



Human Security – Multifaceted Phenomenon

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Abstract

This article explores the complex and multifaceted nature of human security, which extends beyond protection from military threats to encompass physical, food, health, financial, community, political, and environmental dimensions. It traces humanity's historical challenges, including natural disasters, epidemics, and food shortages, and highlights how technological advancements since the Industrial Revolution have eased some threats to security while magnifying others. Colonialism, world wars, the development of nuclear weapons, the evolution of multilateral institutions, neoliberal economic policies, and globalization of trade and finance have also played dual roles. Human security also highlights the subjective factors, including perceptions and expectations of the future and changes in social values, which are ignored or undetected by objective measures. The article stresses the necessity of coordinated collective action to address the pressing human security challenges confronting humanity today, such as climate change and the need for a global cooperative security system to replace the prevailing competitive model. It calls for global acceptance of shared security responsibilities and collaboration to herald a safer, more secure world in the future.

Today, the word “security” is normally associated with protection from military aggression. Security is a much broader concept that includes physical security, food, health, and other forms of social security; job and financial security; community and personal safety; political and environmental security as well. Since the dawn of history, humanity has faced security problems from adverse weather conditions such as floods, drought, cyclones, earthquakes, and forest fires, among others. On top of that was the fear of epidemics involving smallpox, plague, cholera, malaria, and countless other diseases. Food shortage was a perennial problem that human beings have battled throughout history. According to an English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, the life of primitive man was “short, nasty, and brutish”. Human comfort improved only after the advent of the Industrial Revolution when mechanized production made surplus goods possible and allowed urbanized living. The understanding that epidemics were caused by microscopic germs came about in the 19th century after the discoveries of the French scientist Louis Pasteur, who discovered microbes. The discovery of vaccines and antibiotics, together with improvements in sanitation, brought epidemics under control. The current coronavirus pandemic caught humanity by surprise, and it took more than three years for humanity to come to grips with the global threat.

Problems of food security were an issue of major concern with developing countries well into the second half of the 20th century and still persist in some countries today. Nations

like India were dependent on imported food grains from food-surplus countries like the USA and Canada for decades. In the mid-60s, the FAO issued a warning about a potential famine threatening India due to increasing population coupled with a failure to increase food production in equal measure. The US government also expressed doubts about Indian ports having enough capacity to unload all the food aid that the US would be sending. It was at this point that the then Indian food minister, Mr. C. Subramaniam, drew up a plan to make India self-sufficient in foodgrains within five years. India's own food production instead of seeking US food aid. He achieved this miracle through the launching of India's green revolution. India achieved food self-sufficiency in five years and doubled foodgrain production within a decade. What he did in India slowly spread to other developing countries, and as a result, many other developing countries escaped food shortages and associated mass starvation.

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It was fashionable in Europe to have colonies in Asia and Africa during the 18th and 19th century. As a result, countries such as England, France, and the Netherlands gained sizeable colonies in Asia and Africa. “Might is right” was the prevailing doctrine of the 19th century. In this race for colonies, Central European countries like Germany got left behind. After the turn of the 20th century, Germany developed an ambition to have her own colonies as well. Since there were not many countries left up for grabs in Asia or Africa for colonization and Germany was landlocked except on its northern borders, the country turned its colonial aspirations to surrounding European countries. This resulted in two colossal world wars, causing the loss of tens of millions of human lives. This was a period before the establishment of international laws that prohibited wars of aggression. The League of Nations was active in the 1920s, but it did nothing to control Italian aggression in Ethiopia or prevent Japanese aggression on Manchuria. It became obvious that it was a toothless organization that silently supported imperial nations. Only after the carnage of World War II did the countries of the world wake up to the dangers of global warfare and decide to act. Accordingly, the United Nations was founded along with the Security Council, with the main purpose of preventing another global outbreak.

After undergoing the horror of atomic bombs falling on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese parliament renounced wars of aggression and remains committed to this policy to this day. The merging of the coal and steel industries of both France and Germany under the European Union or Common Market made war between these two countries and their neighbors unthinkable. Apart from conventional war, the major danger that remains to be dealt with is the threat of nuclear war breaking out between nuclear powers such as the US, Russia, China, etc. The United Nations General Assembly can consider passing a resolution banning the possession or use of nuclear weapons. However, such a move does not have the force of authority to overcome the power of the veto-wielding nuclear powers in the Security Council. The world came to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis of

1962, of the Kennedy and Khrushchev era. The Soviet Union backed out only after Kennedy promised that the US would not attack Cuba thereafter and made a clandestine agreement to remove missiles from Turkey. Even today, the world is far from being safe from nuclear attacks, considering the constant threats of nuclear attacks issued by North Korea and more recently by Putin's numerous warnings.

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Apart from the insecurity caused by the ever-present danger of nuclear attacks, humanity also faces the problem of financial insecurity caused by disruptions in the world economy. Money did not play a significant role in the ancient economy prior to the 15th century, as the economy at that time was mainly based on barter. However, as the world industrialized in the 19th century, the global economy became increasingly reliant on money. In the late 1920s, something went wrong with the US financial system, leading to a worldwide depression where one-third of the US labor force was laid off. This depression quickly spread to European and Asian countries, resulting in a global economic downturn. It took the genius of FDR and the newly discovered economic principles of Keynes to restore order.

The onset of the Second World War shifted the focus of the US economy to military production, thereby reviving it from the stagnation it had experienced. However, this traumatic experience of the depression exposed the fragility of the capitalist global economy, making the stability of the communist system appear enticing. Nevertheless, the Soviet communist system had its own shortcomings, including one-party rule, restrictions on freedom of expression, and limited availability of consumer goods. Faced with such an unappealing alternative, humanity has chosen, for better or worse, to live with economic insecurity.

Adding to this insecurity is the fear of inflation, which has become a recurring feature of the world economy since 1950. While living standards have significantly improved, it cannot be denied that the cost of living has also continued to rise. This has led to the belief that increases in income have been offset by rising costs. The world has yet to discover a way to raise incomes without causing a corresponding increase in prices. Incomes have primarily risen due to people's aspirations for higher salaries and wages. However, if higher wages are to be granted, producers must increase the prices of their products to generate the necessary funds. Thus, the aspiration for higher income pushes up the cost of goods in the market, making higher prosperity inseparable from a higher cost of living.

Humanity is undoubtedly living a better life in the 21st century than ever before. This applies to technological comforts, conveniences, and prosperity levels. However, along with these advancements, humanity also faces challenges in environmental health, nuclear attack safety, and economic uncertainties. The world is only now beginning to recognize the problem of climate change and is taking coordinated steps to reduce carbon emissions that

contribute to rising temperatures. A competitive mindset regarding security among nations is only exacerbating military threats and worsening global conditions. It is only now that the wisdom of collective security is emerging among nations. The proposal for a UN army that guarantees the security of member nations is yet to gain serious support. If all goes well, we may see a better world that is more secure and safe in the next 50 years.

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