



Human Security in the Face of Non-Traditional Threats: Redefining Security in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global landscape, non-traditional security threats have become complex challenges that have shifted security focus from state-centered to human-centered approaches. These threats include terrorism, illegal drugs, human trafficking, pandemics, climate change, environmental degradation, global warming, cybercrimes, natural disasters, and more. They are borderless and significantly impact human security, often resulting in complicated casualties. Human security, which emphasizes the protection and promotion of individuals, lies at the heart of security analysis in the 21st century. This paper aims to explore the fundamental nature of human security and non-traditional threats, and how these issues affect people's safety, dignity, and livelihoods.

Introduction

The concept of non-traditional security emerged in the 1980s. It comprises non-military threats to security. Prior, the concept of security was state-centric, which was related to safeguarding the territorial integrity, the maintenance of sovereignty, and the protection of the domestic from external threats. This concept of security dominated security analysis and policymaking up to 1990. However, with time, the concept of security also changed. In modern times, the concept of security has more emphasis on humans rather than on a state. Along with the changing notion of security, there has also been a variation in security threats. There are so many non-traditional security concerns that encompass climate change,



environmental degradation, natural disasters, global pandemics, terrorism, cybercrime, mass migration, human and drug trafficking, etc. They directly affect human lives and pose severe challenges to human existence.

The concept of human security is a broad paradigm that emphasizes the protection of individuals rather than the protection of the borders of a state. The First Human Development Report was published in 1990.¹ This report was prepared by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) adopted these measures and published the first human development report. Mahbub ul Haq in 1995 said, “Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human Dignity. In the last analysis, it is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissent that was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed.”² The UNDP defined human security in 1994 as “Human security can be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from Such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression, and second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life- whether in homes, jobs, or communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development.”³

The concept of human security has been shaped by various factors. Prior, the main indicator of development was economic growth, and development was measured in the form of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, it was not enough because the life of humans was not qualitative enough. Second, People were deprived of basic needs in their lives, which led to internal conflicts in many countries. Third, the concept of globalization emerged in the 1980s, which not only developed the economic liberalization and free flow of goods and services but also increased the cross-national threats like terrorism, human and drug trafficking, global pandemics, migration, etc. Fourth, during the Cold War, the world witnessed so many human intervention missions; these missions were sometimes politically motivated. These missions were mainly deployed for the protection of human rights, which were in danger due to wars, genocides, and internal conflicts. Fifth, Climate change was a serious issue; the report of the Brundtland Commission, The Earth Summit of 1992, also insisted on human development. These factors were mainly responsible for the origin of human security.

In the modern era, non-traditional threats affect human security as follows:

1. Terrorism

The world has witnessed a wide history of terrorism. Every region of the world is facing this security threat from different groups. Hoffman (2013) provides a concise definition of terrorism as the intentional



act of instilling fear through the use or threat of violence to achieve political transformation.⁴ Asian countries are prone to terrorism. In West Asia, terrorism spread rapidly after the formation of Israel on Palestinian land. There are so many active terrorist groups like HAMAS, Hezbollah, Al-Shabaab, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, etc. India is a victim of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism through its agency and support of various organizations. The South Asian region is the worst hit by terrorism. The African continent is also badly affected by terrorism. Burkina Faso became the worst-hit country for the first time.⁵ Due to the advent of globalization, transportation and technological transfer have become so easy. But this transport system was not always used for well-being. The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center was regarded as a sign of the internationalization of terrorism.

Terrorism is a big threat to human survival. Many people lost their lives in the attacks. In 2023, deaths from terrorism increased by 22 percent to 8,352 deaths and are now at their highest level since 2017.⁶ Fidayee terrorists use suicide bombers to attack in densely populated areas. They hijack airplanes. Several incidents have occurred in the last three decades. They used high-technology weapons and became more lethal. Terrorism attacks became more deadly in 2023, with 2.5 deaths per attack compared to 1.6 in 2022.⁷ Terrorists make links for further attacks. In India, sleeper cells are the common link. These are big hurdles for the government to eliminate terrorist groups.

2. Natural Disasters

In the last decades, natural disasters have been seeking attention across the world. Different regions of the world are vulnerable to different kinds of disasters. Such as South Asian countries are prone to tsunamis, Floods, earthquakes, cloud bursts, landslides, etc., while Japan is prone to Tsunamis. Human lives are mostly affected by these disasters. People lack their basic survival needs. They faced a scarcity of food, a shortage of water, and houses. Disasters damage the infrastructure of a country, which is a serious burden for the government. There is a very strong perspective that natural disasters, climate change, and environmental degradation may initiate violent internal and global conflicts. Due to these vulnerabilities, people migrate from one place to another. This displacement can be internal or external. People lose their families, land, and houses, and are compelled to spend their lives in the absence of basic needs. In 2020, Cyclone Samphan displaced nearly 5 million people across India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar, making it one of the largest natural disaster-induced displacements in the world.⁸ A report published by the World Bank in 2018 predicted that by 2050, over 140 million people will migrate from their own countries due to climate change.⁹



Disasters like earthquakes, floods, Tsunamis drought kill 40 to 50 thousand people per year.¹⁰ It is the average of the last few decades. There are some cases in which millions of people were adversely affected by disasters. The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 was one of the biggest calamities of the 21st century. In 2015, A magnitude 7.8 struck Nepal. More than 8,600 people lost their lives, and 19,000 were injured. In February 2024, A massive earthquake hit Turkey, and more than 50 thousand people were killed.¹¹ This shows the serious threats to humans from the disasters. Disasters are the result of climate change and environmental degradation.

