# **Human Security in Contemporary International Politics:**

# **Limitations and Challenges**

## Zana Tofiq Kaka Amin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Law, University of Raparin, Rania, Iraq

Correspondence: Zana Tofiq Kaka Amin, University of Raparin, Rania, Iraq.

Email: zanaamin55@gmail.com

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Abstract: Since the Post-Cold War, human security studies have become attracted in the international community and in the security studies. From the human security standpoint, individual security is more significant than the security of the state. At the core of this study is one essential question: To what extent do you agree that Human Security offers a radical and progressive agenda for thinking about and 'doing' security? In order to answer of the main question, the purpose of this article is to examine human security assumptions. The thesis, therefore will argue that human security does not ultimately offer a radical and progressive agenda for international security policy. Thus, this study concludes that human security statements are likely to be unsuccessful in practice.

Keywords: Security, Human Security, Human Rights, Humanitarian Intervention, National Security

#### 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the Cold War era, the concept of security broadly shifted in terms of international security politics. This resulted in a substantial debate regarding the concept of security in the security policy discourse, as well as in international relations theory. In previous periods, security was understood as intrinsically linked with the state and the use of military force, but over the past few decades its meaning and understanding have mostly changed. By the end of the Cold War, the term 'security' was significantly revised by analysts and policy-makers (Buzan et al, 1998; Hynek & Chandler, 2010). In addition, one consequence has been the appearance of the concept of human security as a new dimension and perspective in the field of the security studies (King & Murray, 2001, p. 585; Kerr, 2010, p.122).

Human security is arguably one of the most important approaches in contemporary security politics, since it plays a vital role in academic security studies, both in terms of the practical and theoretical effects in the years following the end of the Cold War (Hynek & Chandler, 2010; Dannreuther, 2007,

p.46). It has clearly expanded as a result of the inclusion of new sectors and issues of security such as non-military threats and domestic violence (Oberleitner, 2005). As a result, although the primacy of military security has probably weakened in global affairs, the roles of non-military aspects have significantly increased in terms of understandings of security (King & Murray, 2001, p.588).

The human security approach has achieved a position of sustainable importance for scholars and policy-makers as an alternative to the traditional concept of security. From the human security perspective, individual security is more important than the security of the state (Kaldor, 2007, p.182). During the Cold War, security studies were clearly influenced by the narrow understanding of the concept of security, and also neo-realism provided a dominant paradigm in global security studies. However, some issues external to the military sector have emerged in international politics such as identity issue, transnational crime, poverty and the environmental collapse (Buzan et al, 1998, p.2; Duffield, 2007, p. 111).

On the other hand, it appears that despite these statements and arguments, the human security approach and associated arguments have led to different explanations and evaluations. For example, for some scholars human security is a new paradigm, while for others it is an imprecise and vague approach in the field of security studies (Paris, 2001, p.88). Therefore, this essay will argue that human security does not ultimately offer a radical and progressive agenda for international security policy. Thus, a human security assumption is likely to be unsuccessful in practice. In addition, it has been hypothesized that the implementation of its assumption in the real world is insufficient. This is because the human security approach has been highly criticized, largely, because it is too diffuse and vague in terms of individual security. Despite this, theoretical human security can be a method of ensuring greater understanding of security issues.

The argument will be structured as the following parts. After introduction, the second part will examine the key idea and the explanation of the conceptualization of human security, considering also the main principles and characteristics of the human security approach. The third part will examine the main limitations and criticisms of human security, considering the responsibility of protecting human security. It will then identify some highly problematic aspects of human security in practical terms, such as the dilemmas of humanitarian intervention, which has become the central issue in today's international legal system and the relationship between security and development. Finally, it will consider the case for emancipation and empowering security.

### 2. Contextualising and Debates of Human Security

### 2.1 The Emergence of Human Security

In order to understand the human security paradigm, it is first essential to identify the values and concepts of its framework. It is clear that one of the most significant changes in terms of international policy is a new understanding of security studies. In this regard, human security has become a controversial matter for both international and regional institutions, and also the focus of academic research in the coming years (Sané, 2008, p.5).

