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Human security in the context of unconventional security threats. A theoretical approach

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of human security in the context of the emergence of a suite of unconventional threats that undermine traditional state-centered security paradigms. Drawing on document analysis, the article redefines security as individual-oriented, emphasising the interdependence between fundamental rights, human development, and global stability. It addresses the complex dimensions of human security – economic, food, health, environmental, ecological, personal, community and political – and the principles that underpin it, including the legitimacy of authorities, multilateralism and a focus on prevention and early intervention. This article highlights the shift from exclusively military to multidimensional security, in which the state shares responsibility with international organizations, NGOs and civil society. The importance of the theme lies in its ability to respond to global challenges such as climate change, migration and pandemics, reaffirming the imperative of transnational cooperation to protect the dignity and well-being of individuals.

Keywords:
security; human security; individual; threats; responsibility to protect (R2P); international community.

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"Systems are only as strong as their weakest link, creating a zommon and mutual vulnerability between all actors" - Jorge Nef

In one of his seminal writings on the theory of international society, "The Anarchical Society", published in 1977, the renowned Australian professor Hedley Bull suggested that the world order is "*fundamental and primordial [...] because the ultimate elements of the great society of mankind are not states [....] but individuals*" and *"the question of a world order arises irrespective of the political or social structure of the globe*" because *"if international order really has value, it is only because it is useful for achieving order in human society as a whole*" (Griffiths 2003, 241), thus intuiting the broad process of fundamentally reconceptualizing the meaning of the concept of security and the elements to which security should be provided.

The redefinition of security has two main sources. First of all, we are talking about a new field of international relations, which gained ground during the 1980s, namely international political economy (IPE), whose literature attempted to provide logical explanations for the turbulence generated by the globalization process. Secondly, there was a growing involvement of the social sciences in the field of security studies, attempting to provide explanations for hitherto quite irrelevant issues such as identity, ethnicity, religion, poverty, terrorism, organized crime, environmental issues, etc. The predominantly military content of security studies during the Cold War period established a clear distinction between external and internal security, which were always analyzed as distinct areas of national security. The end of the Cold War, the new literature bringing to the fore the process of globalization, plus the new information technology, which has reduced the limitations imposed by space and time on the movement of capital, services, ideas, and labour, have given rise to a transnational process that is radically changing the environment and the traditional agenda of security studies. Thus, the military aspects have been relatively blurred by political, economic, societal, and environmental aspects, while the international dimension of crises has become regionalised. Moreover, security has ceased to be the exclusive prerogative of the state, although it remains its main task. In this sense, the culture of security has become increasingly assimilated by civil society, with the security agenda being written, in practice, in the public arena. Thus, during the 1990s, security had become a "*public emergency register of the most pressing political, military, economic, societal, environmental issues*" (Sava 2005, 13-14; 16).

In this "*register*" the questions, and especially the answers, were not those dealt with by security in its traditional version because it (A/N security) was seen as the main "*Westphalian prerogative of the nation*" contracted in sovereign states that, internally, had concluded "*a Hobbesian bargain with subjects, who would have ceded certain rights in exchange for the protection of Leviathan against war*", a vision that no longer fully reflected the tangible realities of the international

community. Moreover, what this "*bargain*" failed to foresee was the situation in which the state[1] is *unable* or *unwilling* to protect its citizens in the face of unconventional threats consisting of serious human rights violations practiced by the state itself, or underdevelopment, which the state does nothing to alleviate/remove, or any other unconventional threats where the state "*no longer claims that its use of force is legitimate*" (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 4). Against this backdrop of the conceptual inconsistencies of traditional security in the context of the occurrence of a series of unconventional threats to it (A/N security), which have revealed the weaknesses and limitations of traditionalist paradigms, objectified by the inability of the state to cope with these threats, have disrupted the stability of global security and have highlighted the need to rethink the concept of security.

[1] As the supreme, sovereign and legislative power in a given territory, depositary of the monopoly on legitimate violence.

The main *purpose* of the article is to theoretically assess the concept of human security, with the specific aim of understanding the mechanisms and valences that define human security, as well as to identify and explain the fundamental principles underlying it.

