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vol. I / no. 07 | September 2020

Warfare or Welfare?: State Security and The Impasse of Human Security

Authors: Annisa D. Amalia¹, Edy Prasetyono², Andi Widjajanto³

Summary⁴

The concept of human security, which has been praised for its purpose to challenge state's domination in the realm of security, evidently opens up avenues for exercising state's power. The state's control over securitisation strategy and the lack of non-state powers to address human insecurities have attracted the profound debate on state versus human security and raised the question on "whose security should be protected?". While a call for rethinking the concept of security is being voiced out, the concern over the protection of human welfare should be given the same degree of attention.

Keywords: *state security, securitisation, militarization, human welfare*

¹ Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia

² Senior Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia

³ Senior Advisor, Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Indonesia

⁴ This edition is the output of 'DefiningNurani: a Dialogue Series on Human Security' held by the IR-UI as part of its 35th Anniversary celebrations, and supported by its Alumnae Association (ILUNI HI-UI), series 1/07, titled: 'Human Security vs. State Security', with Andi Widjajanto (Speaker), Edy Prasetyono, Ph.D (Discussant), and Dwi Ardhanariswari, Ph.D (Host). http://tiny.cc/irui_dn07

Human Security: Conceptual and Contextual Flaws?

In the domain of International Relations, the complexity of world politics has rushed scholars to search for grand theories; theories which explain actors' behaviour on a macro level. The concept of human security follows this logic: it encompasses a wide range of security threats and referent objects, in a way that it can only be defined by what it is not. However, this all-encompassing nature of the concept renders the concept abstract, impractical, and therefore, potentially ends up in achieving nothing. As a result, the debates surrounding the concept has been intense, particularly on one core theme relating to the contradiction between 'human' security or the security of persons, and ['state' security](#) which refer to the security of state apparatuses and national territory.

In the practical realm, the application of the broad human security concept is questioned since it has to be particularly adapted to different dimensions and contexts of human lives. This complexity often forces state actors to 'intervene', generating a paradox of liberalism – a paradigm within which the concept of human security is developed. While one purpose of human security is to liberalize or free human beings from the control of state apparatuses, it often ends up in bolstering state's role in defining and responding to human security issues. The concept's relevance is further compromised by the fact that non-state actors, which are expected to contribute to providing human security, lack the needed capability and resources; thus, stressing the need to rely on state's military power.

Security, State and Military: Challenging the Traditional Nexus

The liberal and cosmopolitan values that give birth to the concept of human security initially aim to shape state's power mobilisation towards the provision of security of the people. However, the application of the concept seems to open up avenues for state's military intervention; sustaining the nature of traditional security as the domain of state's business.

Forms of state intervention occur through two ways. First, when an issue is regarded as a security issue, the language of securitization comes into force. It begins by acknowledging the need to resolve humanitarian crisis: a confirmation of the unfulfilled needs and welfare of the people which threaten the lives of many. When this language of security is employed, it indicates a situation of emergency which should be responded by the state through mobilizing appropriate measures. In Indonesia, two most recent cases unequivocally exemplify this securitizing strategy. In mid-July, President Joko Widodo ordered the Minister of Defence to oversee national food estate program, employing the narrative that [food resilience](#) is a strategic reserve for national defence. Similarly, the handling of Covid-19 in late March also demonstrates a securitizing approach as the government planned to declare a [civil emergency](#) or martial law on the basis that the pandemic has emerged as the form of health insecurity among Indonesians. Hence, while this strategy is in line with the human security agenda which aims to broaden the security threats beyond border and military security, it still sustains the dominant power of state apparatuses.

