeans demonstrated during the first half of the twentieth century, common culture does not prevent peoples from resort to fratricidal conflict. But that is irrelevant to the question of whether it is either accurate or useful to imagine Asia as a cultural unit or its member states as having collective interests readily distinguishable from those of the West which themselves are differentiated by economic and political interests.

Is there, however, an East-West difference with respect to the concept of Human Security? Sharon Ong has written that the countries of the region remain:

> … firmly wedded to a national security paradigm. This paradigm mirrors the traditional understanding of security in international law, that is, the security of states as the primary subjects of international law, based on territorial integrity and sovereignty … The "desire to preserve the sanctity of the newfound sovereignty of the post-colonial 'nation-state' … rendered Asia rather inhospitable to anything but a strictly state-centric agenda of national security". And so it was that the relatively new concept of human security, which challenged the reference point from the state to the individual, thus challenging the traditional conception of national security, was "state-skeptic".[50]

And various states in the region were correspondingly sceptical about it.[51] She then goes on to describe how the onset of financial crises, the intensification of transnational terrorism, incipient pandemics, and natural disasters, all striking powerfully within a

---

48. Thomas FRIEDMAN, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How it Can Renew America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); see also online: ⟨http://www.thomaslfriedman.com/⟩.

49. Peter BERGER and Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

50. Ong, *supra* note 20 at 2.

51. Paul EVANS, "Asian Perspective on Human Security: A Responsibility to Protect?"(paper prepared for the "Human Security in East Asia" conference organized by UNESCO, The Korean National Commission for UNESCO and Korea University's Ilmin International Relations Institute, Seoul, 16–17 June 2003).

short space of time, "jolted the governments of Asia to become more receptive towards human-centric security norms".[52] The result was a series of co-operation agreements focused on human security issues that could, however, if neglected, have repercussions for the security of regimes. To use the idiom I suggested earlier, they came forward as the organizers of human security.

At the same time, however, many governments continued to resist furiously any proposal that could be seen as legitimizing individual or collective action to sanction states that evidenced gross indifference to the security of the human beings within their borders. Thus not only the brutal tyrannical regimes of Myanmar and North Korea but also democratic India "urged the Group of 77 to reject the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Responsibility on 'The Responsibility to Protect'".[53] Does it therefore follow that with respect to intervention as a means for protecting human security and with respect to the related conception of national interest and international law, Asia's values are different?

One must first ask whether this is a question of "values" or of interests and, if interests, whether they are powerfully embedded or quite possibly transient. Is it not possible that for great powers like China and India, this sensitivity is a legacy of a vanished era, a legacy that will itself vanish as they assume that "superpower" status envisioned by the organizers of the Biennial Conference I referenced above? We have, after all, seen a similar sensitivity diminish remarkably in Latin America as the threat of US intervention has receded.[54] One must further ask whether the strict view of sovereignty and the narrow view of security are peculiarly Asian. I noted earlier that a defining characteristic of the American Right is a sensitivity to external appreciation of internal policies.[55] Where the American Right may differ is in its internal divisions with traditional realist conservatives sounding very much like the Chinese in emphasizing nationalist values and interests and indifference to tragedies in other countries while the neo-conservative arm of the American Right believes, or at least claims to believe, that national security requires at least selective response to the mutilation of human security by tyrannical governments.[56]

VI. CONCLUSION

It remains to be seen whether the invocation and employment of Human Security, already embraced conceptually by Japan as well as Canada, by Thailand (however nominally) as well as Norway, will underscore the differences between Asia and the West or, alternatively, support the thesis that material interests and changing conceptions of national interest and identity are rapidly eroding perceptions and hence the reality of region-based antinomies. For the sake of the Human Interest and in the light of my view of the national interests of most states, I cast my hope for convergence.

---

52. Ong, *supra* note 20 at 3.

53. *Ibid*., at 4.

54. See Randall PARISH and Mark PECENY, "Kantian Liberalism and the Collective Defense of Democracy in Latin America" (2002) 39 Journal of Peace Research 229.

55. Goldsmith, *supra* note 35; and Ignatieff, *supra* note 35.

56. Farer, *supra* note 36 at 29–42.