In order to achieve this aim, the article has the following *objectives*: (1) to define and conceptualize human security, with a focus on clarifying the different interpretations of the concept and identifying its constituent elements; (2) to define the key principles underlying human security; and (3) to identify the differences and particularities between traditional, state-centric and human security, as well as to identify the main approaches and debates on the latter. At the same time, in order to achieve the proposed goal, we aim to answer the following *research questions*: Whose security and by whom? Security from which threats?
From the *methodological* point of view, the present article is a mark of qualitative studies, the main method of documentation and substantiation of the research being based on document analysis.

From traditional security to human security

The discussion in this chapter starts from the rather controversial idea that security is a *fundamentally contested concept*. A proponent of critical security studies, W.B. Gallie[2] was the first to describe security as a "fundamentally contested concept" in a 1956 paper. What the author meant to express was that security, as a fundamentally contested concept, "*differs [...] so widely on a value scale that they could never agree on what it means*" (Robinson 2010, 46-47). Therefore, in the spirit instilled by the Scottish political scientist, sociologist and philosopher, W.B. Gallie, this chapter attempts to capture an important element, often omitted by researchers in the field, namely that "*the issue of security is, first and foremost, a matter of perception*" (Miroiu 2006, 182).

[2] Walter Bryce Gallie was a Scottish sociologist, political scientist and philosopher. His 1956 paper in which the "fundamentally contested concept" formula appears is entitled "Essentially Contested Concepts", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, vol. 56, 1956, pp.167-198.

In this sense, we can analyse the transition from traditionalism to human security by using two concepts that have come into use fairly recently, namely *negative security*, which is mainly valid for the traditionalist symbolism of security, and *positive security*, which is in favour of security as an intersubjective process. Thus, the symbolism of security understood through the prism of negative security aims at the fact that the most important and, in fact, the only actor of security is the state, which "*counteracts security threats by external means, namely organized violence, with recourse to armed force as its most eloquent expression*". In this key, state security becomes a security of survival (Dumitrescu 2020, 14-15).

The need to transition towards human security can be understood through the prism of positive security, a concept that suggests that security practices must generate trust and build capabilities, which is why the characteristic emotions of this type of security are safety and stability, with practices being mainly nonviolent. Positive security emphasizes the concept of *'everyday security'*, understood as the institutional capacity of the state to generate predictability for the ordinary citizen on a routine basis. Routinely conveyed, security is thought to become the hallmark of the "multiple actor", in the sense that security, as a process, is sustained not only by the state and its formal institutions, but also by the informal institutions of the state, namely family networks, kinship networks, professional networks and so on. Thus, like Arnold Wolfers, the positive security view argues that security, as an intersubjective process, "*represents a permanent negotiation between the state and the individual, especially with regard to the meanings attributed to security threats*" (Dumitrescu 2020, 14-15).

Against this backdrop, the emergence of human security was conditioned on the one hand by the need to redefine it (A/N security) as a "*subjective experience at the micro level*", and on the other hand, by the new post-Cold War realities, which problematized the relationship between nations and state, which had been considered until then an irreducible element of global politics.
The need to redefine security as a subjective experience at the micro level was simplistic, but well characterized by the Iranian-American researcher Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh who stated that:

> "*'Security' for a farmer growing poppies in Badakhshan or Helmand was the livelihood he gained from selling his crops to a middleman, but this form of security was very different from the 'security' interests of recipient states concerned about their drug addicts and about the terror-crime-drug-mafia networks. For a school teacher in Jalalabad, security was the fact that he could properly clothe and educate his children and invest in the construction of his house, confident that the little he had today would not be taken away from him tomorrow. His security was quite a different matter from that of the coalition troops in Paktika, fearful of a suicide attack or a renewal of insurgency by the Taliban or Al Qaeda*" (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 4).

