Introduction

Many international and national developments that took place in the last quarter of the 20th century have highlighted the need for revising the concept of national security, and going beyond the state-centred approach. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, considered the most momentous event in international politics since the end of World War II, has, in turn, marked the end of the post-War phase in international politics. The resurgence of ethnicity in many parts of the world and the intensity of internal ethnic conflicts associated with secessionist political projects question the very basis of the 'modern state system' that took the state-nation link as its theoretical raison d'être from its inception. During the Cold War, military threats to national security formed the core of the newly shaped academic discipline of security studies. The early theoretical orientations of the discipline of security studies were developed in the USA in connection with the ideological confrontation with the former Soviet Union in geopolitical discourse during the Cold War. The challenge in the changed international and national context today is how to reconfigure the concept of national security not only to incorporate non-military security threats but also to bring other non-state references of security to give a human face to the phenomenon of security.

Against such a background, the present work intends to reconfigure the security problematic of Sri Lanka from the perspective of the human security framework. How can one understand the evolving security architecture and strategic trajectories in Sri Lanka in the coming decades of the 21st century? In order to address this question an integrated approach that would necessarily locate the present crisis of the Sri Lankan state on a broad politico-historical canvas while tracing the interaction between internal dynamics and global level developments set in motion by the process of globalisation is essential. The changed security architecture and strategic environment of Sri Lanka in the 21st century should be understood in relation to the fundamental
changes in the perception of threat in terms of agency and scope. The changed perception of threat is directly related to the crisis of the post-colonial Sri Lankan state and the evolving theoretical discourse on human security. As defined by Foucault, discourse is understood not simply as a linguistic performance. It is a process which mobilises norms, rules, codes and procedures to assert a particular understanding through the construction of ‘knowledge’ within the parameters set forth by these codes and procedures.

Many of the shortcomings of the traditional concept of security which focuses more on states rather than people have been emphasised with the unfolding of the détente relationship between the Superpowers and, more importantly, with the surfacing of new forms of security predicaments in the Third World. Some of those who worked within the conventional paradigm of security subsequently came forward to underline the need for broadening the focus of security studies. In his review article on Security Studies and the end of the Cold War, David A. Baldwin observes, “Proposal for expanding the focus of security studies have been advanced by numerous scholars, including Ullman, Buzan, Haftendorn, Kolodziej, and Kegley. Recognising that threats to national survival or well-being are not confined to the military realm, these proposals expand the notion of security threats to include such matters as human rights, the environment, economics epidemics, crime and social injustice.”

The theoretical genesis of the concept of human security can be traced in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiatives. In 1994 UNDP in its annual *Human Development Report* formally presented the concept of human security to integrate security with people rather than territories. It identified two major components of human security: freedom from fear and freedom from want. The *Human Development Report-1994* focuses on four essential characteristics of human security:

1) “Human security is a universal concern. It is relevant to people everywhere, in rich nations and poor.”

2) “The components of human security are interdependent. When the security of people is endangered anywhere in the world, all nations are likely to get involved. Famine, disease, pollution, drug trafficking, terrorism, ethnic disputes and social disintegration are no longer isolated events, confined within national borders. Their consequences travel the globe.”

---

3) “Human security is easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention. It is less costly to meet the threats upstream than downstream.”

4) “Human security is people-centred. It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to markets and social opportunities.”

Since the publication of the Human Development Report-1994 the concept of human security has become the main guide to UN initiatives. In 1999, Kofi Annan emphasised the need to embrace human security as a strategic guide to action. Canada, Japan and Norway were among the first to announce human security as a foreign policy tool. The United Nations Security Council included the issue of human security on the agenda for the first time in UN history in 1997 when Canada held the Presidency. Another step in fine-tuning the concept was the publication of the report of the Commission on Human Security co-chaired by former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata and Nobel Laureate in Economics Amartya Sen in 2003. Following this report, the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia, Canada, presented the Human Security Audit in the annual Human Security Report 1995 “with a detailed review of the new dataset on global political violence that the Human Security Centre commissioned from Uppsala’s Conflict Data Programme.”

The Human Security Commission report emphasises the need for a new paradigm of security in view of the fact that the security debate has changed dramatically since the inception of state security in the 17th century. It further argued that in the 21st century “both the challenges to the security and its protectors have become more complex. The state remains the fundamental purveyor of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill its security obligations—and at times has even become a source of...

---


3 Other members of the Commission include Lakhdar Brahimi (UN Under Secretary-General), Lincoln C. Chen (Director, Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University), Bronislaw Geremek (former Foreign Minister of Poland), Frene Frenny Noshir Ginwala (Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament, Republic of South Africa), Sonia Picado, President of the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights), Surin Pitsuwan (former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand), Donna E. Shalala (former Secretary of Health and Human Services, USA), Peter Sutherland (former Director-General of the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade), Albert Tevoedjre (former Director General of the International Labour Organisation), and Carl Tham (former Secretary-General of the Olof Palme Centre).

threat to its own people. That is why attention must now shift from the security of the state to the security of the people—to human security.”