3. Pandemic

In the 21st century perception of security has changed. A threat to security doesn't need to be a visible enemy. It can be an invisible enemy, like viruses or bacteria. In 2019, the first case of the COVID-19 pandemic was found in China, and after that, it spread all across the world. It was a fatal virus that resulted in the death of millions of people worldwide. After the COVID-19 pandemic, security analysts were compelled to think about the impact of a pandemic on national security as well. Due to poor health infrastructure in many countries and the unavailability of any cure or medicine, the vulnerability of the pandemic increased. People suffered a lot due to this threat. In India, 5,33,622 deaths were recorded due to COVID-19.¹² After the outbreak of the pandemic, 70110681 people died in the world since April 13, 2024.¹³

But it was not the only pandemic that hit the world hard. The Swine Flu virus spread quickly in April 2009. This caused the death of 5,75,400 people worldwide.¹⁴ This flu attacked children and middle-aged adults. In 2010, this pandemic ended. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) was first detected in the 1980s. In the late 1980s, this virus spread into humans from chimpanzees. As per the WHO reports, 40 million people died due to HIV/AIDS, and 38.4 million people are living with HIV in 2021.¹⁵ The flu pandemic in 1957-58, which was named Asian Flu, resulted in 1.1 million deaths across the world.¹⁶ Pandemics are threats without enemies. These are borderless enemies of humans. It creates obstacles in the development of individuals. To fight against this kind of crisis, we don't need military preparedness; it requires a good health infrastructure. With a proper healthcare system, one nation can't face such a kind of threats.

4. Cyber Crimes

Cybercrime has emerged as a serious threat to human security. Cybercrime may be defined as “any unlawful act where a computer or communication device or computer network is used to commit or



facilitate the commission of a crime.”¹⁷ Cyber Crimes include child pornography, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, job fraud, phishing, hacking, vishing, sexting, smishing, spamming, ransomware, etc. There are no limits to cybercrime. It can happen without any physical touch. Distance doesn't matter in this type of crime. There is no permanent place of work for these criminals. They attack individuals, businessmen, and governments for significant profits.

In this era, everything is dependent upon technology. People rely on technology for their work. As the domain of these advances is increasing, threats are also increasing.

Cybercrimes have a serious impact on individuals. Cyber Crimes by the use of artificial intelligence are a new phenomenon in the 21st century. Recently, we have seen several examples of the misuse of AI, such as deepfake videos of influential personalities.

5. Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking is a serious problem that a nation faces. It is related to the illegal trade of medicines and narcotics that are prohibited. It is a transnational problem.

There is a long chain of smugglers in this domain. It is the biggest illegal trade in the world. The money earned by these drug operators is used in criminal activities like terrorism, black money, etc. These operators create hurdles to the political stability of a country, and they try to influence the policy-making of a state. They tried to corrupt the officials for their own interests. They directly affect human security. Due to this trafficking, violence has increased in some regions. They are also involved in funding terrorist activities. In the world, some regions are specified for drug production, stockpiling, and export. The Golden Crescent, which includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, is famous for illicit opium production. These productions are carried out under the influence of terrorist groups. The Golden Triangle, which encompasses Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, is also famous for opium production. They used this money to purchase weapons.

The illegal trafficking of drugs is a global concern. There is a spillover effect of the illegal activities on the economy, also. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it is a 32-billion-dollar industry.¹⁸ But a limited stress has been placed on this dimension. These drugs are injurious to human health. When people take these substances, people get addicted. To tackle the trafficking, coordination among the countries is required. Countries can exchange data and intelligence about these traffickers. They can assist each other in counter operations. Globally, some conventions have been done on this issue, such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961), the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic



Substances (1988). The SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1990) is one of the major steps taken in the world.

Apart from these factors, several non-traditional security threats adversely affect human security. Such as. Mass migration, proliferation of nuclear weapons, space war, sea level rise, global warming, poverty, hunger, water scarcity, floods, droughts, etc.

Conclusion

In the contemporary era, the concept of security has shifted from traditional to non-traditional security. These are nonmilitary and borderless threats. Now, it is not limited to the state. Its emphasis is more on individuals. Amartya Sen and Mahbub Ul Haq coined the concept of human security, and later, UNDP adopted it and published the Human Development Report. They insisted on socio-economic development, safeguarding individuals from structural violence, health, food, water, and environmental-related issues. The notion of human security lies in the absence of fear, the absence of wants, and the freedom to live in dignity. In the rapidly changing paradigm of security, some major challenges are faced by individuals as well as the state as a whole. Terrorism, drug trafficking, cyber-crimes, pandemics, natural calamities, etc, present significant threats to human existence. Non-state actors are also affecting human security. Psychotropic substances are a serious problem for the youth in the world, as they become addicted to them. Due to natural disasters and pandemics, millions of people have died in the last decades. To tackle these challenges, global efforts are required. Policymaking should be done in a manner that prioritizes the socio-economic development of human beings in this globalized world.

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