As for the problematization of the nation-state relationship, this has been accentuated by the new post-Cold War realities. Thus, during the 1990s and early 2000s, 57 major armed conflicts took place in 45 states, of which only 4 conflicts[3] could be categorized as conventional inter-state conflicts. Thus, the exponential increase in the number of civil wars and intra-state conflicts, resulting in significant loss of life (e.g. through ethnic cleansing) and massive displacement of people putting pressure on various states, demonstrated that "*traditional security approaches could not respond to these problems, as they were not sufficiently sensitive to a range of factors such as cultural, ethnic or religious differences*". Moreover, unconventional threats began to be predominantly directed against society, thus undermining the state's ability to govern and manage threats as a unit (Leucea 2012, 99-100).

[3] The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the subsequent international intervention (August 2, 1990); the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998-2000); the conflict between India and Pakistan (1999) and the US-led intervention in Iraq (2003-2011).

Human security: emergence and conceptualization

The idea of a security that considers the *individual* as the object of reference of security studies (*whose security?*) stems from the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program.

The concept of human security *challenges the state-centric security narrative by cultivating an emphasis on the individual as the referent object of security* (Leucea 2012, 105). In this sense, human security is primarily concerned with the "*security of individuals and communities rather than the security of states and combines human rights and human development*" (Kaldor 2010, 214).

The 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program is considered to be the first official document to introduce the term human security as a universal, people-centred framework of analysis with *seven (7) interrelated components*, which together lay the conceptual foundation for human security:

- economic security – ensuring a secure basic income;
- food security – physical and economic access to food;
- health security – ensuring a minimum level of protection against disease and infection;
- environmental security – ensuring access to safe drinking water, clean air, and an undamaged land system;
- personal security – protection against physical violence and threats;
- community security – ensuring the security of cultural identity; and
- political security – ensuring protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms (WHO 2002, 2).

Furthermore, the baseline report states *four (4) essential characteristics of human security*: (1) it is a universal concern; (2) its components are

interdependent/interconnected; (3) human security is better ensured through early prevention than late intervention; and (4) it is people-centred (Caballero-Anthony 2002, 23).

As *guiding principles*, human security involves:

- *supremacy of human rights* – as the main difference between human security and traditional, state-centred approaches. In this sense, human security states that fundamental rights, such as the right to life, to a home or the right to freedom of expression must be respected and protected even during conflicts.
- *legitimate political authority* – as the main condition for achieving human security. Thus, human security depends on the existence of institutions/authorities vested with legitimacy and public trust, as well as with a certain capacity to assert themselves. Legitimate institutions/authorities here do not necessarily refer to the state but may include local or regional public authorities or international political arrangements such as protectorates or transitional administrations.
- *multilateralism* – as a principle intricately linked to *legitimacy*, an aspect that distinguishes the human security approach from that of neo-colonialism. Seen from a human security perspective, *multilateralism implies*: (1) a commitment to act together with international institutions and through the procedures of multinational institutions; (2) a commitment to creating common rules and norms, solving problems through regulation and cooperation, and ensuring that rules are enforced; and (3) the inclusion of coordination rather than duplication and rivalry, as an effective approach to human security requires coordination between intelligence, foreign policy, economic exchange policy, development policy and security policy initiatives.
- *the 'bottom-up' approach* – as a guiding principle for decision-making on the type of security and development policies to be adopted. Thus, these policies should be made with an exclusive focus on the most basic needs identified by people affected by violence and insecurity, in which communication, consultation and dialogue are indispensable tools for security and development;
- *regional focus* – as opposed to national focus, given that non-conventional threats are often transnational, materializing through refugees and displaced persons, minorities living in different states, criminal and extremist networks, or other phenomena that transcend the capacity of a single state to manage them (Kaldor 2010, 217-223).

Since the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program, the concept of human security seems to have developed in *two main directions*.

