Briefing

Human Security and the Integrated Review

Human security puts the protection and wellbeing of people at the heart of security policy. Unlike the dominant National Security approach, which prioritises the protection of national territory, government, citizens and commerce against militarised threats, it takes a broad approach to preventing, transforming and mitigating threats ranging from violent conflict to climate breakdown, pandemic disease, economic crisis and political oppression. It prioritises international cooperation for tackling the transnational challenges that undermine the shared security of humanity, rather than competitive national strategies.

The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy was launched by the PM in February 2020 and its published report, _Global Britain in a Competitive Age_, was released on 16 March 2021. The Review's stated goal was 'to set the long-term strategic aims of our international policy and national security, rooted in our national interests, so that our activity overseas delivers for the British people.' Unlike strategic reviews in 2010 and 2015, the Integrated Review has not obviously produced a National Security Strategy. It is more a strategic framework to guide the UK's international policy and from which other strategies will be developed.

What is Human Security?

Human security is an approach that puts the experience and wellbeing of the individual at the centre of security policy. In broader application, since all humans are parts of humanity, the **shared security** of the global population is also of central concern. And since humanity depends on the health of its planet, so too is ecological or **planetary security**. As such, human security is intrinsically concerned with defending people against such potentially catastrophic threats as climate breakdown, pandemics and economic collapse as well as war and violence.

Human security came to prominence in 1994 when it was championed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its annual report on human development. It began as an effort to move away from the dominant 'national security' approach of competing states and geopolitical blocs and to present a framework for understanding what security might mean for individuals. It aimed to stimulate ideas of how security practice and resources could be reshaped and redirected to promote wellbeing as much as provide protection. It broke security down into seven categories: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.

Subsequently, the concept was developed by the UN and through an independent Commission on Human Security sponsored by Japan. It was broadly endorsed by the UN World Summit in 2005 and gained a universally accepted definition in the UN General Assembly Resolution 66/290 of 2012. It has since been central to a number of UN-developed policy frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as being officially embraced by the EU (including its 2016 Global Strategy), Canada, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

Human security aims to reconcile the international system's responsibility for security, development and human rights. As such, it is sometimes framed around three types of freedom that the UN and national governments should uphold:

- **Freedom from fear** – including protection from violence and its threatened use, as well as from the existential threats of weapons of mass destruction, and climate and ecological collapse;

- **Freedom from want** – including provision of decent food, housing and healthcare, and freedom from other forms of physical deprivation;
- **Freedom from indignity** – including from human rights abuses and other forms of humiliation, such as autocratic rule and racial, religious or sexual discrimination.

It places a heavy emphasis on **long-termism** in policy-making to address and transform the deep roots of conflict, marginalisation and environmental challenges. As such, it is very much focused on **conflict and crisis prevention**. **Cooperation**, domestically and internationally, is also central to human security. Cooperation in one sphere is likely to build mutual confidence towards resolving other security challenges.

Does the Integrated Review or previous strategies address Human Security?

The first three UK national security strategies (2008, 2010, 2015) do not provide adequate definitions of what 'security' means or for whom it is provided. None uses the term 'human security'. The 2015 Review has 'Protect our People' as one of its three National Security Objectives, including protecting 'our territory, economic security, infrastructure and way of life'. Actions under this objective were overwhelmingly concerned with military defence, counter-terrorism, counter-espionage and combating organised and cyber-crime.

This is striking as Public Health (primarily infectious disease and antimicrobial resistance) and Major Natural Hazards (mainly flooding) were rated as two of the six Tier One Priority Risks assessed by the 2015 National Security Risk Assessment on which the Strategy was based. However, they were given far lower priority in terms of responses and resourcing than comparable militarised threats. Climate change was mentioned often but as a long-term concern primarily affecting coastal flooding and the stability of societies in the Global South. Environmental or ecological security was not referenced.

Unlike its predecessors, the Integrated Review does define security and for whom it is provided, albeit in a rather narrow sense: "the protection of our people, territory, critical national infrastructure, democratic institutions and way of life." (p.13) Unusually, Security is described as one of three "interests of the British people", alongside their Sovereignty (democratic and individual rights and liberties) and Prosperity (economic and social well-being).

In its introduction (p.12) the Integrated Review states that, "This means tackling the priority issues – health, security, economic well-being and the environment – that matter most to our citizens in their everyday lives. In the years ahead, our national security and international policy must do a better job of putting the interests and values of the British people at the heart of everything we do." However, the rest of the document is concerned with maximising UK influence and 'strategic advantage' within an increasingly competitive state system, as per previous strategies. Tackling climate change and health security appear at the end of the Review as components of building resilience at home and overseas.

Is 'Human Security' used differently by the military?

During the 2010s the term 'human security' began to be used by the UK military in relation to its own activities *during* armed conflict. It first began to use the term in peacekeeping operations in 2014, offering advice and training on international humanitarian law around treatment of civilians, women and children. Human security became increasingly conjoined with the military application of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including responding to sexual violence in conflict, which was a priority of the 2010-15 coalition government.

