Human Security & Taiwan's Roles in International Community

By Mignonne CHAN

This article attempts to revisit the concept of "human security," including its critique, evolution and revitalization, as well as to assess Taiwan's potential roles in the deliberation of safeguarding human security.

Human Security Merits Revisit

Today, human beings within many nations are vulnerable to many threats such as external economic shocks, infectious diseases, terrorist attacks, cyber intrusion, weapons of mass destruction, and climate change-related calamities. The world is now recovering from the economic downturn since the collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. in 2008. While alleviating the ripple effects of the financial crisis and sustaining stimulus packages for continuous economic growth are high on the road map to recovery, international collaboration is indispensable for mutual prosperity. Despite rhetorical pledges of cooperation, protectionism and trade wars remain rampant, with unemployment and lack of social safety nets threatening people's livelihoods.

It is timely to revisit the concept of human security when fundamental approaches to problem solving, conflict resolution and international cooperation are being explored. To maintain peace, prosperity and security, we need more innovative ways to identify problems, analyze various options and exert political will to implant optimal sustainable development.

Certainly, there is a sense of insecurity, but its derivation depends on the beholder. Some see insecurity coming from a sudden loss of guarantee of access to jobs, health care, social welfare, education and so on. Others perceive insecurity stemming from violations of human rights, extremism, domestic violence, the spread of conflict, displacement, infringement of privacy, denial of information access, etc. Therefore, security needs to be redefined as a subjective experience at the micro level in terms of people's own experiences.

Human Security: Paradigm Shift on Concept, Scope & Linkages

Global security issues have long transcended the traditional boundary of national security, encompassing human security where the unit of analysis is individuals rather than nations. In essence, the concept of human security connotes a people-centered, rather than nation-centered, approach to national, regional and global security.
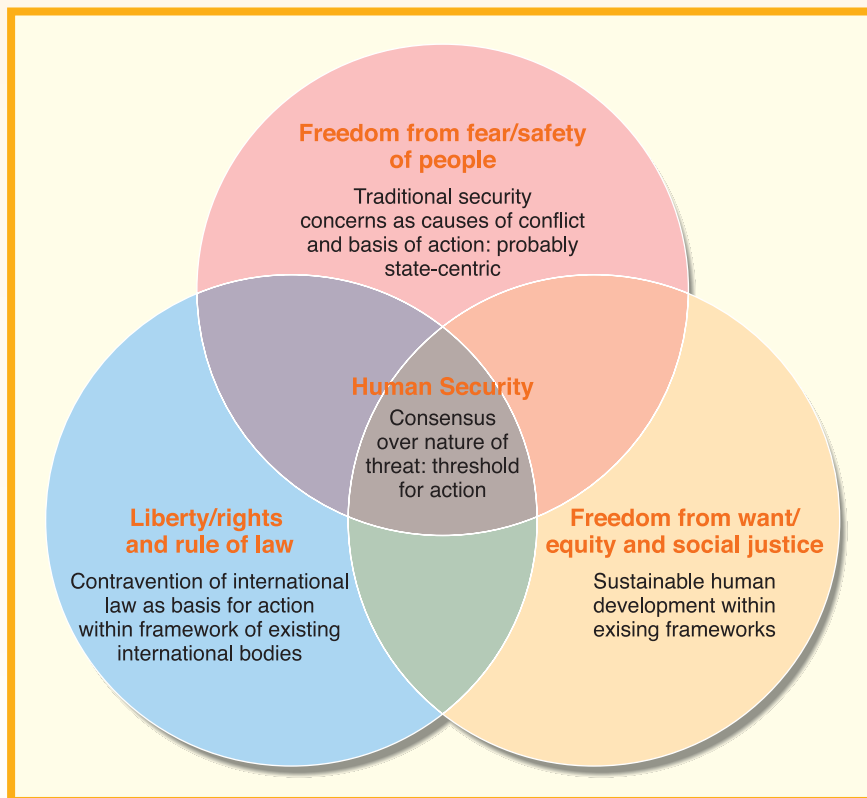
The 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) (UNDP, 1994) maintains that human security requires attention to both "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," which fundamentally link security and development issues together. The report also suggests that the scope of human security covers seven broad areas:

1. Economic security, which requires an assured basic income so as to counter poverty;
2. Food security, which requires assurance of physical and economic access to basic food to prevent hunger and famine; people should be entitled to food, by self-production, purchase or acquisition from a public food distribution system;
3. Health security, which requires access to health care and health services – including safe and affordable family planning – so as to be exempt from injury and disease;
4. Environmental security, which requires a healthy physical environment so as to minimize the negative impacts of pollution, deforestation, desertification, salinization, environmental degradation, natural hazards (e.g. cyclones, earthquakes, floods, droughts or landslides) and man-made catastrophes (e.g. due to road or nuclear accidents or poorly built slum buildings);
5. Personal security, which requires measures to fend off violence and threats of all sorts. There is growing violence from sudden, unpredictable acts (physical torture of sorts), threats from other states such as wars, threats from international or cross-border terrorism, threats from other groups of people such as ethnic or religious conflicts, threats from individuals or gangs against other individuals or street violence, from hostage-taking, threats directed against women and children, threats to one's self, such as suicides or drug abuse, and infringement of personal privacy;
6. Community security, which requires security from oppressive traditional practices, and threats to the integrity of cultural diversity. It is unacceptable to treat women harshly or to discriminate against ethnic or indigenous groups and refugees via group rebellions and armed conflicts;
7. Political security, which requires respect for human rights, protection from military dictatorship and abuse, and from political or state repression so as to denounce the practice of torture, ill treatment or disappearance, and political detention and imprisonment.

The UNDP's human development approach to human security not only focused on the gross violations of human rights, armed conflicts and natural disasters, but also encompassed a wider scope of underdevelopment: inequality, public health, international crime, population growth and environmental degradation.

After a decade, by the end of 2005, two documents had been published to clarify human security threats and what the international community should do about them. One was a report from the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which was

Human security as nexus among safety, rights & equity

Source: *"Human Security," Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, p56*

ereignty of other states and internally to respect the dignity and basic rights of all people within the state. Second, it redefined intervention as action taken against a state or leader, with or without its consent, for purposes which are claimed to be humanitarian or protective. Intervention may be preventive or reactive measures and is conditioned by the responsibility to rebuild. Post-intervention obligations include peace building, justice and reconciliation, security, development, local ownership and limits to occupation.

The report does not justify intervention in the name of human security. Rather, it identified six criteria to justify military intervention: the right authority (endorsed by the UN Security Council), a just cause such as large-scale loss of life or large-scale ethnic cleansing, the right intervention to halt or avert large-scale human suffering, carried out as a last resort, with proportional means and reasonable prospects of success.

The April 2003 Report of the Global Commission on Human Security titled *"Human Security Now"* argued for human security as public good to be provided by states and communities rather than through military intervention by the international community.

titled *"A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility,"* and the other was a reform agenda proposed by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in *"Towards All Freedom."* The former identified threats by six clusters: (1) economic and social threats, (2) inter-state conflict and rivalry, (3) internal violence, (4) nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons, (5) terrorism, and (6) transnational organized crime. In addition to the recognition of the threats, it also identified interconnections: poverty, infectious disease and war, correlating one another in a deadly cycle. The latter aimed at restoring UN credibility and relevance by underscoring the linkages between human rights, development and security as three imperatives that reinforce each other.

Calming Fear of Carte Blanche for Intervention

As research on human security by Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy points to the fact that one of the most salient critiques of a human security approach, in particular when advocated by states on behalf of the peoples of other states, becomes a fear of intervention.