The first was the approach used by the Canadian government, the direction of which was reflected in the Human Security Report published in 2005, which emerged amid

the failure of the international community to combat war crimes, genocide and purge, in which sense the concept of the "*responsibility to protect*" (R2P) was brought into the discussion, which focuses on three main responsibilities: (1) to prevent; (2) to react; and (3) to rebuild (Dungaciu 2019, 529-531). The R2P principle is that, *a state's sovereignty is no longer absolute, but is directly conditioned by the fact that if the state is unable or unwilling to provide its population with basic rights, the international community finds itself obliged to override the sovereignty of the state in question in order to ensure the security of its citizens* (Fukuda-Parr and Messineo 2012, 10). The report also makes a number of important points:

- it redefines the meaning of sovereignty to include a dual responsibility of the state: (1) in external affairs, where the state is responsible to respect the sovereignty of other states, and (2) in internal affairs, where the state is responsible to respect the dignity and fundamental rights of all its citizens;
- it redefines interventions as "*actions taken against a state or a leader, with or without its consent, for purposes defined as humanitarian or protective*". These would include both military intervention and a range of *soft power* alternatives, such as economic sanctions and criminal prosecutions, used mainly as measures to prevent the need for military action. However, the Report stated *six (6) criteria that had to be met for military intervention to be justified*: (1) obtaining authority from the UN Security Council to intervene; (2) the existence of a situation that could lead to significant loss of life or large-scale ethnic cleansing; (3) the existence of the need to stop or avoid massive human suffering; (4) the use of military force as a last resort; (5) the use of appropriate methods/proportionate to the threat; (6) the existence of reasonable prospects for success of the intervention;
- it includes clarifications on the post-intervention policy, which should ensure a return to peace and order, (re-)establishment of justice, reconciliation, and local development. At the same time, the report stipulates the need to set a time limit within which post-intervention policies should be stopped in order to limit the duration of the international community's intervention in the internal affairs of other states (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 14-15).

The second direction was evidenced by the emergence of two documents that attempted to clarify the threats to human security and the measures that the international community should take in this regard. The two documents were: (1) the UN High-Level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change, entitled "*A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*" (2004) and (2) the reform agenda proposed by Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary-General, in "*In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*" (2005).

Thus, the Report "*A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*" advanced the cause of human security by establishing a general framework for collective programs to address unconventional threats, which the group shared into six (6) main categories: (1) economic and social threats, such as poverty and deadly infectious

diseases; (2) inter-state conflicts and rivalries; (3) internal violence, including civil war, state collapse and genocide; (4) nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; (5) terrorism; and (6) transnational organized crime. Beyond recognizing these threats, the report also clarified the interlinkages between them, arguing that large-scale development is indispensable for the establishment of the new collective security, which would require a higher degree of intergovernmental cooperation, for which national, regional actors and civil society are a defining element.

The UN High-Level Panel also presented a package of reforms that Kofi Annan proposed in his report "*In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*", aimed at restoring the UN's credibility and relevance on collective security issues. Although Kofi Annan's report did not specifically use the term human security, it clearly emphasized "the *links between human rights, development and security as three mutually reinforcing imperatives*". Alluding to the widespread concern about the conditions created when states fail to provide for the basic needs of their citizens, the report noted that these threats "*could undermine not only human survival but also the state as the basic unit of the international system*" (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 12-13).

Whose security and by whom? Security from what threats?

As for the referent of the concept of human security (Whose security?), this is clear from the issues outlined above. *Whose security? The security of the individual* as a basic unit that cannot be broken down is the ultimate reality of social life.

Security by whom? We believe that the responsibility for providing human security lies primarily with the *states*. When states are unable or unwilling to take "responsibility" for their own sovereignty, other actors have, if not an obligation, then at least a "moral responsibility" to act. Thus, in addition to state actors, actors that can play an important role in ensuring human security are: (1) *non-governmental organizations (NGOs)*, whose activities extend beyond the borders of a single state, they can be both service providers, providing humanitarian assistance, monitoring human rights and offering conflict mediation services and can also exert pressure on governments and international organizations; (2) *social movements*, representing groups that are often involved in various forms of protest, they tend to be local in character, although they can also establish cross-border coalitions; (3) *networks*, which represent "loosely articulated coalitions between NGOs and social movements, often using the opportunities offered by the internet to directly publicize the groups' arguments"; (4) *think tanks and commissions*, which are often situated close to elites and primarily use the power of words, shaping specific proposals and policies; and (5) *international mass-media* (radio, television, print and web), which often plays an important role in drawing attention to crises in distant places, being "a tool, an expression of public debate rather than an independent actor" (Kaldor 2010, 34-51).