History has shown that the idea of human security is clearly not a new term in world politics, arising as a result of the significantly poor health, nutrition, and education conditions of some nations during the

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1970s and 1980s. The United Nations struggled to improve these conditions, with its Development Program being particularly effective (King & Murray, 2001, p.587). The first clear explanation of human security was articulated in the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report (UNDPR) which recognised external threats as a major hazard to human security (Kaldor, 2007, p.182; Krause, 2008, p.66; Dannreuther, 2007, p.47). Overall, therefore, it can be concluded that the existence of a threat is a key feature for the dynamics of human security.

From a philosophical perspective, it is therefore clear that a human-centric approach in security studies originates in political liberalism, which suggests that "people will be secure" (Kerr, 2010, p.122). In the years following the end of the Cold War, the cosmopolitan assumption of liberal internationalism has reappeared and grown. Hence, the proponents of cosmopolitanism have argued that the Cold War era was a difficult one for the majority of people, involving many conflicts and civil wars (Dannreuther, 2007, p.47).

The crucial difference between human security and traditional security approaches is the difference of a referent object within the framework of the international security politics. People, therefore have become the referent object of human security (Duffield, 2007, p.122; Shani et al, 2007, p.198). This means that the focus has shifted from 'nation-states to people', and also that people are now a core subject with regard to security, with questions being asked about how to better people's lives in the community (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 203). In other words, human security attempts have redefined the wide range of traditional assumptions regarding security. The scopes can be described as "whom and what to protect from harm" (Busumtwi-Sam, 2008, p.18). However, some definitions of human security focus on "generalized poverty" as a significant threat. For instance, King and Murray have defined human security as "expectation of years of life without experiencing the state of generalized poverty" (2001, p. 592). Nonetheless, it is obvious that human security can be seen in a variety of dimensions.

It is clear that human security has been divided into two main contexts such as a narrow and a broad definition. In terms of the narrow definition, human security is faced with the 'threat of political violence toward people' by the state or other factors within the political sector (Kerr, 2010, p.124). According to this vision, human security is 'freedom from fear' which involves struggling to protect people from violence and conflict (Kerr, 2010, p.124). For example, in the late 1990s, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy applied the concept of human security to protect individuals from terrorism and drug threats (Howard-Hassmann, 2012, p.91).

However, the broad approach to human security is 'freedom from want', a definition that includes a wide range of issues including poverty, disease and pollution (Newman, 2010, p.80). This approach is presented (UNDPR), and incorporates seven security dimensions and categories: in environment, health, food, community, economic, personal, and political securities (Grayson, 2008, p.389; King & Murray, 2001, p. 587). The broad definition of human security recognizes new threats to individuals and human life, and also suggests new mechanisms for protection (Howard-Hassmann, 2012, p.93; Newman, 2010, p.81). Despite clear differences, in terms of both perspectives, although it can be said that the individual is the 'referent object' of human security, the threats to the referent object are essentially different according to each perspective (Newman, 2010, p. 79).

Furthermore, the notion of human security has a great impact on the understanding of international security politics in the years following the end of the Cold War. It also should be noted that it has come to the attention of international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union (McCormack, 2011, p.238). In policy terms, human security has the ability to generate some international activities, such as a global campaign to "ban trafficking and light weapons" (Hampson, 2012, p.282). At the national level, the last decades of the twentieth century witnessed the human application of the security paradigm to foreign policy and international efforts by national states such as Canada, Norway and, Japan, among others (Kerr, 2010). In other words, human security nowadays plays a significant role as a guiding basis for foreign policies. Although there are many concepts to define the human security paradigm, it still remains a blurred concept used in terms of theoretical approach. As a result, there is a lack of definitional specificity. In light of the earlier analysis, there currently is no common definition of human security (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.6).

