

NATIONAL SECURITY VS HUMAN SECURITY: A CONCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICTING NARRATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST*

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Distinctions between three concepts may be helpful at the outset: national security, state security and government security. National security usually pertains to protection and promotion of vital national interests. It is exclusively in the hands of governments and normally deals with issues relating to sovereignty, territorial integrity, acts of terrorism and alike. As such it concerns threats that appear to challenge the supremacy of the state. Generally the source of such threats are located, or perceived to be, outside the borders of the state. It is the ultimate justification for acts otherwise deemed unjustified. It should, however, be noted that in the absence of a *nation* it may be difficult or perhaps impertinent to talk of national security; different modalities of community formation such as tribalism may well stand in the way of that.

State security, however, concerns itself with threats to the legal entity of the state. To illustrate the difference between national and state security – blurred most of the time and perhaps even indistinguishable from one another – the bedrock of national security – theoretically speaking - could be a sense of duty to the nation emanating from strong nationalism. State security on the other hand can rise out of patriotism that asks for protecting the attributes of the state in particular its territorial integrity. Lastly government security deals with protecting the government, or the ruling elite, in the name of national or state security. In this instance government assumes the mantle of statehood itself rather than a mere representation of it.

Human security, however, concerns itself with the attributes of security in its broadest terms that affect the individual as opposed to the nation or the state. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive and could in fact be complementary depending on the kind of regime in power in any given state. The UNDP in 1998 refers to human security as an “essential dimension of human development” and defines it as protection from “such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression...from sudden and hurtful disruptions in people’s daily lives – in the home, workplace and community.” Commission on Human Security (established in 2001) argues that “human security is mostly concerned with removing various hindrances that restrain and restrict human lives and prevent its

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blossoming...with growth and equity, whereas human security goes beyond that and takes into consideration the insecurities that threaten human survival or the safety of daily life, or imperil the natural dignity of men and women, or expose human beings to the uncertainty of disease and pestilence, or subject vulnerable people to abrupt penury related to economic downturns...human security demands protection from these dangers and the empowerment of people so that they can cope with – and when possible overcome these hazards.”

In other words human security means protecting fundamental freedoms and using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations; it aims to create political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity. Accordingly human security is normally associated with the domestic conditions of the state.

The Arab Human Development Report for 2009 outlined seven dimensions of human security: people and their environment, state and its insecure people, vulnerability of those lost from sight (women, children, displaced persons and the like), hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, health security challenges, volatile growth, high unemployment and persisting poverty. More than half the Arab world are under 26 years old and one in every seven is out of work. Also one in every five earns less than \$5 a day. In 2004 King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia actually stated that income per capita had actually fallen in Arab countries in the last 20 years. The obvious absentee from the list of human security dimensions, however, was the physical threats to security of different kinds.

Therefore the link between national security and human security and their increasing interdependence can be clearly noted. The Arab regimes of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were not toppled due to failures in national security measures but rather due to shortcomings in providing for human security of their people. The same goes for the ousting of Mr. Saleh in Yemen and the brutal repression, killing and the carnage in Syria. **Looking after human security (the people) is more pressing and more urgent in the Middle East than paying attention to national security (perceived foreign enemies).**

Instances that support the above statements can be found in the post-Mubarak Egypt, where despite a majority vote to annul the peace treaty with Israel that has not taken place. Egyptians seem more concerned with their human security issues. Also in Syria, the Assad regime took thousands of Palestinians to the Golan Height in a political gesture to divert attention from internal human security issues to outside national security ones. The attempt was an utter failure as the old doctrine of trying to dilute internal dissent in foreign conflict failed to operate. In all the elections held in the North African countries in the past year or so, unlike President Putin’s campaign in 2012, anti-Western messages have

been scant in trying to attract voters. More attention has instead been paid to domestic affairs.

Islamist Security

Surprisingly we may be witnessing a widening gap between Islamist politics and the general public in Muslim countries. There are several indicators for that. First was the absence of a wide-spread protest after the killing of bin-Laden by US Marines. Second is the lack of an overriding push to implement *shari'a*, the legal code of Islam, in the liberated countries of the Arab Spring. Lastly, there has been a conspicuous absence of huge anti-Western campaigns by Islamists in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya or Yemen. Of course one reason for people's disillusionment with politicized Islam could be the spectacular failure of political Islam wherever it has been practiced including Sudan and Afghanistan.

However, that should not be taken to mean Muslims do not wish to feel secure in their identity, much of which may emanate from their faith. Islamism (religious fanaticism) may have become less attractive but Islam and Islamic way of life have certainly not. Traditional Islam may ultimately triumph over the competing radical versions of the religion. The victory of Islamic/ist parties to varying degrees means their input into politics and society will be tangible and durable at least for a while. The politics of coalition, however, will force even the hardest of Islamists to moderate their policies if they wish to hold on to power; something they have universally and consistently shown an inclination for. In the unfailing words of Bernard Lewis, a man I usually find myself in disagreement with, the doctrine of many Islamists remains 'one man, one vote, only once.'