

Final Exam: Human Security and IR Theory
Hallie Jones
May 2nd, 2005

The notion or concept of "Human Security" is extremely difficult to define. The term is vague, broad, and often times a serious point of contention amongst its most ardent proponents, according to both Paris and McDonald's articles. Human Security can include elements such as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (Paris, p. 90). With such an extensive list of priorities, policymakers and academics must contend with the question of how to address all areas of concern without allowing one area preference over another. Indeed, attempts to narrow the concept have resulted in exclusion of, or hierarchical ordering of, specific normative values over others.

Likewise, the notion of human security is so encompassing that it could potentially support all hypothesis and their corresponding null hypothesis. This perplexes scholars who in turn lack the clear focus and direction necessary to construct well developed theoretical debates from the foundational basis of Human Security (Paris, p. 93). Consequently, developing Human Security as a theoretical framework for analysis of the international system seems highly improbable. Rather, Human Security appears to resemble a campaign for normative standards that was constructed to be vague intentionally.

When Human Security is placed in the context of international relations as an organizational apparatus or political tool, it appears to be effective. The ambiguity of the term provides common ground on which middle-power states (Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Chile, etc...) can jointly predicate their foreign policy objectives. These middle-power states can invoke the Human Security "campaign" to assemble coalitions thus allowing them to respond to various international actions and political developments with a unified voice.

Not only does it initiate strength through numbers and cooperation, but it contributes the additional boost of rallying around a "moral" platform thus providing legitimacy to those specific governments, a global appearance of benevolence, and forces the standards to be raised for opponents by coercion and pressuring through public relations, "soft power". A narrowing of the concept would pose additional barriers to this type of coalition building by reducing or shrinking their available area of common ground, and is therefore seen as counterproductive to accomplishing various Human Security advancements.

Liberalism does, can, and should accommodate the notion of human security within its theoretical framework. According to class discussion, Human Security falls under the rubric of Liberal Cosmopolitanism, which is preoccupied with a normative agenda focused on ethics and morality. According to Liberal Cosmopolitanism, the western developed countries, or the global north, have an

obligation to repay to the south third world for years of exploitation of its natural resources.

This line of reasoning holds the notion of mutual reciprocity as a truism, believing that the north supports its living standards through the oppression of the third world and as such should accept a reduction in its quality or standards of living in order to allow the south to catch up. The relationship is inversely proportionate; northern standards of living increase as southern standards of living decrease.

This specific branch of liberal theory is concerned with the “ought to be” and offers the radical suggestion that the primary unit of analysis or level of inquiry should shift from the state to the individual. Accordingly, this theory posits the notion of individual egalitarianism at its foundation, stating that we all belong to a single species of humanity and are “fragmented” into the state system, which is inconsistent with human nature. They argue that the state-centric system is oppressive because it authorizes and legitimizes preferential treatment of some over others. If humans were not fragmented into states, each individual would have the same claim to equal moral worth and status.

Evaluating Human Security in the general context of liberalism, it is apparent that it promotes values, objectives, and a moral agenda that is consistent with the developed north. Human Security is predicated on the notion of universalism, the assumption that what’s good for the goose is good for the gander. This generalized conception implies that the values and moral agenda

embodied by its proponents are consistent with the rest of the world (translation: liberal democracy).

Theoretically, it is flawed because it denies differences and does not allow room for varying positions. If the unit of analysis is placed upon the individual, how do you find common ground in the current case of Iraq? There are some individuals that want a democratized Iraq, and there are others who fervently oppose their country being transformed into a liberalized democracy. There are two distinct, dichotomous goals at battle. Human Security only acknowledges the movement toward establishing a liberalized democracy as the valid or moral side of the coin, they are the "freedom fighters", while the opposition gets labeled "terrorist" for resisting western values.

