



# Shifting Terms and Concepts: From Defence to (Human) Security

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## Introduction

Over the last two decades, the concepts of defence and security have overlapped to the point where the former is merged with the latter. Since jihadist terrorism broke out at the dawn of the millennium, governments have been forced to review the classic paradigm according to which the military is employed in overseas operations—or the defence of the homeland from external enemies—and police and law enforcement agencies are tasked with internal security. In such a context, the military has taken on an increasing role in national security matters, although security itself is an umbrella concept under development that currently includes such cross-cutting topics as terrorism, cyber threats, health, food, energy, the economy, poverty, climate change, information technology, social security, job security, just to mention a few. The inclination to replace the idea of defence with security has contributed to the expansion of the idea of security itself. This way, defence activities abroad, such as military assistance to Ukraine in the context of the ongoing conflict with Russia, are presented to the public as "security" operations.

## The UN concept

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) *Human Development Report 1994* conceptualised "human security" over seven pillars: economic security, food security, environmental security, personal security, health security, community security and political security. Such concept of human security embraces the idea that security cannot be achieved only through state security and military means, but also through providing security to the population [See Figure A].

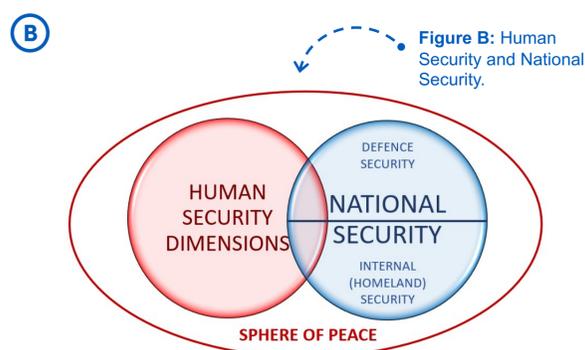


Source: Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland.

UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 66/290 of 25 Oct. 2012 endorses the UNDP concept of 1994 but concludes that the notion of human security is distinct from the responsibility to protect and its implementation, and that human security does not entail the threat or the use of force or coercive measures neither replaces State security and is based on national ownership [See Figure B].

Therefore, in the assessment of State security and human security, priority is often given to the former.

The debate is framed in the broader discussion on and around the dichotomy/overlapping concept of defence and security as they are shaped in recent time also by the NATO (Marsili, 2021).



Source: Tayo Aduloju (2016), *Sustainable solutions for peace and human security*, 21<sup>st</sup> Nigerian Economic Summit, slide 7.

## The NATO approach

The NATO's human security approach is drawn from that of the United Nations. The NATO introduced the concept of human security at the 2016 Warsaw Summit (§132), further stressed it at the 2019 London Leaders' Meeting (§6), at the 2021 Brussels Summit (§60), and at the 2022 Madrid Summit (§13). Subsequently, for the first time the NATO Strategic Concept 2022 has emphasised the high importance of human security. The Approach and Guiding Principles on human security of the Alliance (§6) recall UNGA A/RES/66/290.

## Data analysis

The author of this work has checked the multi-sectoral approach to security outlined by the UN and the NATO against commonly accepted versions of human security through a comparative study of the definitions provided by well-established and reputable dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster*, *Britannica*, *Collins*, *Oxford*, *Cambridge*, *Longman*, and *Macmillan*.

Such dictionaries provide similar definitions of the term "security": safety; safety from attack, harm, or damage; freedom from danger or threat; freedom from fear or anxiety; being safe and free from worry; being protected or safe from harm. Security is the protection from, or resilience against, the potential harm caused by others by restricting one's freedom to act.

## Conclusions

The human security approach broadens the scope of security analysis and policy from the traditional notion of national security to the security of people and their complex social and economic interactions.

The term "defence", is given as a synonym of "security" by the majority of these dictionaries (*Merriam-Webster*, *Cambridge*, *Oxford*, *Collins*), even though *Britannica* and *Macmillan* continue to be anchored to the dichotomy of defence/external and security/internal, respectively, by providing the words "national security" and "internal security", is evidence of this trend.

The evolving concept of security must be scrutinised, with special attention paid to the notion of human security, boosted by UN General Assembly resolution 66/290 and the NATO Strategic Concept 2022, and currently under investigation by the Exploratory Team of the NATO Science and Technology Organization.

So far, the meaning of "human security" remains unclear.

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