Moreover, by emphasizing the interconnectedness of unconventional security threats and giving moral priority to the security of individuals, the human security paradigm lays the foundation for a *culture of responsibility* in the sense that, in order to ensure the survival, livelihood and dignity of the population, those in a position of power must submit to new responsibilities:

- first, that of the state, for if sovereignty once meant the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence and the defence of national territory from external threats, *now the state must integrate and submit to the idea of the responsibility to protect its citizens*.
- secondly, the concept of human security requires an increasing recognition of the *role of the people in ensuring their own security*, given that it is the complementary duty and response of the people that will enable the state to assume its true role and gain the legitimacy it needs to achieve that goal. Moreover, as I stated at the beginning of the article, "*security is a public good that involves subjective feelings* and requires people to make demands and requests and to be prepared to make effective use of what they are given", and they in turn have a responsibility to act for the common good at the expense of self-interest.
- third, the concept of human security also holds the international community responsible for fulfilling its responsibility to protect in the event that the state actor is unable or unwilling to fulfil this responsibility. However, what the concept of human security entirely fails to do is to hold the international community accountable in terms of taking the blame (along with the independent state actor) for the mass underdevelopment of certain areas, the existence of famine, disease and continued environmental degradation (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 23-26).

Security from what threats? Threats to security are represented, in the traditionalist view, as external to the state, being a precondition of human nature characterized by a deep sense of insecurity, which instils in the human being distrust and suspicion of other people, peculiarities that spread automatically to all forms of institutionalized forms of human beings, thus creating an anarchy at the systemic level, characterized by the absence of a central, moral authority to direct and resolve in complete impartiality the dissensions between certain individuals or states (Miroiu 2006, 95).

However, new concrete realities in the sphere of international relations have destabilized the conceptual and philosophical foundation of traditional assumptions about the nature and causes of security threats, in which context some scholars have noted the limitations of this perspective and argued for the need to broaden the analytical framework.

Thus, more recent studies under the direction of the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung have brought to light a new perspective on human security threats. Galtung defines peace as the opposite of violence, but, for him, violence is not simply the

regulation or controlled use of force by humans but involves "*anything that impedes human self-realization and can be avoided*" (Griffiths 2003, 217). Thus, the novelty brought by Galtung consists in the concept of "*structural violence*", a form of violence that represents "*everything that prevents the self-realization of the human being in terms of the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, which can be physiological, ecological, economic or spiritual*" (Leucea 2012, 125). In this key, he distinguishes four types of violence in world politics: (1) classical violence - which refers to the infliction of suffering through torture or war; (2) poverty - as the lack of minimum living conditions such as food, water, clothing or shelter; (3) repression - as the loss of freedom of individuals to choose and express their own desires; and (4) alienation - as a form of structural violence against our identity and our needs to belong to a community or to establish inter-human relations (Griffiths 2003).

McSweeney also talks about the importance of considering "structural threats", by which he refers to the "*unintended consequences of social action*", i.e. the structure of the global economy, the pattern of power relations and dependencies within it, the profound influence of the food, tobacco and alcohol industries on government policy, gender inequality, relative and absolute poverty levels, income inequality and so on (Stoeva 2020, 5-6).

Also, within peace studies, following the contributions made by the Norwegian sociologist J. Galtung, a distinction can be made between (1) negative peace - as the absence of war, the absence of explicit and overt physical violence and (2) positive peace - as a state of "social justice", characterized by the absence of structural violence, representing, in particular, an idealized form of peace studies (Dungaciu 2019, 478-480).

