

*Boomerang Effect: The Convergence of National and Human Security*  
P.H. Liotta, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 33(4), 2002.

There is an emerging understanding in the developed world “that aspects of ‘non-traditional’ security that have long plagued the so-called developing world can also increasingly affect the policy decisions and future choices of powerful states and world leaders”. Developed states, inevitably, may indeed be led to witness “a blurring of issues involving state security [...] and issues involving ‘human security’”. The future will thus require decision-makers “in both the developing and the developed world to focus on broad and broadened understandings of the meaning of security”. The danger is indeed that in “focusing [only] on one aspect of security at the expense or detriment of another [can cause states] to be ‘boomeranged’ by a poor balancing of ends and means in a radically changed security environment”.

What emerged after the end of the Cold War was a unique situation, different from most if not all international and security configurations the world had formerly experienced. No new principles, structures or definitions of security were formally established or re-established in international politics. Contrary to traditional practice following the end of every large international war, there was no formal ‘postwar settlement’ leading to a new or renewed agreement on principles of international security. The world was thus “uncomfortably nestled” in what was referred to as the “post-Cold War era”. In the same time the process of globalization and its impacts remained somewhat misunderstood. In this context the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report recognized the “conceptual shift” that was taking place, stating that security had “for too long been interpreted narrowly” and proposing the new framework of human security. In contrast to national security issues, human security brought attention to issues of vulnerability, mobilizing the concept of “direct threat” for only the most acute cases of insecurity.

Vulnerabilities are often unclear to identify and “linked to a complex interdependence among related issues”. The most appropriate approach therefore becomes adopting an “adaptive posture”, emphasizing prevention, early-warning and rapid and flexible responses. In such a security environment, policy-makers should thus regard human security issues not simply as “threat-based realities” but as “emerging vulnerabilities that require new measures and methods of creative, adaptive thinking”. Relying solely on traditional concepts and tools such as military intervention, even when reoriented or repackaged towards conflict-prevention, can thus be counter-productive and cause further dilemmas. The NATO intervention in Kosovo is one example of this paradox.

While states have brought to the foreground of their security focus the problems of terrorism and homeland security, there remains “a backdrop of critical uncertainties, which, if ignored, can equally ‘boomerang’ and create ugly short-term and long-term outcomes”. As Ellen Frost rightly points out “holistic thinking has thus become a national security imperative” as national and human security in today’s environment are clearly on path towards convergence.