## 2.2. Characterizations and Principles of Human Security

Within security studies, there are a number of principles of the human security paradigm. First of all, human security centres on individualism. The thoughts associated with people-centric security have been established in the UN Charter, the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Geneva Convention" (Mack, 2004, p.366). It has also been demonstrated that individuals are the referent object of human security. As Howard-Hassmann (2012, p. 90), emphasises protection of the individual is a requirement of international society and lead to global intervention when states lack the ability to protect individuals. Therefore, particularly since the end of the Cold War, the term security has obviously changed from state security to the security of the citizen. In this regard, human security focuses more on individuals than on states (Duffield, 2007, p.111).

The other principle of human security is human rights, and there is a need for cooperation between each of them. Thus, there is a strong association between human security and human rights because the latter consists of the right to life, the right to speech and other rights. In addition, human rights contain the right of different sectors such as political, economic, and social ones. In terms of security, it therefore has an effect on policy and development (Kaldor, 2007, p.185; Hampson, 2012, p.281). Human security focuses on the 'freedom from want' as a significant assumption with regard to protecting people from different threats, and this paradigm also plays a central part in terms of human rights (Howard-Hassmann, 2012, p.103). Overall, it can be argued that human security and human rights have shared aims, and it can therefore be hypothesized that the relationship between them is complementary.

Within the human security agenda, multilateralism is one of the principles at the global level. This means that a group of states has responsibility for taking action as part of international institutions such as the United Nations and NATO (Kaldor, 2007, p.188). It could therefore be argued that multilateralism has played a substantial role in terms of the human security approach (Kaldor, 2007, p.188). Furthermore, others have argued that the existence of legitimacy has considerable implications for human security. In other words, human security is based on local and international political authority (Kaldor, 2007, p.187). This point can therefore be articulated as a main principle of human security. At its most obvious, human security can be seen as a universal value and part of the policy agenda. In addition, legitimate political authority is a noteworthy value with regard to human security. Thus, the creation of legitimate political authority is necessary for human security in terms of the enforcement capacity that can be applied, both

for physical security and material security (Kaldor et al, 2007, p.281). It should be noted that multilateralism and legitimacy are the main features of the human security paradigm.

In addition, the existence of human security is related to threats to individuals, and it can therefore be argued that such threats are important elements of human security. In this regard, Hampson suggests that the language of threats is used to characterise the human security paradigm (2012, p.289), but determining such threats has become a major obstacle to the human security approach. As a consequence, interdependence is faced with human security regarding these security concerns because when one citizen is threatened, other people are also threatened (Kim, 2010, p.87). The human security approach, therefore, emphasises the universal concern about threats as being relevant to everyone. Thus, it should be emphasized that the human security approach is a multidimensional and universal paradigm in international security politics (Jolly & Ray, 2007, p.458).

### 3. Limitations and Criticisms of Human Security

#### 3.1. The Criticisms of Human Security

In order to analyse the impracticality of human security, it is crucial to understand and identify the main criticisms against it. From a critical security studies perspective, there have been a number of criticisms regarding the framework and concept of human security since the United Nations of Human Development Report was published. In fact, criticism of human security has, therefore, become considerable within the field of security studies. The first limitation and criticism relates to the broad vision of human security, which perceives many aspects in different sectors such as economic, environmental and political, being a threat to individual security. As a result, it may perhaps lead to pointless and confused meanings (Newman, 2001, p.82). This obstacle can be seen as a major criticism in that it is difficult to delimit human security boundaries (Busumtwi-Sam, 2008, p.18; Duffield, 2007, p.114).

In this context, Krause argues that the broadening of human security is ultimately nothing more than a "shopping list" (Newman, 2010, p.82), since human security comprises many issues and threats including terrorism, disease, and climate change. Therefore, in terms of practice, it has led to complication for taking action (Jolly & Ray, 2007). Grayson (2008, p.388) suggests that the formation of human security has drawn upon security, economics, ethics, diplomacy, medicine, and psychology. As has been shown above, the agenda and assumption of human security remains unclear in security studies. For example, Christie (2010a) has similarly argued that human security could be powerless when it comes to offering the origins for an international security regime.