The problem with concepts that expand the scope of threats to human security is that the "*progressive expansion of the field of security studies jeopardizes the intellectual coherence of security, thereby giving it such a broad meaning that it may become incomprehensible*" (Buzan, Waever and Wilde 2010, 14-15). However, the question remains valid: *security against what threats?*

Among the threats to human security we can consider, without being exhaustive, the following: global infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria), respectively pandemics of respiratory infections (SARS-CoV-2, avian flu - H5N1, swine flu - H1N1), but also epidemics of viral hemorrhagic fever (Ebola) (Human Security Course); mental disorders, climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity (United Nation Development Programme 2022, Chapter 6); State vulnerability, economic threats (weak economic development limits the resources available to build strong political institutions and the ability of government to meet the needs and demands of the population is limited by a weak economy), transnational crime, environment (biodiversity loss has negative effects on: food security, health, energy security, reduced water availability, degradation of social relations and cultural

identity - given that many cultures value ecosystems or their components, reduced freedom to choose the lifestyle provided by biodiversity, reduction of basic materials), terrorism, violent conflict, lack of law and order, weak state authority coupled with the absence of key public institutions, illegal migration, human smuggling, drug trafficking (Bellamy 2020) and so on.

Although the problem of conceptual ambiguity of human security is one of the frequent criticisms of human security, a simplified table can illustrate, in essence, *the differences between traditional state-centred and human-centred approaches to security*.

TABLE NO. 1

The difference between the traditional state-centred approach and human-centred security

	TRADITIONAL (STATE-CENTERED) SECURITY	HUMAN CENTERED SECURITY
SECURITY REFERENT	In a Hobbesian world, *the state is the main provider of security*: if the state is secure, then those who live in it are secure.	*Individuals are equal to the state* in terms of importance as the referent object of security. State security is a means, not a goal.
PROTECTED VALUES	Sovereignty, power, territorial integrity, national independence.	Personal security, well-being, and individual freedom. Physical security and basic needs. Personal freedom (freedom of association). Human rights, economic and social rights.
SECURITY THREATS	*Direct* organized violence by other states, violence, and coercion by other states.	*Direct* violence (death, drugs, dehumanization, discrimination, international disputes, weapons of mass destruction) and *indirect* violence (deprivation, disease, natural disasters, underdevelopment, displacement, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality), from *identifiable* sources (such as states or non-state actors) or *structural* sources (power relations ranging from the family to the global economy).
PROTECTING BY WHAT MEANS?	Retaliatory force or the threat to use it, balance of power, military means, consolidation of economic power, little attention to law enforcement or institutions.	Promote human development: basic needs plus equality, sustainability and greater democratization and participation at all levels. Promoting political development: global norms and institutions plus collective use of force, as well as sanctions if and when necessary, cooperation between states, trust in international institutions, networks and coalitions and international organizations.

Source: table taken in full of Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, *Human Security: Concepts and Implications with an Application to Post-Intervention Challenges in Afghanistan*, Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Sciences Po, 2005, p. 28.

Approaches and debates on human security

As can be seen from the issues outlined above, there is no consensus on threats to human security. Although *proponents* of human security agree that the object of reference of security is the individual and the protection of the individual, there is

debate as to what this entails. The difference of opinion on human security divides proponents of this approach into three schools of thought:

- *the minimalist approach* argues that "the threat posed by political violence by the state or other organized political actor against people must be the primary concern of the concept of human security" which means "protecting people and communities from internal conflict, war or other forms of violence", thus aiming to maintain conceptual clarity and analytical rigour that does not "fall prey" to the over-extension of the security agenda. The minimalist definition of human security is succinctly summarized as *'freedom from fear'*, shaped by works such as Professor Andrew Mack's 'A Signifier of Shared Values', 2004.
- *The maximalist approach* opposes the reductionist view of the minimalists, arguing that human security must encompass more than *'freedom from fear'*. In the maximalist approach, human security must also refer to *'freedom from want'*. For Ramesh Thakur, a maximalist, in his book 'A Political Worldview' (2004), human security means "*protecting people from critical situations, from risks and assaults on human life, whether the threats are related to social activities or natural calamities, whether the source of these threats is within the borders of a state or outside, whether they are direct or structural*".
- *the circular approach to human security*, which seeks to substantiate an analytical framework based on both minimalist and maximalist approaches. Thus, this analytical framework "focuses on human insecurity generated by political violence and the causes of this state. In social science language, human insecurity as political violence (minimalist school) is the dependent variable. Included among the many causes of political violence are the problems of underdevelopment (characteristics of the maximalist approach), and these are independent variables". One of the proponents of this approach is Pauline Kerr, who argues that this framework of analysis has several advantages, namely (1) the connection between the two approaches is quite clear; (2) causal links can be multi-factor and inter-linked; (3) causality can have a circular dynamic; and (4) because it identifies the problem of violence and its causes, the approach can provide decision support in the development of certain policies (Leucea 2012, 114-119).

