David Chandler
DOI: 10.1177/0967010608094037

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://sdi.sagepub.com

Published by:
SAGE Publications
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo

Additional services and information for Security Dialogue can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://sdi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://sdi.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
Human Security: The Dog That Didn’t Bark

DAVID CHANDLER*

Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London, UK


Introduction

THE HISTORY OF THE RADICAL CHALLENGE of ‘human security’—from the first usage of the term in the United Nations Development Programme’s 1994 Human Development Report until the present time— is often written in terms that pose the centrality of the struggle between traditional, state-based, interest-based approaches and new, deterritorialized, values-based approaches that focus on individual human needs. For some authors, the struggle is at the heart of how we conceive of international relations and questions of security, and one that, after 9/11 and with the ongoing disaster of Iraq, is more important than ever. This struggle for the heart and soul of global policymaking is often posed as one between two different ‘paradigms’, two entirely different outlooks on the world, one paradigm reproducing current power relations and inequalities and insecurities, the other challenging such a view, recognizing the interconnectedness, interdependence and mutual vulnerabilities of security threats and the need for collective, collaborative, human-centred responses.

This review article suggests that 14 years after human security was first taken up by the United Nations, its integration into the policymaking and policy practices of leading Western states and international institutions has revealed that talk of two different ‘paradigms’ – the radical counter-position of ‘individual’ and ‘state-based’ approaches, or between ‘critical theory’ and...
‘problem-solving’ frameworks – has been much exaggerated. Such radical counter-positioning has been framed not just by the advocates of human security, eager to stress the ‘added value’ of normative people-centred policymaking, but also by the critics of human security, who have stressed that the holistic, ambitious approaches of human security are unworkable and impractical for policymaking.1 Understanding ‘human security’ in these terms makes it difficult to intellectually grasp, first, why the discourse of human security has become so dominant in international policy circles, and, second, why it has had so little impact on policy outcomes. Human security is ‘the dog that didn’t bark’,2 in that its integration into the mainstream of policymaking has reinforced, rather than challenged, existing policy frameworks. It will be argued below that, in the post-Cold War world, human security approaches have been easily – and willingly – integrated into the mainstream because they have sought to (1) exaggerate new post-Cold War security threats, (2) locate these threats in the developing world, and (3) facilitate short-term policymaking in the absence of clear strategic foreign policy visions.

A New Paradigm?

The two books under review are specifically concerned with explaining new human security approaches and assessing the impact of these approaches. Both are valuable contributions to the debate on human security and will certainly become recommended reading for those seeking to understand the policy centrality of human security approaches and the high level of support these approaches have received in the academic community. The first, Human Security: Concepts and Implications, by Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, Director of the Programme for Peace and Human Security at CERI, Sciences-Po, Paris, and Anuradha M. Chenoy, Director of the Programme on Russia and Central Asia at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, presents human security as a radical challenge to the discipline and practices of international relations. One of the immediately apparent, and potentially problematic, aspects of this book is the tendency to conflate the aspirations of normative theorizing with policy practices in reality. For example, the authors state:

With human security [the individual ‘qua person’, rather than ‘qua citizen’] becomes the ultimate actor taken into account. His/her security is the ultimate goal, to which all instruments and political actors are subordinated. Elevating the person as the ultimate

1 For an overview of various positions on the value of human security frameworks, see Burgess & Owen (2004).
end is made possible by defining this new actor in terms of his/her vulnerabilities on the one hand, and his/her capacity to affect change on the other (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 13).

Of course, as we know, in the real world, not every ‘speech act’ (or academic assertion) creates a security discourse. Individuals qua persons’ clearly have different and differing security concerns, making it impossible for them to be the ‘ultimate actor’ to which international institutions are subordinated. Even Amartya Sen (1999: 33–34) recognizes that the ‘human-centred’ approach, highlighted in his seminal book *Development as Freedom*, still involves political processes of collective decisionmaking, choices and policy trade-offs. The assertion that ‘individuals qua persons’ – that is, outside a political process – can suborn power makes little sense in theory, let alone practice. Nevertheless, this view highlights the authors’ radical understanding of the transformative potential of human security approaches.