More recently, human security has also broadly been used by the MoD in lieu of or interchangeably with the concept of Protection of Civilians (PoC) in armed conflict. PoC has had a separate, [parallel development](#) to human security since the late 1990s, again led by the UN but focused on the role and responsibilities of military actors. This is sometimes referred to as a 'narrow' definition of human security. Practitioners differ on whether the two approaches are complementary or in competition.

In April 2019 the MoD officially established a Centre of Excellence on Human Security to provide training and guidance to UK and foreign personnel. The UK is thus unusual in having "the first military in the world to have a dedicated national defence policy on Human Security" ([MoD, 2019](#)), even though that policy appears to be very different from the 'broad' preventative, civilian actor-focused concept of human security developed and endorsed by the UN.

The Integrated Review and Human Security: Questions for the Government

The Integrated Review contains a number of omissions, inconsistencies and contradictions in terms of HMG's approach to international policy and national security. Useful questions which might be asked of the Government from the perspective of increasing human security include the following:

1. **How will the Government monitor and evaluate whether its actions are delivering the intended impacts of the Integrated Review?** The Review is very light on definitions and details, including of its intended beneficiaries, and would benefit from a clear framework of intended outcome against which progress could be objectively measured. This was a criticism levelled at the 2015 strategy, which the government addressed in its subsequent annual progress reports via an Annex of 89 Principal Commitments made. An elaborated version of this operational plan with specific, measurable targets should accompany the Integrated Review.

2. **How has the Government prioritised risks within the Integrated Review and on what basis has it allocated resources to countering or mitigating them?** Previous security strategies were transparent about which risks (high impact and/or high probability) they prioritised, using a tiers system based on the National Security Risk Assessment. This is not the case in the Integrated Review. The Government should state clearly its prioritisation of risks it has assessed based on their impact on human security. It should also explain how it has mapped the long-term resourcing of its priority actions against these identified risks with particular emphasis on climate change & biodiversity loss and global public health.

3. **How will the Government resolve conflicts between its professed values and principles, including promoting human rights and tackling corruption, and its prosperity agenda?** This is particularly relevant in terms of trade with and arms exports to authoritarian regimes and the facilitation of tax-evasion and money laundering via the UK, its overseas territories and crown dependencies. The Review is silent on both issues. A values-driven foreign policy should suppose that principles precede profit but this has not been standard practice in the past. A clear statement on prioritisation is therefore required.

4. **Will the Government commit to a broader national dialogue on human security and well-being?** The Integrated Review should be considered part of an ongoing conversation between people and government on what can maximise their security, resilience and happiness. Mechanisms for ongoing societal consultation with all sectors of the UK's population should be elaborated as a key output of the Review.

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Further Information and Action

A **Westminster Hall debate** on Global Human Security is scheduled for 11.25am on Tuesday 13 April 2021. MPs representing at least seven parties have requested to speak. Wera Hobhouse MP is debate sponsor. James Cleverley MP, Minister of State in the FCDO, will give the government's response.

An **Early Day Motion** (#1384) on Human Security and the Integrated Review was tabled on 20 Jan 2021. The motion's text is:

> "That this House welcomes the upcoming Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy; notes with concern the changing nature of global threats to the UK, including irreversible climate change, emerging artificial intelligence and the risk of increased frequency and size of global pandemics; highlights that many of these threats could cause far greater disruption to the lives of UK citizens than traditional military threats; emphasises that unforeseen developments of this nature can occur at pace and must be pre-emptively addressed; believes that the Integrated Review is an opportunity to reframe the UK's approach to defence and security to ensure future generations are protected; and calls on the Government to champion an inclusive, positive vision of global and local security."

About Rethinking Security

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and campaigners with expertise in peacebuilding, conflict and security research, disarmament and demilitarisation.[1] We have a shared concern that the current approach to national security in the UK and beyond often hampers efforts for peace, justice and ecological sustainability. We are committed to building a much richer understanding of what security really means, and of what is required to build sustainable security.

Beginning in March 2021 we will be conducting a three-year **Alternative Security Review** for the UK with the objective of changing the way that UK security policy is generated, based on an approach that promotes peace, human wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

For more on Rethinking Security, its work and engagement with the Integrated Review, see our website or contact our Coordinator, Richard Reeve: Richard@rethinkingsecurity.org.u*k*

Our submission to the Integrated Review (Sept 2020) contains further detail on our proposed approach to security strategies.

Our report, Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American Security Strategies (March 2018) compares how the UK and 19 peer states approach security in their national strategies.

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[1] Rethinking Security's organisational members include Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, International Alert, Medact, Movement for the Abolition of War, Northern Friends Peace Board, Peace Direct, Quaker Peace And Social Witness, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Saferworld, Scientists for Global Responsibility, United Nations Association – UK, and War on Want.