Another criticism of human security relates to the term 'problem-solving'. According to some analysts human security has probably become weakened theoretically as an uncritical paradigm with regard to this term. Consequently, the 'problem-solving' approach would have a less positive influence on public lives when engaged with policy and government (Newman, 2001, p.82). Therefore, 'problem-solving' has become a major challenge for the United Nations (Krause, 2010, p. 82).

A further criticism relates to human security based on a "cosmopolitan ethical realm". In other words, human security has a theoretical emphasis in terms of its moral framework, whereas in practice, it is quite different (Dannreuther, 2007, p. 48). Moreover, human security has been criticized in terms of its

analytical value. For example, Buzan has pointed out that the international security has been confused with social security and civil liberties in the human security paradigm (cited in Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.43). Therefore, the difference between international and internal security policy has become a failure.

Another criticism is related to extensive threats over human security. This is because everything can be described as a threat to human security. For instance, Keller suggests that restricting the threat of human security has become akin to traditional security problems (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.78). According to many security scholars determining a wider range of issues as a security threat is impossible when it comes to prioritizing political action (Owen, 2004). Overall, therefore, human security can be criticised in theoretical terms, and also that these shortcoming and limitations have an effect on human security policy in the real world.

### 3.2. The Responsibility of Protecting Human Security

One crucial point in the practical agenda of human security is associated with the principle of the responsibility of protection. In terms of the policy of responsibility to protect, the concept of human security has raised one of the most important debates in international security. According to many analysts the main actor in the protection of human security is the state. Therefore, it can be said that human security is unable to recognise the problem of the state and the role of the state within the human security approach (Dannreuther, 2007, p.48). In human security policy, responsibility for guaranteeing individual security is often an unclear paradigm (Liotta, 2002, p.477). However, Hampson (2012) makes different observations, arguing that the fundamental agenda for protecting human security is state sovereignty and government. Similarly, Duffield claims that the main responsibility of freedom, rights, and human security is the state as the 'ultimate guarantor' (2007, p.121). Nevertheless, in the human security field individual security rather than state security has become problematic. In other words, the interests of national security may perhaps lead to challenging human security policy in the real world.

Furthermore, Hynek and Chandler have argued that national security has become a problem for human security policy (2011, p. 2). This is because such security highlights that of people rather than national security. Also, as discussed above, the primacy focus in human security is individuals rather than the state. In practical terms, a human security approach attempts to ensure individual survival such as water, food, freedom, work, and public health, rather than national sovereignty (Shani et al, 2007, p.30). On the other hand, however, the state is still the central object with regard to security, and states have also tried to maintain security. The state therefore has a significant role in providing for human well-being in the contexts of "freedom from fear' and freedom from want" (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.168).

The concept of security, however, has returned to the traditional state-centrism and the role of military action with the rise of the "war on terror" (De Larrinaga & Doucet, 2008, p. 518). Therefore, human security has been damaged by military action. In terms of practice, it seems that the individual-centric approach does not offer a radical alternative to state security (Christie, 2010b, p.103). Moreover, the rejection of the realities of global affairs such as the role of the state and state sovereignty in security studies by the human security approach has become an obstacle and acts as a shortcoming. As a consequence, human security has failed as a suitable alternative to national security (Shani et al, 2007,

p.196). Therefore, protecting people from insecurity, disease, crime, unemployment, environmental issues, and social conflict has been weakened in many parts of the world.

Other worries relate to the role of non-state actors in sustaining human security. It should therefore be noted that the United Nations as the key actor in the international community has a responsibility to protect human security and for applying it in the real world. This is because the United Nations has numerous agencies and programmes in different sectors for protecting human security (Martin & Owen, 2010). According to some scholars such as Thomas and Tow, the respond of the United Nation to human security threats in the seven dimensions has becomes boundless. Therefore, they believe that human security is "unworkable in policy terms" (Bellamy & McDonald, 2002, p.375). In the last few decades, the United Nations as a collective actor has played a substantial role in the maintenance and definition of the human security.