Second, the weak civil institutions is also perceived as the rationale why government should play a bigger role. When securitization takes place, it confirms the existence of fear in the society towards a particular phenomenon which has to be responded. The escalation of the fear into a sense of insecurity reflects the absence of capable strong institutions to mitigate crisis in

the society. In turn, this situation invites the practice 'big government' to take place, whereby the coercive state instruments through military force are deemed necessary to take the control over. Also due to the state's control over resources and 'social contracts' between citizens and government, the condition of human insecurity and the absence of non-state powers become a site where the state plays the role as the protector of the nation. In the case of food and health security as mentioned above, the attempt for state-led militarization is pursued due to civilians' lack of capability and the perception of the military as the most capable institution to undertake the issue. The deployment of [military personnel](#) in handling the outbreak of Covid-19 in Indonesia, for instance, reinforces the view that the strong coercive measure is required to resolve public health concerns. This further validates that the traditional nexus of state and military in the security sector remain unchallenged.

Beyond Military and Security: In Search for a Possible Alternative

As explained above, the use of 'hard' security measures (deployment of military forces and coercive instruments) has become an unwritten norm when dealing with security issues. It certainly demonstrates that the state views human security issues as the important and urgent crisis requiring serious responses, yet it reflects a number of problems which will need to be reassessed.

The militarization approach has created a space for contestation between human and state security. In the case of war on terrorism, for instance, while countering violent extremism (CVE) measures is vital to address terrorism threats, Human Rights Watch has criticized several potential of [human rights abuse](#) towards terrorism suspects, including lengthy detention periods, limited protection for witnesses, disproportionate surveillance and abuses by military personnel. The strategy aims to protect human beings from the evil of terrorism but at the end the well-beings of the other people need to be sacrificed. Similarly, the plan to adopt martial law in Indonesia to handle Covid-19 also spurred criticism as it boosts army power and increase the risk of upsetting [civil-military relations](#) by the adoption of repressive policies. This further provokes classical questions over "whose security is at stake?" and "who should be protected?".

This debate further reflects the limit of the human security's practicality. It forces the 'compartmentalization' of security, whereby the use of security language automatically invites state and military actors to undertake some sorts of intervention. Then, it is only a matter of the issue escalation for the government to decide whether minimum, partial or maximum degree of militarization is required. The problem is, when the character of 'big government' and 'strong leader' of state and military apparatuses is fortified, it would be a difficult task to play it down and give room for civil institutions to step in.

For many security experts and officials, to prevent state and military's control over security, it is necessary to more deliberately define the situation and consider security issues as working in spectrum. In the sector of food security, for instance, relevant actors need to be more careful in deciding whether an issue should be classified as a need, problem, crisis or security, based on a set of considerable strict conditions. Each term carries different significance and consequence, including the extent to which state actors should be involved. By detaching the word 'security' from any issues, state apparatuses need to be more careful in declaring 'emergency' status; they need to also strongly limit and highly restrict the opportunity for the

involvement of military force in resolving civilian issues. Militarisation – although highly potential resulting from securitisation – should be avoided. This shifting paradigm is also expressed by the call for understanding security as development, welfare, and rights of the people. This shift emphasizes the view that human security will be realized by viewing human beings as subjects who need to be emancipated and liberalized from any sorts of control. Thus, while militarization approach should be placed as the last resort, the empowerment of civil institutions, including non-state actors, should be reinforced. It remains to be seen how non-state and state actors can work in synergy in resolving human security related issues.

Conclusion: Progressing Human Welfare

The paradigm shift, as many argue, is believed to be an answer for flaws of human security concept, both conceptually and contextually. It sets boundaries for what can be labelled ‘security’ and thus, improves the concept’s practicality. Consequently, the clash between human and state security can be prevented as the dominant state’s military power in hard security measures is reduced while non-state actors can be more empowered. However, it also means a total deconstruction of the security concept, as understood by both scholars and practitioners of security. What needs to be made certain, therefore, is that the separation of ‘security’ from the issues of ‘human welfare’ does not restore the traditional binary logic of high and low politics; that the concerns over human welfare is given the same level of significance and that non-military apparatuses working in non-security sector are given a just level of resources and authority.***

Editor-in-Chief

Dwi Ardhanariswari, Ph.D. (riris.sundrijo@ui.ac.id)

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Department of International Relations

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Indonesia

☎ (+62 21)-7873-744 ✉ internationalrelations@ui.ac.id

🌐 www.ir.fisip.ui.ac.id

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🐦 @ir_fisipui

