Review - National, European and Human Security

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RICHARD MATTHEW, JAN 7 2013

National, European and Human Security: From Co-existence to Convergence
Edited by: Mary Martin, Mary Kaldor and Narcis Serra
Routledge, 2012

Throughout the 20th century, the lion's share of security theory and practice was linked explicitly to understanding and addressing the threat of great power war. This intense and narrow focus changed quickly and unexpectedly when the Cold War ended, and with it the most alarming axis of great power confrontation. Few analysts could discern another configuration of great power rivalry worrisome enough to decisively shape international security, and by the mid-1990s a transatlantic rethinking of security was well-advanced.

The elements of this rethinking exercise, which is still underway, are varied and complex. The internet and other powerful technologies have created an entirely new domain of human activity—cyberspace. Cyberspace has transformed the speed, scale and density of human interactions, enabled new platforms for competition, collaboration and violence, and made vast quantities of information available to everyone. Human impacts on the natural environment, such as climate change, have emerged as existential threats on a planetary scale. Societies around the world find themselves hard-pressed to manage dynamic and interactive pressures from rapid

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urbanization, economic globalization, democratic transformation, new patterns of pandemic disease, and sophisticated, globe-spanning criminal and terrorist networks.

Under these truly unprecedented conditions, some countries, such as South Korea and Angola, have found ways to flourish, while others, such as Somalia, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have lost ground to poverty and violence. Many other countries – Rwanda, Liberia, Colombia – have experienced both ends of the spectrum. Where the world is headed, and how quickly, is much debated.

The task of understanding security in the 21st century has required a new vocabulary of terms like fragile state, sustainable development, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, and human security, among many others. This new vocabulary, while still evolving and often contested, is widely seen as rich with insight and promise. It has attracted researchers and practitioners who, twenty years ago, would have shunned any association with the security community. At the same time, this new vocabulary has also alienated some traditionalists who believe that maintaining the historically narrow focus of security studies is the key to refining the field's understanding of war and hence its policy utility.

In any case, the cat is out of the bag, and thus an important question is, how is the project of rethinking security playing out in security practice? Some metrics are well-known: for example, freed from US-Soviet rivalry, the UNSC is authorizing more peace-building operations than it did during the Cold War. Some implications are clear: for example, NATO and the trans-Atlantic alliance have lost much of their raison-d'etre. But much is not known at all.

The editors of the new volume, *National, European and Human Security*, have made a great contribution towards filling this gap. "This book sets out to examine whether, if at all, human security and national security have converged in the past decade, and how they currently co-exist" (p. 3). It does so by bringing together an accomplished group of scholars to search for the imprint of human security in official documents – statements of doctrine, policy papers, operational guidelines, procurement plans, and so on. The result is a very detailed and fascinating account of a complex, contested and uneven period of transformation.

The book's introduction – by Mary Kaldor, whose *New and Old Wars* (1999) has played a major role in rethinking security, Mary Martin and Narcis Serra – succeeds in establishing the importance of the question noted above. The editors argue that human security emerged after the Cold War as a direct challenge to the national security paradigm that had elevated the state above all other actors, war above all other threats, and military strategy above all other approaches to providing security. This challenge has not displaced national security but instead has led to many experiments with integrating the two paradigms. Consequently, a key question today is, how is this synthesis faring? What is surprisingly absent in the introduction – and it is a gap in the volume itself – is a discussion of the various meanings of human security, along with some indication of which meanings, if any, have been selected to guide the case studies.

I think that it would have been useful to have noted that operationalizing human security has divided states into at least two groups: firstly those, following Canada, who prefer a narrow understanding of human security that focuses on the different and often novel forms of acute and sustained violence people are facing; and secondly those, following Japan, who embrace a much broader understanding of human security that integrates human rights and sustainable development into a grand vision of what an individual requires to live a life of safety, wellbeing and dignity. It would also have been useful to explore the links between human security and factors such as the liberal view of politics that originated in Europe, the role of middle powers on the international stage, and UN notions of crisis management, humanitarian assistance and peace-building. All of these factors are central to how human security has informed security policy in European countries.

Following the introduction, the seven case studies that make up the volume are very well done, although the last chapter on Russia is much briefer and more general than the others. Each chapter reviews key documents, shows in some detail the ways in which human security has shaped or failed to shape policy, and concludes with an evaluation of that integration. Each case is well constructed, informative and enjoyable to read. Scattered throughout the chapters are many insights that likely have a general applicability, thus helping us to understand how difficult it is to

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transform the massive security apparatus built during the Cold War, which has been enhanced for the war on terrorism, and constrained by years of economic recession. For example, Genevieve Schmeder concludes "the French case demonstrates an inertia surrounding the notion of security, the conceptual categories of which have proved to be highly resistant to theoretical and practical revisions" (p. 36).

Thomas Bauer, in contrast, notes that "the material and conceptual transformation of German security and defence policy instruments clearly underline the importance of a comprehensive security approach to the German government. The material transformation lags behind due to budgetary constraints…" (p. 59). In their excellent chapter on the UK, Natasha Marhia and Chloe Davies conclude that "human security has had a discernable impact on British security and defence policy," but argue that the impact has been a mixed one, bringing "resources to addressing intolerable insecurities" but also justifying interventions against terrorism that violate human rights (p. 83 and p. 84).

The volume has two curious omissions. It is surprising that there is not a chapter on Norway, which has played a significant leadership role on human security. It is also surprising, given the title and comments made throughout the book itself, that there is no sustained discussion of the case of the EU itself. Documents such as the 2003 *European Security Strategy* and *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe* (2004) inform behavior at the state level and perhaps ought to have been explored in detail in this volume.

In spite of these minor shortcomings, this is an important and well-written book that will reward a broad readership.

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Professor Richard A. Matthew *is a Professor of International and Environmental Politics in the Schools of Social Ecology and Social Science at the University of California at Irvine, and founding Director of the Center for Unconventional Security Affairs.*

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