Despite this, the contribution of the United Nations with regard to the protection of human security is a limited process. In general, it has been argued that global organisations such as the United Nations are likely to be ineffective in the maintenance of human security values. This is because world politics are dominated by national interests and power politics (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.203). It is clear that the role of the United Nations in practice is likely to be unsuccessful in terms of human security. Therefore, human security paradigm needs authority and powers in order to defend its assumptions in practical terms; however, this power is dominated by state sovereignty and national interests. Thus, state and non-state actor's attempts to protect human security are limited and insufficient.

## 3.3. The Assessment of Human Security Dilemma in Practical Terms

Despite the considerable value of human security, there has been a substantial problem with regard to its applicability in the real world. There are a number of differences between theory and practice. First of all, humanitarian intervention has become a central issue in the international legal system, since it is one of the practical forms that are applied by the international community to the human security approach. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a significant increase in international peace-keeping on the part of the United Nations and international and regional organisations in response to an obligation to protect human security objectives. Some analysts, therefore, have argued that when humanitarian intervention is used in the light of human security, it could be changed to another form such as the classical realist perspective for state and national interests (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 204).

From the perspective of human security, share values have a top priority rather than the national interest (Oberleitner, 2005, p.190). It could be claimed that one of the main elements of human security is cosmopolitanism, which is based on the 'moral realm'. In this respect, humanitarian intervention is an instrument for human security, and has been defined as the best method for promoting such security. In practice, however, humanitarian assistance may lead to obstacles within the human security paradigm (Dannreuther, 2007, p.48). These are because humanitarian intervention does not necessarily mean collective security and agreements between the less powerful. Noam Chomsky, for example, argued that 'humanitarian intervention was a new form of imperialism'' (cited in McCormack, 2011, p.250).

Thus, humanitarian action has had adverse consequences on the population of the global south. In addition, there have been a number of failures on the part of international community in terms of its

efforts to prevent civil war and violence. For instance, in the case of Rwanda in 1994, the role of human security was limited to the protection of human rights (Dunne and Wheeler, 2004, p.14). As Christie (2010a, p.186) points out, human security has been applied to justify the increase in the roles of traditional security actors. In this regard, the US invasion of Iraq is a good example because the main justification for the war in Iraq was to save the people of Iraq from the human insecurity (Kerr, 2010, p.130).

In sum, it can thus be said that the humanitarian approach has the potential to provide a political agenda for powerful states in the international order instead of protecting human security. In addition, the human security paradigm may perhaps lead to military solutions. As a consequence, the sovereignty of a state may be broken by such intervention (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.64). For example, in the case of Afghanistan, the main principle of human security in terms of protecting people was broken in order to achieve national security. Furthermore, many civilians have been killed by the military forces (Kaldor et al, 2007, p. 286). Therefore, it has been argued that ensuring human security has provided the perception of Western imperialism against non-Western states, in particular since 9/11 (Shani et al, 2007). It can be hypothesized that national interests have crucial role in the decision making and the action of states.

Another problematic case in terms of human security is the link between human security and development. It should be pointed out that human development is seen as essential for human security. This is because human development has a strong relationship with human well-being, and is people centric (Petrovsky, 2005, p.30). Thus, the idea of human security for supporters and as a guarantor in order to maintain human development arose in 1994 with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007). There are some practical reasons for the appearance of human security with regard to human development. First of all, protecting human beings and individual lives are not only based on development but conflict and violence may damage the significant achievements in terms of human development. Second, human security in the short and long term can be damaged by traditional development. Additionally, the merging of development with security requirements is often affected by the shifting of international order and new threats (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007).

In terms of practice, there are many debates and arguments regarding human security and human development. Although human security is useful for development in terms of threats, it is often inadequate for development policies (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.99). It should therefore be noted that the main relevant problem is about confusion between human security and human development within the UN system. Therefore, human security is posed as an ethical paradigm in terms of theory (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007, p.104). As a result, achieving this goal in the real world is difficult. For example, there are numerous cases of poverty, lack of education, and social conflict in many parts of the world.