The authors also highlight the radical rupture that human security is held to pose in its ‘moral challenge to realism’, in its normative ethical focus not merely on ‘what is’ but on ‘what should be’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 20). In their desire to stress their critical credentials, the authors unfortunately spend relatively little time looking at human security in practice, preferring a rather assertive approach to the benefits of the framework. For example, rather than considering why states in the global South have been critical of human security, seeing it as an ‘excuse for intervention’ or for ‘new conditionality for receiving aid’, they assert that Southern critics are mistaken, suggesting that ‘the advent of human security should be seen, instead, as the triumph of the South to put development concerns into global security discussions’, and is, in fact, ‘despite the fears . . . exactly the paradigm needed for the South today’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 35, 37).

After paying lip service to some critiques of human security, the authors conclude that it is a ‘useful and innovative concept that inspires a new worldview and political agenda but also a powerful tool for research and analysis in both existing academic fields as well as for cross-disciplinary potentials’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 58). At the rather abstract level at which this book poses the issues, the framework of human security is alleged to be able to ‘evaluate threats, foresee crises, analyse the cause of discord and propose solutions’, and to provide ‘an effective means for preventing the degradation of people’s well-being and dignity as well as diminishing the consequences of insecurities’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 71). Apparently, all that holds back this new paradigm with potential solutions to pressing social, political and economic problems is the self-interest of ‘powerful states, aspiring regional hegemons, and entrenched elites that are interested in retaining their power within the nation states structures’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 93).

---

3 See Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1997).
The view of two radically separate paradigms allows Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy to bifurcate the world in reality. The world of politics, clashing interests and policy trade-offs is consigned to the realist paradigm of power politics, while the human security paradigm occupies an idealized world in which human security is the magic genie fulfilling Aladdin’s three wishes: freedom from want, freedom from fear, and a life lived in dignity. While the aspirations of the authors may be peerless, there is a danger that critique can become unmediated and disengaged in the tendency to present human security goals in the form of abstract policy prescription. Unfortunately, the book suffers from a surfeit of idealist and ungrounded claims: ‘contemporary analyses of security need to factor in systemic, structural, institutional and operational causes of armed conflict’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 157); ‘sustainable human development strategy would stress ... gendered and equitable development within and between regions, classes and ethnic groups’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 165); statebuilding reconstruction needs ‘to guarantee that the reconstruction process is equitable, efficient and empowering’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 177); ‘the ideal-type human security approach envisages the state to be part of a dynamic and seamless policy network with non-state actors, including NGOs and civil society, international and regional organizations as well as individuals and communities’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 183); ‘the aim is in fact to integrate the different phases of relief, reconstruction, development and prevention to iron out transition problems, eliminate contradictions and minimize negative externalities’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 229); ‘Seamless development entails consultation and coordination of all levels and sectors. It calls for sensitive, well-planned action safeguarding against risks of politicization or manipulation by interest groups’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 230); ‘For a holistic human security approach, the planning, budgeting and monitoring of different interventions across sectors and levels should be integrated’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 234).

Despite the great play of difference made between the approach of human security and traditional security frameworks, the irony is that it is very difficult to consistently maintain that there is a struggle between fundamentally differing approaches. Even Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2007: 21) find themselves slipping into the argument that ‘securing people is not just an ethical imperative, it is the best strategy to secure the state and the international system’. The radical challenge at some points appears to completely collapse: ‘thus human security transforms, rather than replaces the national security discourse and is not an alternative to state security’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 167). Occasionally, these contradictions come to the forefront: for example, when the authors assert that human security ‘would be best divorced from the notion of “responsibility to protect’”(R2P) – which legitimizes Western militarism and downplays economic and social needs (Tadjbakhsh

There is nothing wrong with normative theorizing, but, as Hedley Bull (1995: 266) sharply pointed out in his critique of Richard Falk, there is a great danger ‘in the confusion of description and prescription’. I think that this warning might usefully be taken on board by the authors, who at times seem to be more concerned with advocacy than with analysis of the actual operation of human security either at the level of ideas or that of practice. This comes through in their conclusion:

The main challenge is not to try to convince state authorities to be moral, even though their self-interest is not at stake, but to change the way they think and make them realize that problems cross borders in multiple ways. Human security threats are global in scope, which is why governments around the world ought to understand that it is in their, and in everybody’s interest, to achieve it. (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 207)