A commission report in 2001, *"Responsibility to Protect,"* has had some distinct impacts. First, it redefined the meaning of sovereignty to include dual responsibility – externally to respect the sov-

Human Security as APEC's Key Agenda

In their November 2009 declaration in Singapore, leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum reaffirmed the importance of enhancing human security and reducing the threat of disruptions to business and trade in sustaining economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. APEC work in areas such as trade security, aviation security, anti-terrorist protection of energy infrastructure, countering terrorism financing, fighting cyber terrorism, protecting food supply against terrorist contamination and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and infectious diseases all point to capacity-building efforts in public-private partnership.

This year, Japan is hosting a series of APEC meetings. We expect a successful conclusion on various issues and topics, including human security.

Taiwan's Roles in Safeguarding Human Security

Taiwan, under President Ma Ying-jeou's leadership, has been committed to safeguarding human security by unilateral, bilateral and multilateral actions. Unilaterally, the Ma administration has

been enforcing "flexible diplomacy," which put to rest the ill-faith competition with mainland China for diplomatic allies. To ensure personal liberty, President Ma has signed two human rights-related UN conventions, namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Currently, Taiwan is devoted to establishing a green industrial structure and creating a low-carbon society. Having suffered from earthquakes and typhoons, Taiwan also stands ready to provide rescue teams and disaster relief assistance.

Bilaterally, the cross-strait relationship with mainland China has been in steady progress based on the "92 Consensus" that entails "One China, each with its own interpretation." Ours, the Republic of China, was founded in 1911, and theirs, the People's Republic of China, was founded in 1949. By mutual non-denial, we have chosen the path to sideline the contention, reckon the reality, stake a win-win relationship and create a

Taiwan's rescue team evacuates a security guard at the UN peacekeeping mission's police dormitory after five days of burial under the rubble in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Jan. 19, 2010.

better future. This non-confrontational approach aims to enhance human security, and this outcome-oriented approach to normalize the cross-strait relations has delivered 12 agreements with mainland China, which cover tourism, charter flights, air and sea transport links, postal services, food safety, regular flights, financial cooperation, joint combat against crime, mutual judicial collaboration, agricultural quarantine & inspection, standardization & accreditation and fishing crew affairs. These moves highlight our government's commitments to "Taiwan's interests and people's welfare," with the underlined essence of human security.

Multilaterally, our commitment to safeguard domestic and global human security has also opened up new channels for Taiwan's participation in global issues of concern. In May 2009, after years of persistence and aspiration, Taiwan earned substantial support from mainland China's goodwill and the international community and was invited to attend the World Health Assembly as an observer. This earmarked a small step toward the world's patching up a missing loop in health security. Furthermore, in APEC, we co-hosted a symposium with mainland China on "emergency preparedness" in 2008, and a joint APEC project in 2009 on "paperless trade."

We will continue to pursue our expanding roles in the global community in consultation with and in accordance with the pace and level of comfort of all concerned parties. Taiwan's participation in international organizations rests on the approach to human security, which highlights the people-centered, rather than nation-focused, safeguards of safety, liberty and equity. This year, we aspire to par-

ticipate in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change so as to acquire access to real-time information in the climate change adaptation mechanism. Furthermore, we also aspire to participate in the International Civil Aviation Organization so as to comply with evolving aviation standards and security. Nations need not fear the controversy over national sovereignty, and could nurture innovative approaches to safeguard human security. We believe that our presence in the international community would serve as living evidence of a concerted devotion to human security, worthy of its underlying mandate – people's expectation for being exempted from threats, a wider scope of development and shared responsibility.

In conclusion, with the current dynamics of the cross-strait relations, Taiwan is more in tune with the world's expectation of resolving conflicts by confidence-building dialogue and contributing to regional stability. Taiwan cannot evade its responsibility in the global security chain, which includes economic prosperity, trade and investment flow, health alerts, food safety, air and maritime security, financial stability, energy security, and sustainable development. Taiwan needs the world, and the world needs Taiwan. We are here to contribute with our goodwill, and to learn from others' role models. **JS**

Note: The author's next *Asian View* column will be carried in the September/ October issue.

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