With the advancement of modern conflicts, the concept of human security is increasingly taking a role in the protection of citizens and communities. At the various international, national, and grassroots levels, human security is being crafted and defined to help stabilize complex situations. The task of operationalizing human security and creating a usable strategy is currently being pursued by international organizations, state governments, and civil society organizations.

**International Approach to Human Security**

Security, at all levels, is no longer viewed only as the protection of the state, but also refers to the security of individuals. One perspective of human security sees security as rooted from the inability to deal with the insecurities and violence occurring in complex conflict situations. While traditional wars are on the decline, modern violent conflicts frequently blur the line between combatant and civilian. Human security operates within cross-cutting threats to the lives of individuals in response to violence or natural disaster; their livelihood through access to education, food, water, or employment; and their dignity of human rights, identity, and respect.

While no concrete or legal definition of human security exists, at the international level the United Nations has focused on human security through the development of norms, such as the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P), the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), and a Human Security Unit within the Secretariat.

International organizations, such as the UN, are promoting a common understanding of human security as well as standards for practice. One common standard envisaged is an absence of
force in protecting individuals, managed through a civilian peacekeeping force. A rethinking of security would place civilian peacekeepers as a stronger part of the military and promote greater engagement in the political aspects of a conflict. Ideally, such a force would be led by those who understand the politics and culture of the local context. Such a ‘civilian force’, including judges, police, and humanitarian actors, would work to stabilize a situation through nonviolent means, rather than use violence in search for the ‘enemy’.

National and Private Industry Approach to Human Security

There exists a dichotomy of paradigms in the security structure: national security and human security. Within national security resides a state-centric focus on threats to territory and national borders. Threats to the state are met with the use of military force. Human security, on the other hand, aims at protecting individuals first. It is widely viewed as an individual-centric approach that recognizes threats other than just states, such as non-state actors, environmental degradation, and, importantly, the indirect effects of conflict such as poverty and unemployment.

National governments and private enterprise are recognizing that direct threats to the state are not always the center of concern in complex conflict situations. Rather development issues, poverty, social injustice, addressing grievances, and the influence of non-state actors require a human-centered security approach. Human security is not an add-on to national defense strategy. Rather it is a psychological approach in order to view the ‘enemy’ as a fellow human being. The mentality of combatants is as important as the economic or material considerations in a conflict.

In reaction to the security situations in Iraq, General David Petraeus of the United States Army placed local security stations throughout Baghdad, facilitating some forms of human security. However, this practice did not develop further. The traditional exercise of targeting terrorists through violent means has endangered civilians, rather than creating security. The counterinsurgency (COIN) used in Afghanistan and Iraq could be considered human security, but COIN is an operation and not a strategy. Counterinsurgency used by the United States military is not an end in itself and thus cannot truly be considered human security.

Liberia has presented a case study of private industry operating based on a human security strategy. The question was posed how to transform the security sector, military and police, from a symbol of terror to instruments of democracy (e.g. how to make a child no longer run away from a policeman and make them comfortable with the police for protection).

DynCorp International, a private security company, conducted training and demobilization in Liberia. Outsourcing these security services was described as freeing up the operation from the restrictive bureaucratic nature of the Departments of Defense and State. While complicating matters of responsibility and the state’s monopoly on the use of violence, it gave the contractors
more mobility to conduct their mission. In this case, DynCorp chose to align its training content more closely with that of the human security approach.

Approaches taken by the DynCorp contractors in the Liberia, including aspects of DDR and SSR, encompassed cultural sensitivity, inclusive planning while dealing with spoilers, demobilizing the military and maintaining their dignity, human rights vetting when hiring police and military, including women in the armed forces, the exclusion of heavy weapons in the army, an all-volunteer force, and the development of a transparent ombudsman. The role of non-state actors, such as DynCorp and other private organizations, in the protection of individuals and communities demonstrates the multi-dimensional environment of human security.

Civil Society Approach to Human Security

Civil society organizations have noticed a contradiction in perception on security and human security. They feel the need to take control of the dialogue on these issues. Civil society actors attempt to inject a new narrative with key stakeholders in conflicts, especially concerning the process and framing of security, and thus advancing the principles of human security. However, the frequent framing of specific actors affects the engagement of a particular situation and leaves scarce room for dialogue. For instance, the effort by military forces against Al Shabaab in Somalia has created a frame of terrorism and hence blocks possibilities for discussion between parties on human security.

In response to the dichotomous discourse between national security and human security, civil society believes that human security guarantees national security. Civil society and non-state actors play a role in this respect, as the growing instances where the state can no longer provide sufficient protection against imminent threats. Nevertheless, an issue for civil society continues to be operationalizing a strategy in promoting human security in the face of the state’s monopoly on violence as well as the state’s use of violence against citizens. Civil society, without claiming a solution, provides a complementary role to identify policy space in which to lobby for political dialogue on a multi-dimensional stage with international organizations, governments, and civil society organizations. Examples of this can be seen in regional intergovernmental bodies such as the Organization of American States, ASEAN, the African Union, and ECOWAS that can bring together multiple stakeholders for a broader dialogue on human security in a sensitive conflict situation.

Conclusions

The driving forces of globalization, modern violent conflicts, and growing democratization have increased the necessity for operationalizing human security and to develop the concept further in theory and practice. A profound shift in security is needed from national and territorial priorities towards stabilization and individual security. A glimpse of this shift was witnessed in the
protection of civilians in Benghazi, Libya, where NATO forces used air strikes to prevent the army from attacking the city. However, this still depended on the use of air strikes and left no room for dialogue or a civilian led operation.

With regards to peacebuilding, human security can aid societal recovery from conflict, strengthen inclusiveness and reconciliation through an individual, people-centered approach, and increase the role of local actors and community efforts. Furthermore, a human security strategy denies armed groups the popular support that fuels their campaign and violence. Focusing on the individuals impacted by the turmoil of war, human security promotes development goals and supports local communities during violent conflict situations.