It would appear, then, that these human security advocates want to have their cake and to eat it. They want to argue, on the one hand, that human security is a radical, emancipatory paradigm shift and, on the other, that it is less an ethical, normative challenge to realist calculations of self-interest than an adaptation of realist understandings to a more globalized and interdependent world. It is often not clear in human security advocacy – where the interdependence of threats and responses is crucial to the argument – whether the merging of ethical imperatives with security and self-interest is merely a tactical ploy or one based on the facts or just rhetorical wishful thinking. The openly admitted lack of clear causal understandings of these interconnections serves to keep the question off the agenda (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 243). Nevertheless, the fact that human security advocates do not counterpose interests in a direct political challenge to power, but rather seek to conflate ethical and security prerogatives, would suggest that this approach could be easily co-opted by political elites.

Mainstreaming Human Security

The second book under consideration, *A Decade of Human Security*, edited by Sandra MacLean, David Black and Tim Shaw, casts a more nuanced light on the development of the human security agenda. The 16 chapters were first presented at a workshop on the theme, organized by the editors of the collection, at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, in 2005. Where many edited collections can be faulted for a lack of analytical depth and cohesion around a theme, this one stands up as at least a partial exception to the rule, with around half of the chapters engaging in useful analytical evaluations of the development and mainstreaming of human security approaches.
The editorial introduction, along with one or two other chapters, nods towards the ‘clash of paradigms’ approach – counterposing traditional realpolitik unilateralism ‘represented by US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq’ (Shaw, 2006: 102) with the new human security-driven multilateralisms of state and non-state actor collaboration, exemplified in the Ottawa Convention on landmines, the Kimberley Process on conflict diamonds, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Shaw, MacLean & Black, 2006: 8–9) – arguing that new threats, especially from failed states, necessitate human security approaches to analysing and addressing the problems. However, many of the chapters take a much more critical and engaged approach to understanding the attraction of human security for international actors.

The chapter by Robert Muggah and Keith Krause is one of the strongest, informed by what the authors see as the weakness of ‘constructivist/critical International Relations’ – the tendency to ‘treat discourses as significant themselves, without examining the link to actual practices’ (Muggah & Krause, 2006: 115, n. 10). In an attempt to consider the relationship between discourse and practice, Muggah and Krause seek to examine the differences between pre- and post-human security interventions, comparing and critically examining similar UN missions in Haiti – UNMIH (1993–95), where there is no human security discursive framework, and MINUSTAH (2003–05), shaped by the human security agenda – and concluding that this shift in ‘paradigms’ has not necessarily translated into radically new practical strategies, much less positive outcomes in situ (Muggah & Krause, 2006: 122).

In an excellent brief study of the European Union’s use of the human security approach with regard to intervention in Africa, Rory Keane (2006: 42) makes the point that it is ‘difficult to ascertain whether the EU looks at sub-Saharan Africa through a realist post-colonial lens or a human security lens’. He argues that ‘EU foreign policy-making appears as a cocktail of realist-driven assumptions, together with broader human security objectives’ (Keane, 2006: 43). Referring to the work of Robert Cooper (policy adviser to former British prime minister Tony Blair, as well as to EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana), particularly Cooper’s (2003) arguments about ‘enlightened self-interest’ in *Breaking of Nations*, Keane (2006: 46) argues that the EU’s Security Strategy ‘can be endorsed by a realist practitioner or a human security practitioner, as the line between intervention based on peace and development versus intervention based on regime change becomes ever murkier’. He also makes the point that it is difficult to say what motivations are selfless or selfish: realist theorists could argue for or against any self-interest, for example, in the Tony Blair approach of spouting human security rhetoric and a ‘feel-good’ human security doctrine about Africa rather than making ‘hard choices’ and stump up ‘hard cash to protect and make safe EU citizens’ (Keane, 2006: 46–47). What seems like human security – for
example, the rhetoric about African ‘local ownership and capacity-building’ and ‘home-grown solutions’ – might be realist self-interest about not over-committing and evading policy responsibilities (Keane, 2006: 47–48).

