

## APPROACHING TO THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY

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### Overview

Human security focuses on protection of life and dignity of each individual human being and community and ensures “freedom from want”, “freedom from fear” and “freedom to live in dignity”.

The composition of human security includes 7 fundamental components: personal security, environmental security, economic security, political security, community security, health security and food security. The concept of human security has significantly reinforced for the concepts of national security, human rights and human development.

For the time being and in the coming time, Vietnam’s security and development faces many huge challenges. It is necessary to incorporate human security in the legislative formulation program, broaden the strategy for protection of national security to include the dimensions of human security and proactively participate in international fora on human security.

### 1. Evolution of security concept: from state to human

Security is among the most commonly used terms over half of the past century after the World War II. During the Cold War, almost all aspects of security centred on national security. The end of the Cold War and globalization process resulted in not only the fundamental changes to the order of the world security but also shift of interests to security, thereby facilitating the broadening of the security concept from traditional security – i.e. national security to other areas of security which were collectively named non-traditional security. According to Barry Buzan and David A. Baldwin, the broadening led to formation of the multi-dimensional structure of the security concept consisting of 4 major dimensions: international security (transnational security, regional security, and global security), national security, public security (social order and security) and human security. As expressly demonstrated by John Peterson and Hugh Ward, such dimensions of security exist in a very closely interactive, interdependent rather than independent relationship.

Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, a well-known Pakistani economist and one of the pioneers in the human development theory, leader of the drafting team, first introduced the concept of human security in the global agenda in the UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report. The Report defined human security as "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities." The 1994 HDR highlighted two major components of human security: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. These freedoms, from the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are part of the four human freedoms that President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously referred to in a speech in 1941. He was advocating a world founded on: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear<sup>(\*)</sup>. Subsequent debate in the 1990s added the freedom 'to live in dignity'. In accordance with Sabina Alkire, human security focuses the attention on human individuals and their communities. This emphasis on human beings distinguishes human security from the objective of protecting state territories. The human security approach broadens the scope of security analysis and policy from territorial security to

the security of people. The 2012 GA Resolution stresses the role of "Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to survival, livelihood and dignity of their people". In other words, threat(s) to – and values under threat in – people's lives are the key starting point of a human security<sup>(\*)</sup>. Human security shifts that focus to persons, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, or other distinguishing characteristics. In this way the human security approach parallels the movement in economic development and international law to shift the emphasis from instrumental objectives (such as growth, or state rights) to human development and human rights. In doing so the human being becomes the "end" of development, not only as a "means" to increased economic productivity or legal coherence, and these various activities in turn become "people-centred".

Four defined essential characteristics of human security include: *i) Universal:* Human security is a universal concern for all people everywhere, in rich nations and poor; *ii) Interdependent:* The components of human security are interdependent such as famine, disease, pollution, drug trafficking, terrorism which are no longer isolated events, confined within national borders; *iii) People-centred:* It means the key concern is about how each individual

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt's address to the United States Congress, January 6 1941, chapter 36. See <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/ralph/workbook/ral-prs36b.htm>

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<sup>(\*)</sup> UN General Assembly, 66th Session "Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome" (A/RES/66/290), 25 October 2012.

and community live and choices they can make and how freely they exercise their many choices. Essential to human security is the advancement of political, social, economic, military systems that together give people the building blocks for achieving peace, development and security; *iv) Easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention:* Because it is less costly to address the threats to human life and dignity upstream than downstream. The first three elements are shared with human development, although human security analysis is focused on threats; the last element implies understanding the threats in order to implement preventive measures (Oscar A. Gomez and Des Gasper, 2013).

In consideration of the key values to be threatened, how such values are threatened and how the threats are addressed, the composition of human security is constituted of 7 fundamental components, including: personal security (security from physical violence and threats), environmental security (access to sanitary water supply, clean air and a non-degraded land system), economic security (assured basic income), political security (protection of human rights and freedom), community security (security of cultural identity), health security (freedom from disease and infection) and food security (access to food). It should be noted that although human security is considered as the core element of non-traditional security, the division of human security into 7 categories is not aligned with the division of non-traditional security (into

also 7 different categories<sup>(\*)</sup>). Based on their frequency of threats, human security can be relatively distinguished by chronic and sudden. Human security is assured based on four clusters: risk assessment, prevention, protection and compensation.