Criticisms of the concept of human security are mainly based on the *conceptual ambiguity* of the term, which is caused by the fact that "*in trying to be all-encompassing, it has come to mean nothing*". To address this problem, authors Gary King and Christopher J. L. Murray consider that a useful approach would be to include only those domains of well-being that "*have been important enough for human beings to fight for or put their lives or property at risk*" (King and Murray 2001-2002, 593).

At the same time, critics have argued that "*human security lacks sufficient political traction*" because the approach is far too broad "*to serve as a guide for academic research or government policymaking*" (Stoeva 2020, 3), and the crowded list of

threats to human security "*makes it impossible to prioritize political action*", thus leaving the call for quick military solutions as the only option. Thus, advocates of the narrow approach such as S. Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong (2006) consider that "*a definition of human security that includes so many components, from the physical to the psychological, without a clearly established hierarchy, presents difficulties for policymakers forced to choose between competing objectives and focus their resources on specific solutions to immediate problems*". On the other hand, proponents of the broad approach to human security, such as Mary Kaldor and Shannon Beebe (2008), Lincoln Chen and Vasant Narasimhan (2003), Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy (2007) or Caroline Thomas (2001), consider, in one form or another, that the approach "*does not seek to elevate every possible problem to the highest political priority, but merely to set thresholds below which people's lives are endangered and their dignity threatened*", and that the prioritization invoked by critics "*may be an exercise in futility, since the concept is based on the assumption that all threats are interdependent*", in the sense that removing a threat will have little effect without "*the implementation of comprehensive security that restores the dignity of individuals*" (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 8).

Last but not least, some of the criticisms of human security are sharpened by a number of state actors, such as the G77 group, which comprises mostly developing countries and for whom the concept of human security "*is still an ethnocentric paradigm emphasizing subjective issues and values*" representing "*yet another attempt by the West to impose its liberal values and political institutions on non-Western societies*", as well as a criterion that challenges "*the sovereign role of the state, threatening the intervention of the international community on behalf of the people*" (Tadjbakhsh 2005, 10).

Conclusions

Paradoxically, the conceptual ambiguity and the breadth of the threat agenda, the main targets of this concept's critics, seem to be the *de facto* main source of its strength and attractiveness.
Beyond considering this concept as a "*mature*" one in terms of conceptual clarity and analytical rigor, the concept of human security has often been attributed to the category of normative concepts, its practical usefulness being that of regulating or prescribing the ideal behaviour, relationships or processes that the panoply of actors on the international relations scene should adopt in order to *free individuals from fear and wants*.

Starting from here, we consider that the usefulness of the concept of human security translates into several strengths, namely: (1) through the magnitude of the threat agenda, the concept creates a sense of urgency and collective responsibility to act, an aspect that gives the concept a mobilizing role; (2) it contributes to guiding positive

analysis by describing facts, processes or relationships without including value judgments, through objective approaches based on observations, data and verifiable facts; (3) it provides a set of terms and definitions that gives a 'common voice' to the international community and can also contribute to policy development; and (4) it provides a scale for assessing progress and identifying conceptual, procedural and action gaps around the issue at hand.

Thus, we believe that the dynamics, flexibility, and adaptability of human security should remain one of its "analytical rigors", as only in this way is the concept able to respond to the complex challenges of global human insecurity. Although it is criticized for its breadth, the essence of human security is simple: prevention of the worst situations that threaten human life and dignity. In this sense, the concept is a call for collective reason and responsibility, emphasizing a deep understanding of the causes of global human insecurity and the development of effective solutions to manage them.

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