Catherine Schittecatte’s (2006: 130) interesting study highlights how, regardless of the normative debate on ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ understandings of the concept of human security, the areas that have gained more attention and resources, and increasingly included leading roles for non-state actors, have been those that ‘reflect ongoing priorities of the most powerful members and organisations of the international community’. Most progress has been made in the ‘freedom from fear’ area, with the revival of ideas of ‘just war’ intervention, while there has been little interest in mainstreaming ‘freedom from want’ approaches that go beyond palliative measures to ‘challenge the philosophy of market liberalism’ (Schittecatte, 2006: 132). Colleen O’Manique’s critical feminist perspective on the securitization of the HIV/AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa reinforces the point. O’Manique (2006: 165) argues that the palliative attempts to manage the ‘health crisis’ do nothing to challenge the new governance frameworks of partnership and poverty reduction that reinforce and institutionalize global economic inequalities of health. She argues that the ‘human security’ agenda around HIV/AIDS is shaped by the US national security agenda, which sees the spread of HIV/AIDS as a ‘direct security threat to US national and geopolitical interests’ (O’Manique, 2006: 170).

Antonio Franceschet explains that human security approaches have facilitated the extension of international law, and that there are inherent dangers in the marriage of human security ethics and international legalism, in that both approaches ‘can mask the tough political and ethical dilemmas of world politics’ in their assumptions about the impartiality of the operation of norms, rules and law (Franceschet, 2006: 33). Franceschet suggests that human security concerns, which are ‘interventionist by nature’, are ‘becoming co-opted by forces that favour the entrenchment of an unequal, non-universal global legal order’, where self-selected liberal states can ‘impose, through force, their unilateral moral judgements onto weaker states’. In noting that, historically, global legalism has been characterized by great-power exceptionalism, he argues that the extension of human security concerns seems less likely to challenge existing hierarchies of power than to institutionalize them.

Several of the contributors forward interesting pieces on the development of Canada’s approach to human security, with Canada being one of the leading players behind many human security ‘successes’, such as the Ottawa Convention, the ICC and the Kimberley Process, as well as a sponsor of R2P. David Black argues that even some conservative Canadian critics supported the mainstreaming of human security approaches on the basis that this could rescue ‘Canadian defence policy from military irrelevance and strategic sterility’, not just on the basis of providing a ‘compelling strategic rationale
for upgrading the Canadian armed forces’ but also because ‘the human security agenda has the realpolitik virtue of being fundamentally discretionary: policy-makers can “pick and choose” which human security causes they wish to pursue’ (Black, 2006: 59). He also notes that the focus on ‘freedom from fear’ human rights issues robbed the concept of its transformative potential, by, first, neglecting a deeper analysis of structural inequalities and Canada’s own complicity in these, and, second, discursively constructing a threat emanating from the global South, making human security a ‘conservative, problem-solving approach’ augmenting hegemonic interests rather than challenging them (Black, 2006: 61).

George MacLean (2006: 69) takes issue with the view of human security as a paradigm shift, arguing that this was ‘a frantic attempt to imprint Canada’s foreign policy in a fresh and innovative way’, making the ‘realist’ point that activist, multilateralist policymaking is clearly in the self-interest of middle powers, increasing their decisionmaking power, along with their authority and influence. Heather Smith (2006: 73) follows up this critique, suggesting that, beyond ‘the smoke and mirrors’, human security paints a similar divisive picture of the world as traditional frameworks. She argues that human security frameworks can easily be used to paint a global picture of ‘instability and anxiety’, where the more ‘holistic’ the picture of interconnected threats the more national security is prioritized in traditional ways with ‘fears about mounting disorder in the politically turbulent and economically polarized second and third worlds’ (Smith, 2006: 77, 80). Elizabeth Blackwood (2006: 89) argues that where human security approaches might have undermined Canadian business interests, such as oil-producing contracts with the government of Sudan, the government choose a policy of ‘constructive engagement’, effectively putting Canadian commercial interests first.

What becomes clear from reading many of the studies provided by this collection is that the alleged policy gulf, or ‘paradigm clash’, between those advocating traditional state-based national interests and those advocating ethical, emancipatory, people-centred approaches is a diversion from the academic and political need to understand why human security approaches have been so rapidly mainstreamed in the post-Cold War era, along with the discursive practices that flow from this.