The idea of human security is closely related to two other equally important discourses of the day, namely, human development and human rights. As against the neo-liberal prescriptions, the underlying premise of human development is that progress must be fair, that is to say, we must have progress with equity. In this context it is necessary to view ‘freedom as development,’ to quote Amartya Sen. With the increasing importance of the new social movement and the evolving discourse on the third generation of human rights, human security has come to the centre of attention.

The significance and the relevance of the issues raised in the alternative paradigm of human security to the conventional state-centred national security must be understood in the context of the rapid changes taking place in global politics and its institutional structures. Intense flow of goods, services, finance, people and images create new opportunities as well as insecurities. At the same time, the individual and ‘people’ within the state come forward to demand a fundamental change in their existing relationship with the state. The state is compelled to redefine its role and position internally and externally in such a context. The failure on the part of the state to restructure its form of governance and the content of authority in line with internal ethno-political and socio-economic dynamics in the changed global environment creates a ground situation where internal violent challenges can emerge. The ultimate outcome of state coercion to confront such challenges and anti-state terror on the part of dissidents is the sense of pervasive insecurity that can envelop the entire social fabric. Sri Lanka is a textbook example.

During the first two decades after independence, Sri Lanka was cited as a shining illustration of Western parliamentary democracy taking exemplary root in a Third World plural society. It was an oasis of stability, peace and security. In the 1970s, this picture began to change steadily. In the 1980s, armed challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the state, declarations of emergency rule, manipulation of the electoral process, ethnic conflict and political violence and erosion of the welfare network became the order of the day. Today Sri Lanka is considered a most volatile locus of ethno-political conflict in the region. Sri Lanka has been going through this process for fifty years now.

Parallel to this transformation, security thinking in Sri Lanka has also undergone a noticeable change. At first, mainstream conceptualisation

---

of security conditioned the thinking of policy-makers. Security was defined as protection of the territorial integrity of the state vis-à-vis military threats that originated from external sources. Security remained exclusively within the domain of the state and was its prerogative. With the collapse of the earlier concepts of political and social stability, the limitations of the mainstream national security paradigm came to the fore. The state is not the only reference of security; the need to bring other units of reference such as ethnic identities and the individual is acutely felt at this time. Security cannot be simply military-strategic security of the state and territory. With the inclusion of other units of reference, the non-military aspects of security are now viewed as equally important. Security is no longer the prerogative of the state; it is everybody’s concern.

This shift of emphasis in security thinking is further reinforced by the emerging discourse on human security. The issues raised by the discourse on human security as key elements of the human-centric security approach are not just restricted to the Sri Lankan polity. The country’s internal conflict and its socio-political implications present a good case that underscores the rationale and relevance of the heuristic construct developed in the discourse on human security. When the individual and his collective identities have become the focus of security configuration, diverse sources of threats and vulnerabilities are to be taken into account. The main thrust of the book is to reconstruct the symbiotic relationship between different sectors and other references of security to human security.

The symbiotic relationship between other references of security and human security highlights the need to locate the human security problem in the context of the crisis of the post-colonial Sri Lankan state. The crucial factor here is how to restructure the institutions of power and governance to ensure a high degree of human security. At the same time, the socio-cultural and economic aspects of human security must be ensured by pursuing sustainable development strategies that promote progress with equity. The conceptual breakthrough on the security of the state which is to be brought about by the discourse on human security in the thinking of policy and opinion makers will be vital in tackling the complex emergency that has arisen from the internal crisis of Sri Lanka.

The second chapter of the book will discuss the main themes of the evolving conceptual discourse of security in order to draw the theoretical and analytical contours necessary to trace the Sri Lankan security discourse. After sketching out the basics of the national
security paradigm that sets the parameters of security discourse in the past, it will trace how developments in the later part of the Cold War have exposed the limitations of the traditional national security paradigm. The challenge to the conventional national security paradigm came from three directions. Firstly, the Northern European readings on ‘common security’ rooted in the Social Democratic tradition pointed out that peace cannot be based on the delicate balance of nuclear deterrence between the Superpowers. By building a bridge between sustainable development and security, the Palme Commission opened up a new vista that the traditional security paradigm was reluctant to grasp. Secondly, and at the same time, Peace Research scholarship brought the social groups and the individual as units of analysis and socio-economic aspects into the national security analysis. Thirdly, Third World security studies emerged with the proliferation of contextually different security problems that were highlighted to expose the Western bias of the conventional paradigm of national security. The chapter will trace how the traditional national security paradigm came to be deconstructed. The second part of the chapter is devoted to examine the main element of the alternative paradigm—human security.

