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THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY IN THE ARAB WORLD

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The need for conceptualization

- **“The elucidation of the language of political science is by no means an idle exercise in semantics, but in many instances a most effective way to solve problems of research.”**

Felix E. Oppenheim (1975)

- **Once the term ‘security’ is defined, we need specifications**
 - **for turning security into a policy objective, and**
 - **for identifying measures to pursue that objective.**

Dominant trends

- **Security studies**
 - equated security with national / military / hard security.
 - Defined security in terms of military power.
 - Eventually included in the definition other dimensions such as economic / financial / political power.
 - The referent object of security was usually the state; then it was argued that national security cannot be achieved without individual and international security.
 - Security was linked to the existence of an infinite number of threats.



- **Disputes replace a rational dialogue.**
- **Adoption of inappropriate policies.**

Human security (HS)

According to the Commission on Human Security (CHS):

- **HS focuses on people (not states);**
- **HS means:**
 - **Protecting fundamental freedoms;**
 - **Protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations;**
 - **Using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations;**
 - **Creating political, social, economic, environmental, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.**
- **The concept of human security must be dynamic, and its constituent elements vary with time and space.**

Definition & specifications

“A low probability of damage to acquired values.”

- **As an objective, security can be defined in terms of:**
 - the relevant actors (security for whom?)
 - The values to be secured.
- **Policies for its pursuit are defined in terms of:**
 - How much security?
 - From what threats?
 - By what means?
 - At what cost?
 - In what time period?

From David A. Baldwin (1997)

Security in the framework of the EMP

- **The first paragraph of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration reads:
“The participants express their conviction that the peace, stability and security of the Mediterranean region are a common asset which they pledge to promote and strengthen by all means at their disposal.”**
- **However, security perceptions differ between North & South, and within each shore. ... →**

Security in the framework of the EMP (2)

- **This contribution focuses on security as it applies to the MENA region, even though this region is not homogeneous.**
- **The 7 dimensions of security mentioned above will not be examined in equal depth.**
- **The discussion will concentrate on:**
 - **dimensions that have been unduly ignored, neglected or over-emphasized;**
 - **Empirical evidence pointing to various forms of insecurity;**
 - **Policies needed to achieve security.**

Human security in the Arab world

- **Security for whom?**
- **The values to be secured.**
- **How much security?**
- **From what threats?**
- **By what means?**
- **At what cost?**
- **In what time period?**

- **Security for people**
- **Avoid focusing on regime security or state security because:**
 - **States are personified in their rulers;**
 - **Rulers are not accountable for their actions;**
 - **The state is often a threat to human security.**
- **Values to be secured:**
 - **Survival**
 - **‘Freedom from want’**
 - **‘Freedom from fear’**
 - **‘Freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment’**

Kofi Annan

Human security in the Arab world

- Security for whom?
- The values to be secured
- **How much security?**
- From what threats?
- By what means?
- At what cost?
- In what time period?

- **It is not necessary to view security as an absolute condition.**
- **It is common to speak of varying degrees of security:**

One city or one period is more secure than another.

- **Absolute security is unattainable.**
- **Scarce resources have to be allocated among competing goals.**

It will be argued that in the Arab world, a certain amount of insecurity in some areas has to be accepted in order to make more resources available for achieving greater security in other areas.

Human security in the Arab world

Major threats

1) Authoritarianism

- **“Respecting democratic principles is a step towards attaining human security and development.... This requires inclusive citizenship practices.” (CHS, ch. 8, p. 133)**
- **Unaccountable rulers and weak institutions have led to the adoption of harmful policies and the waste of resources.**

Human security in the Arab world

Major threats

2) Violence

- **Cross-border conflicts**
Palestine, Western Sahara
- **Internal conflicts**
Algeria, Sudan
- **Latent conflicts between many and within most Arab states**
- **Violence in reaction to repression and as a form of political protest**
- **Foreign intervention**
- **Disregard of international instruments/agreements**

Human security in the Arab world

Major threats

3) Armament

- **Unresolved conflicts and the lack of mechanisms for conflict prevention exacerbate the arms race.**

4) Environmental degradation

Cf. Prof. Selim's presentation

- **Desertification, shrinking arable areas**
- **Fresh water supplies**
- **Pollution ...**

Human security in the Arab world

Major threats

5) Economic threats

- **Insufficient diversification**
- **Unfair trade practices**
 Cf. Euromed Partnership
- **Debt burden**
- **Unequal income distribution**

6) Social threats

- **Demographic growth**
- **Low access to education, health services, sanitation, housing ...**
- **Unemployment**
- **Low status of women**

Achieving human security (1)

- **Reorder priorities**
 - Upgrade/demote types of security
- **Search for more efficient and cost-effective approaches to security; e.g.**
 - **Military security: CBM's, universal adherence to international regimes, collective security, elimination of regional tensions, greater implication of regional institutions ...**
- **Dilemmas:**
 - **Will non-Arab actors encourage such approaches?**
 - **Do the Arab regimes have the political will to undertake this search?**

Achieving human security (2)

Calculating risks:

- **Arab regimes:**

- **Is democratic reform a greater threat than oppression?**
- **Can legitimacy and accountability be a greater threat than reliance on foreign support?**
- **Is clinging to personal power a viable objective?**
- **Is fictitious or virtual ‘national sovereignty’ an acceptable alternative to enhancing human security through common action?**

- **The North**

- **Revise current definitions of stability, interests, threats...**
- **Move from preaching to practicing**
- **Evenhanded, consistent and coherent policies**
- **Consider that human security is universal**

Summary

- **There is a need for a common conceptualization of HS as a policy objective:**

A low probability of damage to acquired values

- **For research purposes specifications should be supplied to operationalize the concept and to define policies for achieving it.**
- **Application to MENA:
Reducing the probability that individuals and communities are victims of warfare, displacement, oppression, hunger, illness, ignorance, injustice and arbitrary behavior**

... →

Summary (cont'd)

Implementation requires:

- **Deliberate efforts on the part of Arabs to create the proper environment for achieving HS;**
- **Willingness of outside actors to refrain from blocking efforts at achieving HS;**
- **Active cooperation and effective support of outside actors to enhance HS, on the basis of shared interests and common destiny.**
- **If worse comes to worst, consider that *Politics consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable.***

J. K. Galbraith