



## 11 Fostering Human Security

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*“Peace, to have meaning for many who have known only suffering in both peace and war, must be translated into bread or rice, shelter, health, and education, as well as freedom and human dignity – a steadily better life.”*

Ralph J. Bunche

Security, in the literal sense of the word, means a state free from care (lat. *se cura*). Since the first nation-states emerged in the mid-16th century up until the end of World War II, security was commonly understood as the primary concern of states to maintain external sovereignty and to avert any threats from the outside, particularly military threats from other states. This understanding has changed fundamentally in recent decades.

**HUMAN SECURITY** | a comprehensive, people-centred and prevention-oriented concept that includes protection from threats in the area of economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.

### **The erosion of the traditional understanding of security**

There are countless examples throughout history where seeking “security” has served to justify wars and raids, conquering colonies and oppressing peoples. Security policy was a zero-sum game played according to the law of the strongest, with security of the powerful being based on the insecurity of the less powerful. This narrow understanding of security – sovereignty and protection of states – was called into question when humankind entered the nuclear age.

Since any use of nuclear weapons harbours the risk of uncontrollable devastation, it was the interdependence of security, between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, which became a political issue. A deep understanding of this new dimension of threat, and of the responsibility of social and natural scientists to work together to find ways of better dealing with conflict than weaponised security, was an important impulse for the founding of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies in the 1970s.

Growing awareness of nuclear interdependence has also helped to carve out a growing consciousness that security is no longer just a military issue or privilege only of states. Rather, structural interdependences may also exist because of other – non-military – risks or threats to physical existence and between unequally powerful social actors in conflict, such as between dysfunctional governments and an organised opposition in fragile states. Structural interdependence and power asymmetries may thus become a strong driver of interests in → Conflict Transformation.

### A broader concept of security

In the 1970s and 1980s, an originally small-scale expert debate reached public attention when it considered non-military “global risks” such as climate change, resource scarcity, under-development and modern epidemics to be triggers for armed conflict, posing a threat to the security of states and peoples that is almost equal to war. The hitherto undisputed traditional security focus on military threats became contested. As the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) stated in 1987:

*“Conflicts may arise not only because of political and military threats to national sovereignty; they may derive also from environmental degradation and the pre-emption of development options. ... Action to reduce environmental threats to security requires a redefinition of priorities, nationally and globally. Such a redefinition could evolve through the widespread acceptance of broader forms of security assessment and embrace military, political, environmental, and other sources of conflict.”*

A security policy that cares about non-military risks and threats needs different tools and approaches than military defence. Moreover, risks which have a global scope by nature can hardly be mitigated, let alone resolved, by nation-state-based policies. International, and in most cases transnational, collaboration is required. Yet the political dominance of traditional security thinking has remained an obstacle to the constructive enlargement of security perspectives. Negotiations on global risks such as climate change, water scarcity and threats to biodiversity demonstrate both a growing sense of the need for global cooperation and the difficulty of nation-states in reaching compromise over competing interests.

In their effort to maintain the upper hand, the more powerful states in particular tend to “securitise” their policies, i.e. to defend their own interests rather than to seek fair arrangements, as

the current migration regime of the European Union illustrates. The issue area of preventing violent extremism shows similar ill effects of “securitisation”, as one of our most recent Berghof Handbook Dialogues made clear. Pursuing security policy at the cost of others, however, will sooner or later turn interdependence into more insecurity for all.

### **From enlarged security to human security**

The worldwide cascade of radical political and societal changes after the end of the Cold War influenced the manner in which security concepts were viewed across the globe. The political and social changes, in combination with the impact of global risks, affected everyone’s lives. Against this background, the 1994 Annual Report of the United Nations Development Programme coined the term “human security”, defined as the freedom from fear (i.e. protection from violence) and the freedom from want (i.e. a more holistic approach to security that includes protection from hunger, diseases and natural disasters) for each individual.

Human security was designed as a comprehensive, people-centred and prevention-oriented concept that includes protection from threats in the area of economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. The revolutionary aspect was not only that it reconfigured the traditional security paradigm and advocated a holistic concept that combined security and development policy as mutually reinforcing; it also linked the idea of human security to the responsibility of states to provide the necessary conditions.

Japan and Canada were among the first states to adopt the concept of human security in their national policies. Canada focused mainly on protection from a variety of threats, whereas Japan adopted a mix reflected in the UN debates, with a stronger focus on education, health and the environment to “change lifestyles” in order to fulfil every human’s potential.

Security Concepts	
	Traditional Security
Purpose	Protection of states against military threats from other states
Level of Actors	States
Instruments and Approaches	Defence policy; alliances of states; codification and enforcement of international and humanitarian law

Table 2, source: Berghof Foundation

For the first time, the sovereignty of states to act domestically as they see fit was challenged in cases where governments flagrantly disregarded universal human rights and freedoms. The concept of the “responsibility to protect” was developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001 and it pushed the issue further, by stating that governments should not be allowed to threaten their own citizens and if found to be doing so should be duly sanctioned with a mandate from the international community.

Of course, the legitimacy and the accountability of states to act under the auspices of responsibility to protect remain a matter of concern, due to the possible inclination of major powers to in-

Comprehensive Security	Human Security
Protection of states and their societies against military and non-military (non-traditional) threats and risks	Protection of all human beings from being threatened, regardless of the origin of threats (freedom from fear and freedom from want)
States	States, non-governmental organisations, social groups, individuals
Collaborative and integrative strategies for all policy areas, including military and civilian elements; securitisation of policies	Dominance of civilian strategies to provide living conditions in peace, dignity, prosperity for everyone

tervene for selfish reasons under the banner of “responsibility”. But the new interpretation of human security and the protection of populations against arbitrary state behaviour are important positive reference points for conflict transformation.

If states are held accountable for guaranteeing human security – and since sustainable development and just peace are intrinsic prerequisites for human security, and vice versa – the chances increase of making social and political relationship patterns more peaceful. The concept of human security addresses the underlying causes of violent conflict, which are of primary concern for conflict transformation, and directs attention to the sustained prevention of violence. Conversely, conflict transfor-

mation is a promising approach to support the goal of human security because it aims to transform the security sector and others and to change patterns of security behaviour, contributing to turning structural and inter-personal conflicts into constructive relationships.

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