

“The end of the Cold War unleashed a debate that had been growing for years, provoked by scholars and practitioners increasingly dissatisfied with traditional conceptions of security”, the benchmark for new security thinking and models in many ways became the concept of human security, popularized in the 1994 Human Development report published by the UNDP. The new security framework proposed was much broader, encompassing new types of threats, such as hunger, disease, political repression as well as “protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life”, the UNDP report then identifying seven constituent parts of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

This initial “UN endorsement” was an incentive for a number of countries to form, by the end of 1999 the “Human Security Network”, while some countries adopted human security to renew their security establishment, as did South Africa in the wake of the change of majority in 1994. Soon after, the Japanese government, under the impulse of Prime Minister Obuchi, “sought to make human security the defining characteristic of Japanese foreign policy”, through the creation of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security in 1999. The United Nations and its Secretary General have also lent support to the human security concept, Kofi Annan instituting in 2003 the Commission on Human Security, which resulted in a permanent UN Advisory Board. Furthermore, human security also received the European Union’s endorsement with the publication in September 2004 of the Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe’s Security Capabilities, entitled *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding these endorsements, many various definitions or questions remain, specifically in the following four areas:

1. On “referent object” of human security, there is wide agreement that the focus must be set on the individual, some definitions also proposing an element of “community security”.
2. On the nature of threats there is however more of a debate because of elements of subjectivity in defining how deprivation and want constitute a security threat, however the idea of a threshold has brought some rigor to ongoing discussions.
3. On the actors providing human security to the people, there is recognition that “achievement of human security is almost by definition a collaborative effort involving the individual citizen as an active player but also including key roles for civil society” as well as state actors.
4. On how to translate human security into practice, the key challenge for the concept is to explain “how to connect and gain synergy from simultaneous economic development, growing respect for human rights, increasing public sector capacity and accountability and maturation of civil societies”.

Any survey of literature on human security would however be incomplete without reviewing skeptical approaches to the concept. Some authors indeed argue that such an all-inclusive definition makes “every human dilemma a security issue” preventing policymakers to “identify, categorize and prioritize what truly must be protected”. However “none [of these criticisms] are sufficiently compelling to halt the growing acceptance of the basic paradigm”. The true challenge to human security is the “troubling issue of how to operationalize the concept”. Yet this operational challenge is in the end simply a practical question of coordination, for human security is intrinsically a synergetic collaboration of multiple cross-boundary actors, meaning that any human security agenda “almost by definition requires consistency and patience”, as well as coherence, comprehensiveness and persistence.