**Three Reasons Why the Human Security Dog Didn’t Bark**

From reading these two comprehensive studies of human security – one stressing the concepts and their implications, the other focusing on the prac-

---

4 See also Kagan (2003).
tice of integrating these concepts into multilateral forms of global governance – it is possible to suggest three sets of reasons for the ease with which human security has been integrated into mainstream security agendas:

First, the exaggeration of new post-Cold War security threats. It is clear that political elites and radical advocates of human security approaches both share a normative desire to exaggerate the existence of threats. It is here that human security advocates come into their own, outdoing any ‘dodgy dossiers’ about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction with their assertions that, in our globalized world, everything is interconnected and interdependent, and that therefore ‘dysfunctionality in one sphere is structurally and sequentially expressed in other subsystems and leads to a vicious circle of causes and effects’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 16–17). Allegedly, we are approaching a ‘tipping-point’ for Armageddon, where ‘drugs, disease, terrorism, pollution, poverty and environmental problems’ are ‘mutually reinforcing’ (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 17). In the absence of traditional enemies, human security approaches fill the gap with the securitization of every issue from health, to the economy, to the environment.

Second, the location of new security threats in the developing world. The two central planks of the human security framework, those of ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, clearly locate the threats to human security in the developing world. The sharpened focus of the threat stemming from non-Western states can be seen in the human security concerns around the dangers posed by the ‘failed state’ and the need for policy to be framed in terms of the security–development ‘nexus’ – that is, the focus on the interplay between human rights, poverty-reduction, good governance and state capacity-building. As the editors of A Decade of Human Security argue:

in a ‘new world’ of some 200 states, many regimes – probably between a quarter and a third – are poor and weak and cannot contain threats from rich and strong militias and mafias. Such ‘failing’ or ‘failed’ states are not aberrations, but rather continuing features of global inequalities. They are not limited to ‘Africa’ but are present in all regions, especially ‘new’ post-Soviet ones like Central Asia and Central Europe, and even the South Pacific. (Shaw, MacLean & Black, 2006: 17)

The problematization of the non-Western state, facilitated by the human security framework, is as central to security discourses shaped by the unilateral ‘realist’ ‘war on terror’ as it is to the multilateral ‘critical’ discourses of poverty-reduction, sustainable development and climate change adaptation. It seems that ‘realists’ have no disagreement with the ‘human security’ argument that the world’s poorest countries now pose the biggest security threat to the West.

Third, the facilitation of short-term policymaking in the absence of clear strategic foreign policy visions. In the absence of the geostrategic Cold War order and the domestic framework of the politics of left and right, leading Western states and international institutions have found it difficult to draw up long-
term strategic visions of the future. Human security approaches have assisted in the process of rationalizing these difficulties and legitimating the lack of clear strategy. Human security advocates suggest that, first, the interdependence of threats means that ‘threats should not be prioritised’; second, that ‘policy-making is not a vertical process but a networked, flexible and horizontal coalition that needs a complex paradigm’; and, third, that the prioritization of human security goals and outcomes ‘may be a futile exercise’, as the interdependence of threats means that work in one area may achieve little success if the intervention is not comprehensive and holistic enough to tackle all the relevant factors (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 17). Human security approaches therefore enable governments and policymakers to opt out of taking responsibility for foreign policy, encouraging a shift from strategic thinking to sound bites and ad hoc policymaking. What may appear to some critics of human security as a useless ‘shopping list of threats’ (Kraus, 2004) is, in fact, the mainstay of both national and international security agendas, where governments lack strategic priorities. Multilateralism and the integration of non-state actors in policymaking is also a reflection of governments’ increasing unwillingness to take accountability for policymaking and implementation. Furthermore, human security approaches argue that causal relationships are impossible in an interconnected world, making it much easier for governments to evade responsibility by seeking praise for their ‘good intentions’ rather than being held to account for the policy consequences of their actions.

Conclusion

Rather than understanding international relations as the struggle between two fundamentally different paradigms – one based on states, interests and problem-solving, the other based on individuals, values and emancipatory theory – it may be better to see security policy, and foreign policymaking in general, as beset by an absence of paradigms or clear frameworks of operation. The attraction of human security approaches would appear to be that they, on the one hand, reflect this confusion, portraying the external world as a complex and ever more threatening environment, and, on the other hand, legitimize and institutionalize the lack of policymaking capacity, encouraging the shedding of policy responsibility and viewing the world as less open to strategic intervention.

5 See, for example, Chandler & Heins (2007); Chandler (2007a).
* David Chandler is Professor of International Relations at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London, and editor of the Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding. His personal website can be found at http://www.davidchandler.org.

References