## **2. Human security among national security, human development and human rights**

Regardless of the difference between the people-centred approach of human security and the state-centred approach of national security, rather than conflicting with the concept of national security, human security does not obviate state security, but reinforces national security of which greater focus is on protection of the territory and the political regime. The concept of national security reflects the demand to protect the territory and political regime from largely external and military aggression. Meanwhile, human security reflects the demand to protect specific individuals and communities from threats which originate from their surrounding environments and are mainly of non-military nature. National security also implies that the state is the sole actor while human security involves not only governments but a broader participation of societies, communities and each individual to guarantee their own security.

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Non-traditional security is often divided into 7 categories: demographic instability, economic inequality, migration, environmental challenges, terrorism, drugs trafficking and other forms of international crime, potential proliferation of mass destruction weapons.

National security, however, is a necessary rather than sufficient condition for human security. The nation or state itself can either play the role of the most significant security provider for each citizen or become the threat to human security in the event that illegal oppressive and restrictive policies are imposed. As Silva Guilherme (2011) put it in “Human Security and Sovereignty: Polar Opposites or Simply Nodes in Network”, the two concepts are mutually reinforcing as nodes in a network of broader security issues where the absence of either of the two will result in the breakdown of the network.

On the other side, the inclusion of human security in the international agenda has led to significant conflicts with the traditional perspectives on national sovereignty. The key conflict stems from the situation where certain developed countries manipulate human security to serve their political goals. In fact, instability within the borders of certain developing countries may be exaggerated as “humanitarian disaster” due to “state failure”. This can serve as a pretext to raise human insecurity issue to international organizations, even the United Nations for the purposes of exerting pressure, imposing gradual isolation, embargo, humanitarian intervention, even military intervention to overthrow the ruling regimes in sovereign nations. As scholar Lloyd Axworth (2001), former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs even highlighted that NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 was a typical example of humanitarian intervention by

military means. Consequently, certain developing countries are still adopting doubtful attitude towards inclusion of human security in the official agenda which they consider as another “Trojan horse”. On the other hand, lack of clear distinction between human security and human rights has led to various debates and some even assumed that human security is solely a “new cover” of human rights. According to F. Hampson (2002), the stress on human rights in international relations has caused disagreements, even conflicts of views.

The successes of various humanitarian and peace-keeping campaigns by the United Nations have proved that human security does not conflict with national security. What matters is to shed light on the ambiguity regarding the power to conduct such campaigns. The outcomes of the 4 key discussions in the United Nations General Assembly (see the section below) demonstrate that the concerns about the concept of human security itself have gradually reduced as the international community requirement for clear determination of the power to conduct humanitarian intervention has been satisfied. The disagreements and debates also indicate that the United Nations need further facilitate the discussions to reach mutual consensus on human security. Amitav Acharya (2001), a well-known scholar, analysed humanitarian intervention and argued that humanitarian intervention for reestablishment of human security could only be realized under the authorization of the United Nations and by multilateral approaches.

Human rights and human security are closely related. *First*, human rights highlights the legal aspect and human security stresses the practical aspect of combining state, community and individual efforts to address the violations of fundamental human rights. If clear policy orientations and arrangements are in place, human security activities, rather than challenging the roles of the state, will reinforce the state's roles in ensuring national security and social order and safety. At the same time, communities, organizations and individuals can jointly conduct the human security activities with the government to effectively address the threats to human lives. *Second*, part of the project of the human rights community has been to build consensus and public awareness around a set of universal and fundamental human rights that are argued to hold even when they are not in fact respected by state authorities or others. While human security may be instrumentally useful to countries in other ways, one of the motivational forces for human security is that it addresses what most would consider to be the most basic and universal of human rights. *Third*, human security and human rights address both violence and poverty; their subject matter is complex. The international bill of human rights includes basic needs such as work, education, food, self-determination, and healthcare. The same bill of human rights prohibits torture, slavery, persecution on religious or racial ground, and direct killing, and another Convention prohibits genocide.

The identification protection and promotion of central facets of human lives from the "freedom from fear", "freedom from want" and "freedom to live in dignity" is the aim of human security as well as human rights. *Four*, clear difference between human rights and human security is that human security explicitly recognises the need for ongoing prioritisation and discussion of elements of human security. Human rights activists will argue that each right is equally fundamental and indivisible, and that no institution can legitimately "pick and choose". If human security initiatives were to implement that view, then the "elements of the vital core" would of necessity be the entire set of human rights for all nations everywhere. In contrast specifying human security does entail the explicit, open-ended prioritization of freedoms and rights that current human rights theories studiously avoid. While the disagreement about the "equal priority" of all human rights may seem to drive the two approaches apart, it is actually quite helpful to have both approaches. The human rights approach defends the incommensurable value of a list of human rights. *Five*, the most significant divergences between human security and human rights lie in the instruments and institutions that will implement human security. For example, human rights activists generally have used legal instruments to prevent human rights abuses, or to punish transgressors; human security will use economic, political, and perhaps military forces and try to realise human security with the same force and

decisiveness that characterises national security efforts. *Six*, both approaches usefully complement each other.