Liberal institutionalism and regime theory argue that a hegemonic power is necessary to enforce the balance of power. They theorize that actors derive functional satisfaction through an institutional dimension or regimes such as NGO's. A hegemon is required to enforce the particular agenda and the anarchical nature of the system is mitigated through cooperation for mutual gain. Additionally, since Human Security initiatives are created by the UN and middle-power states, they are irrelevant if the hegemon choose not to join the ranks of its supporters. An example would be the Kyoto treaty, the US did not sign the treaty because it held competing values as priorities over environmental values, and Kyoto is therefore irrelevant because there is no one to police it.

Structural liberals believe the hegemon is the crucial element. The hegemon must be liberal and its role is to shape and mold the “separate peace” or democratic zone. The US is charged with expanding the democratic zone, or spreading democracy, based on the position that liberal democracies don’t fight each other. This essentially means opening up new markets to foreign investment for members of the controlling liberalized global coalition (further exploitation of the south to maintain the north’s living standards). When considering Human Security in that context, the US is violating many facets of the notion, such as using military force, economic sanctions, etc...

However, because the US is liberalized (according to liberal institutionalism), its ability or temptation to become universally dominant is curbed because of the pressure placed on it from other members of the liberal coalition. Therefore, governments advocating for Human Security concerns are in effect allowing the US to do their bidding. These countries free-ride, sit back on a soap box and advocate an agenda of morality while the hegemon facilitates the global balance of power which enables them to do so. These middle-power countries are given a voice through the international organizations which exist in essence because of the primary actions of the hegemon who is responsible for maintaining stability and the global balance of power. The hegemon can still pick and choose its battles, enjoying a certain degree of freedom.

Liberalism can and does incorporate the notion of Human Security. Above, the various perspectives of liberal theory have been explored. There is

disagreement, and the notion of Human Security is placed in different boxes and afforded different levels of relevance. Liberalism in general would hold that more needs to be done in the way of Human Security initiatives because it is necessary to maintain the status quo. The US can not choose to act unilaterally and must at times consider yielding to the initiatives of the UN and middle-power states. After all, the members of the northern liberalized global coalition provide it with its legitimacy. The US must respond, to some extent, to the majority which authorizes its actions through their inaction.

Realists would balk at the notion of Human Security. A state-centric theoretical perspective, they would exclude the notion of Human Security from their consideration because it suggests a radical ontological shift to the individual. Realists would argue that the state is the most rational and logical unit of analysis and would counter by asking how Human Security theorists expect to resolve problems for individuals. They would claim that the state is the most obvious structure for managing individual complaints and grievances, because the international system obviously could not effectively govern, facilitate, or administer the day to day realities of individuals. The international system is too far removed from the individual for this notion to be realistic.

Realists would debunk the claim that NGO's and coalitions pushing normative values have a significant amount of relevance. They would scale the argument back to the basics, that these states are maximum utility organizers seeking to advance their individual positions within the international system.

NGO's are extensions of the state. They are rational actors operating within the context of the balance of power which restrains their capabilities.

States use international norms and laws as an avenue to pursue self-interest. They band together only because they have specific agendas through which they can gain a common mutual benefit. Therefore, while liberalism would recognize cooperation as possible for mutual gain, realism would suggest that the system is still anarchical. The notion of Human Security is vague intentionally because these countries in reality are at war with one another. If there were a more explicit iteration of the concept of Human Security, these countries would not be able to identify collectively. They still fear each other, but they fear the hegemonic powers more based on their relative capabilities and that fear drives their behavior within the system.

Realism seeks to explain how things are, not how they should be. There is no room for Human Security within the theoretical framework of realism. It is a theory that supports a constant, immutable set of rules or truisms. Realism would treat human security as any other emergent concern or influence within the international system, dealing with it in a manner that is equal to other elements of consideration, such as religion, economics, expansion of territory, and culture. It is simply another iteration of the struggle for power and balance. It's a method for engagement in the international system and an attempt to assert dominance through the use of coercive soft power.

Realists believe that the state does not have the capacity to follow moral precepts. They do not accommodate the notion of dynamism or change in nature. Man, by nature, is evil. The state is a product of man. Since man exists in a state of war, the state and the international system is therefore a state of war and war does not accommodate Human Security.