Thus, some scholars have argued that the association between security and development is not considered to be a 'good thing' (Krause, 2010, p. 79 cited in Duffield, 2007). In this respect, Duffield has suggested that "human security represents a vast and expansive agenda of control over the developing world by the developed" (cited in McCormack, 2011, p.252). It can be said that in terms of practice, links between security and development are likely to be problematic to success in terms of economic, social, and political development.

Another limitation of human security is empowering security for citizens. As McCormack (2008, p.125) suggests, emancipation is the main statement of human security for individuals in developing countries. From the case of emancipation human security is unworkable and criticized. According to Booth (1991, p.319), "security and emancipation are two sides of same the coin". Thus, the idea of emancipation as the freeing of people is problematic. The radical test of human security is challenging state-centric security. In other words, human security cannot give a good solution to the issue of the state in its assumption. From this perspective, this is because the state leads to insecurity or acts as the provider of security for people (Dannreuther, 2007, p.48).

Human security suggests that individuals should be free in their lives. Moreover, human security focuses on empowerment strategies to aid citizens to solve challenging situations. In this regard, Booth argues that emancipation can be described as freedom of people in different sectors such as political, social, economic, and physical sectors (Christie, 2010a, p.182). Thus, empowerment has become a central issue in the human security paradigm. In terms of the individual centric assumption, human security suggests that there is a lack of security faced by states and authority. Therefore, efforts to empower citizens oppose that authority (Christie 2010b, p.101). Consequently, according to some analysts human security is an obstacle to emancipatory aims. For example, McCormack (2008, p.125) points out that empowering policy become problematic, because the international system is controlled by the main powers and not by international organisations.

It is clear that human security seeks to provide protection for the majority of people according to the new understanding of the term 'security'. This debate thus appears pointless, because in terms of practice, individual security rather than state-centric security does not provide a radical challenge (Christie, 2010b, p.103). Furthermore, there is another assumption that considers human security from an ethical point of view. Despite these unsuccessful cases in the human security paradigm, human security could widely be seen as a comprehensive agenda for non-governmental institutions. Nevertheless, human security is often powerless to respond to a number of key problems faced by individuals in the real world. As Krause claims (2008, p.78), there is a real gap between the practice of human security and the values involved. It can be argued that human security does not reflect its assumptions and theories. Therefore, it has not reduced the insecurity of people around the world.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, there has been a significant shift with regard to security studies following the end of the Cold War. The concept of human security thus seems to appear as an arguable and controversial matter in the field of security studies. In the human security paradigm, the individual is the centric referent object in contrast to traditional assumptions, which highlighted a state-centric approach and sovereignty in international security policy. In point of fact, therefore, it is clear that there are many theoretical criticisms of human security. As a result, it is hard to implement such an approach in policy terms. For instance, Hubert argues that "the definitional issues are unlikely to be resolved" (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007, p.43).

Some scholars have described human security as an idealistic theory in international security policy. This is because human security in its broadest definition does not offer an accurate approach as a progressive agenda for ensuring security. In this regard, Kaldor argues that human security in practice, as

an attempt to protect people has been disappointing (Krause, 2010, p.70). Despite this evidence, however, advocates of the human security concept suggest that it has a significant role to play in redefining the concept of security from state security to individual security. Therefore, human security has been applied in practice, because many threats such as poverty, crime, environmental issues, and health problems are still continuing in many parts of the world.

However, it has been argued here that human security is likely to be an unsuccessful paradigm in practical terms. Hence, it can be seen that development issues and human rights violations have increased significantly. Moreover, human security can be used to justify military action in the name of humanitarian intervention. Human security is incapable of offering a comprehensible alternative to the national and state security approach. For example, some analysts have argued that human security can be described as a utopian paradigm, "even if we had the capabilities, it is not practical or realistic" (Kaldor et al, 2007, p.281). This is because problems of definition, national security and confusion between security and development have proved to be highly problematic in the human security paradigm. In addition, another limitation of human security in practice is the weak responsibility of state and non-state actors. As a result, it is still an arguable matter in international security politics. Therefore, one can conclude that the human security approach does not offer a radical alternative to international security policy.

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