Human security and human development are interlinked rather than independent and separate. These two concepts adopt the same approach – human-centred approach in which human beings are the goals (rather than the means), are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. Human security is a necessary condition, the foundation for human development and human development contributes to the guarantee and reinforcement of the foundation for human security; without human security, the human development will be ruined and the absence of human development will result in human insecurity. Moreover, the composition of human security has to adjust to reflect the human development level and the sustainability of each human development level depends on its respective composition of human security.

The progresses of human development often directly contribute to or create indirect conditions for strengthening of human security and in turn better guarantee of human security lays down conditions for more secure and sustainable human development. As a result, these concepts are mutually reinforcing and the dimensions of human security are nearly similar to those of human development such as poverty, disease and welfare. Therefore, it can be said that the inclusion of human security has added a new dimension to the concept of human development – the dimension ensuring security and sustainability for the development.

These two concepts however are also significantly different. Human development aims at enhancing all capacities and enlarging people's choices while human security is about protecting the core and vital values from the threats. Human development implies enlarging choices and freedoms, enhancing individual capacity whereas human security is about assuring priority freedoms so that 'people can exercise choices safely and freely' (HDR 1994, page 23) and can be confident that the opportunities they have are protected. To certain extent, the resources allocated to one concept will not be used for the other. Human security is close to the concept of people's vulnerability to risks and threats. Human security corrects the prejudiced understanding of human development which assumes that only the pursuit of enlarging people's choices and enhancing individual capacities is sufficient for development. It refers to the inherent and intangible aspect of the foundation and composition of development – which is the higher development require stronger and appropriate foundation and composition. Ostensibly, that today the foundation and composition are strong does not necessarily mean that they are strong enough to carry the weight of the house that is being built on the foundation and composition. This perspective leads to a more accurate understanding of the threats to human security – which are not any risks than the risks that exceed certain limit.

It can be said that, *firstly*, the theory of human security is a logical and inevitable development of the theory of

security in combination with the theory of human development given the post-Cold War globalization and international integration. The foundations of the human security theory including the concept itself, composition, key dimensions, etc., have gradually been perfected. *Secondly*, the human security theory has been increasingly adopted in practice in many countries in the world, which has significantly contributed to the assurance of national security, social order and safety, ensured the exercise of human rights and contributed to the sustainable human and national development. The multidimensional approach to human security enables a systematic and overall perception of the threats to human beings; analysis and assessment of the nature and level of the threats to effective response and settlement measures. *Thirdly*, the theory of human security in itself also contains certain aspects without high consistency and overlapping dimensions, which deters the establishment of extensive global awareness consensus. However, appropriate approach to human security which suits the specific conditions of each country, region and area will enable the engagement and mobilization of synergy of the international community, states, communities and individuals in dealing with risks and challenging facing international security, national security, public security and human security.

### **3. Human security in Vietnam**

Currently, although non-traditional security and human development have been extensively studied and implemented in Vietnam, human

security remains to be a new area with improper attention.

*Firstly*, Vietnam has been exposed to the theory of human security only recently. The local studies mainly focus on exploring and familiarizing with the concept of human security and the quantity of studies is limited and unsystematic and extensive discussions about the subject matter is insufficient. Awareness of the policy makers is rudimentary and even prejudiced and falsified in many aspects. Some are still concerned about the risk of human security being used by external forces as a pretext for provocation and intervention in the democracy and human rights issues of the country.

*Secondly*, until now, although a considerable number of studies have been conducted regarding the dimensions of human security in Vietnam, the majority use the non-traditional security perspective as their approach with a stress on the roles of the state rather than a generic, multi-disciplinary and multilateral approach which connects and links the studies by each individual dimension in a general theory framework to propose systematic and effective policies and avoid the current overlapping situation. None of the literature has offered an evaluation of the current situation of human security in Vietnam.

*Thirdly*, in dealing with human security challenges in Vietnam in various dimensions, there is a lack of attention in determining the conditions and mechanisms to ensure that human security is aligned with the country's

development level. The interlinked or changeable challenges of the dimensions have not been properly considered.