Realism can not, does not, and should not incorporate Human Security into its theoretical body. Realism exists to provide a purely pessimistic critique of the inter-workings of state relations. It is removed emotionally and is therefore able to provide a more objective impression of the systemic balance of power. It provides a constant, a point of reference from which arguments can be constructed.

Postmodernism, feminism, and green theory all three would fall into the rubric of Human Security. Postmodernists are credited for being the largest contributors to the area of Human Security. They deconstructed and debunked the debates between liberals and realists, questioning and demythologizing the very notion of power and the origin from which it derives its legitimacy. They uncover the linkage between power and knowledge, calling the discourse between the opposing camps into question for hypocrisy because they package so-called "truisms" into their theories. Postmodernists claim that theory is nothing more than interpretation and the ultimate source of authority is the play of discourse. As a conceptual notion, Human Security fits nicely within the

context of postmodern thought because it is deconstructed, lacks absolutes, and resists hierarchical or polarized oppositions.

Feminism and green theory also fit well within the realm of Human Security. Each line of argument can be classified as a concern or element that combines to compose the overall concept of Human Security as a whole. Green theory and environmentalism are interwoven with other elements of Human Security, such as Health Security, Economic Security, and Personal Security. Likewise, Feminism opposes the patriarchal structure and calls each policy area into question from a critical perspective, positing that the global system is created and based around a male dominated agenda. This is consistent with NGO's that seek to serve, protect, and represent women.

World Systems Theory would recognize Human Security as a positive trend serving to effectively dismantle the global economic status quo. These theorists do not recognize states or individuals. The unit of analysis is the global capitalist system, which they study objectively from a historical perspective. They predict that the underlying secular trends, the influence that differentiates capitalism from its respective historical periods, will yield a radically different picture by 2050. They predict the end result (or natural progression) to be globalized socialism.

The campaign for Human Security is essentially fighting for position, seeking to serve as the regulatory body that restricts the morally impoverished free-market from operating in a completely unethical, inhumane, and unchecked

manner. Socialism is a combination of market economics and democratic controls that facilitate distributive benefits for all based on the notion of individual equality. World systems theory does accommodate the notion of Human Security in a way that explains its relevance, permits its validity, and places its importance on an elevated level in the context of analyzing the international system.

Social Constructivism would also incorporate the concept of Human Security in its pursuit of playing the role as the great theoretical intermediary or diplomat. Social constructivists would still recognize the state as the primary unit of analysis, however, and would likely use the logic that realism uses to deny the notion of Human Security. Since Human Security posits the individual as the primary unit of analysis, and realism points to the state as the logical method to resolve individual grievances, Social Constructivism would not reject the notion of Human Security based on this logic. Instead, it would use this as a fertile breeding ground to plant the “great divide-bridging” seeds, arguing that individuals are just as relevant as the state or the global system.

In conclusion, most of the theoretical frameworks we studied accommodate the notion of Human Security and realism seems to be the single exclusionary realm of discourse. The fabric for incorporating and treating Human Security within these various frameworks differs across the board. World Systems Theory offers an optimistic outlook for the future by accounting for the equalizing potential that organized resistance and ethical positions can force onto

market economic systems, thus restricting and subjecting the behavior of capital to a standard that is consistent with the basic fundamental premises of democracy. While Human Security might not prove to be fulfilling as a theoretical framework of IR, it is proving to be effective as a campaign for raising the bar and creating standards to be applied horizontally across humanity.

I'm unsure if you were serious about justifying absences from your class or not. In case you are serious, here's my explanation. I left at the break on one occasion because I was extremely sick, which ended up disabling me for an entire week. I did consult you to explain the reason for my early departure. On one other occasion, I did not come to class. That was the Monday directly after spring break. In the spirit of having moral scruples about myself as an individual, I must admit that I have no good excuse for missing that class. I had a friend in town from Milwaukee and took her on a shopping excursion. However, we did consume consciously by patronizing the secondary thrift market exclusively, avoiding the direct exploitation of the third world associated with patronizing such retail locations as the mall. In all, I missed 1.5 classes.