As the theory of human security has increasingly achieved international consensus and been included in the agendas of the United Nations, major international organizations and fora and steadily become an effective instrument for comprehensive human development, it is time for Vietnam to take serious consideration of human security and be proactive participating in international agendas on human security.

After nearly three decades of Reform, Vietnam moved from an under-developed country to a middle-income country with moderate human development record. However, more and more challenges have arisen with increasing complexity which hurdle sustainable development and threaten human security in Vietnam. The extensive economic development model with intensive use of labour and cheap natural resources has become increasingly inefficient and likely to face crisis. Vietnam's society is experiencing crucial changes in terms of its structure with migration, urbanization, etc. The political system is facing immense challenges regarding its efficiency, effect, corruption, diminishing confidence, etc. The cultural values are being eroded under the influence of the market economy and international integration.

Such changing environment has rapidly transformed the nature, scope and methods to combine challenges and threats to human security and human development. Firstly, it is the speedy

and complicated transformation among the challenges which are overwhelming, long-term with presence of chronic but devastating threats. For example, widespread deforestation may trigger large-scale environmental disaster or illegal land reclamation in a small area may result in nationwide discontent and even disorder. Secondly, it is the combination of material, spiritual, physical and intelligent threats. For example, school dropout among children is related to poverty, family breakup, school violence which may even cause the children to commit suicide. Thirdly, it is the rapid spread of threats to human security among various sectors. For example, loss of land, poverty, environmental destruction, dropout, social violence, etc., has formed a vicious spiral for human beings.

It can be seen that at the macro and micro level, enormous challenges are facing the security and development of Vietnam. At the macro level, it is necessary to restructure the economy, innovate the growth model and create development breakthrough in accordance with the Resolution of the 10th Party Congress while at the micro level, new approaches which are people centred are needed so that "people are both the driving force for and goal of development". Apparently, under such circumstance, the deployment of human security approach – a multidimensional, generic and multi-disciplinary approach – is a matter of great urgency. A profound understanding about human security will enable an overall, systematic perspective on the threats to human security ranging from income



inequality, social violence, and environmental degradation to violation of human rights. The key advantage of this approach is the capacity it offers to handle in a systematic and multidimensional manner the complicated, booming, intertwined and transforming threats in our country. The practical application of the human security theory in Vietnam will be a vital addition to the human development policies which have been successfully implemented over the past years and significantly contribute to the national cause of “a rich people, a strong nation and a democratic, equal and civilized society. Furthermore, thorough understanding of human security enables harmonious settlement of the relationship between human security and national security, between human development and national development, between exercise of human rights and protection of national sovereignty and provides clear distinction between the objective and subjective risks and manipulation of difficult situations for purposes of provocation and sabotage.

Vietnam’s socio-economic development strategy puts people at the heart of development where people are the driving force for and goal of development. It is necessary to adopt human security in the national policy framework and incorporate the concept of human security into the legislative formulation; broaden the strategy for protection of national security to include the human security and people-centred aspects, focus on the actors which are challenging and threatening people’s lives and dignity. This will be a crucial

step forward in building a law-based socialist state of the people, by the people and for the people.

It is also a necessity to clearly define the current situation of human security in Vietnam, specify the causes of insecurity, and define the risks, challenges and threats to Vietnam’s human security. The conditions for assurance of Vietnam’s human security are determined based on 7 components (economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security) and centred on human beings’ fundamental values (material, spiritual, physical and intelligent). It’s required to propose a system of solutions to address challenges, eliminate causes, prevent risks and mitigate the impacts of Vietnam human insecurity.

It is important to facilitate Vietnam’s integration process with respect to security-national defence, such as dynamic participation in international peace-keeping efforts, prevention and control of international crimes, etc. Vietnam should also be active in international cooperation and implementation of international commitments regarding human security through taking part in preparation of and accession to international treaties on human security and be proactive to extensively cooperate with the international community to address the threats to human security. The accession to international treaties on human security will partly facilitate the completion of the legislation system on human security in Vietnam.

Protection of human rights is one of the central elements of guarantee of human security. The fundamental aspects of human rights are affirmed in the 2013 amended and supplemented Constitution. It is significant to codify the provisions on human rights stipulated in the Constitution. International cooperation on human rights should be enhanced. The principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs should be affirmed. The exercise of human rights should be associated with measures for prevention of wars, conflicts, terrorism, poverty, disease, transnational crimes, etc., challenges threatening peace and prosperity of every nation.

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