The third chapter is devoted to tracing the particular socio-economic and political profile of Sri Lanka for contextualising the human security condition of the country. It begins with a historical survey. In order to understand post-colonial political and economic processes in Sri Lanka in their proper historical context, it is necessary to trace the process in which the pre-colonial socio-economic order was transformed under colonial rule, mainly during the British colonial Raj. Marx in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* observed that “(M)en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please: they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under the circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.” This is by no means to use the ‘weight of the past’ to exonerate generations of post-colonial political and social leadership for their shared folie. It is a fact that they failed miserably in post-colonial state building and national integration processes to create a stable polity by embracing the multi-ethnic social order in the decision-making process. The pre-colonial historical survey in the chapter, though very sketchy, is offered merely to provide a background to the colonial transformation. The main thrust of the chapter will be the post-independent political process and development strategies. Finally,

---

it will take an inventory of the physical and human resource base and ethno-social milieu. The proper management of physical and human resources and sustainable utilisation of natural resources constitute very important elements of human security.

The evolution of Sri Lankan security discourse since Independence will be covered in the fourth chapter. During this period security perceptions underwent noticeable change. New concerns and issues emerged and the emphasis changed. The chapter will relate the changes in security perspectives to the socio-political crisis of the Sri Lankan state. The focus of the chapter is to highlight the process in which the issues and frames of references developed in the concept of human security gradually came forward to shape the present security discourse in Sri Lanka with the intensification of the crisis of the postcolonial state. The evolution of the security discourse is traced in three phases. It will be argued that the defence and security concerns aired in the period 1948 to 1956 relating to national security represent nothing but the thinking of the ruling regime who used Sri Lanka’s geopolitical imperatives and certain historical legacies to develop a political construct to justify their strategic relationship with the West which they needed for their other political and economic needs. The second phase in the evolution of security discourse evolved after the political changes of 1956. The changes in the security perceptions and frames of references after 1956 need to be understood in the light of the new configuration of internal political forces and changed development strategies pursued by post-56 regimes. The third phase in the evolution of security discourse began after 1977. It is argued that 1977 is a turning point in the post-independent history of Sri Lanka in many respects. A qualitatively different phase in the crisis of Post-colonial Sri Lankan state gradually unfolded after 1977. This chapter traces how human security came to occupy the central place in the security discourse with the deepening of the internal crisis.

The last two chapters of the book will reconfigure Sri Lanka’s emerging security architecture from the human security perspective. The fifth chapter will examine ground realities of human security in relation to different sectors and also prevailing human security practices that are in place as regards positive and normative dimensions. In discussing different proportions of human insecurities in relation to different dimensions, it is argued in the chapter that there is no hierarchical order of security priorities. The situation varies depending on the context. Therefore, inventorising human insecurity is a complex and difficult task. By certain indicators Sri Lanka can lay claim to a
high degree of human security but these will not represent the true picture. Sri Lanka has been laying claim to a high Human Security Index (HSI) amidst low income conditions and years of unremitting internal armed conflict. However, the general figures conceal the real situation and generalisations hide the true extent of the insecurity. Human security conditions and practices are surveyed in this chapter under four broad themes: poverty and economic dimension of security; political and governance aspects of human security; the ethnic conflict and its impact on human security conditions; and finally social and environmental aspects of human security.

The last chapter of the book tries to evaluate the measures and initiatives taken by the state and other stakeholders to reduce vulnerabilities and minimise threats from the human security perspective. This section is not only analytical but also prescriptive. It is now high time for a breakthrough in the vicious circle of violence that Sri Lanka has been experiencing for years. It goes without saying that the security of the state is very crucial as it sets conditions for security in many other sectors in addition to its vital role in the political sphere. What is proposed here is to analyse the security of the state in a paradigm that will give more emphasis on people rather than borders and territory. It is a fact that the ideological basis of the state, its institutional apparatus, and its physical base have come to be threatened internally mainly because of its very character and behaviour. In the final analysis, the ethnic conflict is a manifestation of a crisis of the post-colonial state. Hence, restructuring of the state and its institutions of power and governance is fundamental not only to the resolution of the ethnic conflict but also to achieving a high degree of human security. It must also be noted that the agency of threat extends beyond the parameters of the state to include many non-state actors. How to reduce threats and other forms of violence emanating from the behaviour of non-state actors like the LTTE vis-à-vis unarmed individuals in political and civil domains has become an equal priority. In view of the extent of the crisis, a holistic approach based on human security is required to ensure security to the people who are caught up in the violent conflict, on the one hand and in the economic and social deprivation and ecological degradation, on the other. The thrust of the argument is that we need a new paradigm of security that goes beyond mere protection of territory from external threats to ensure the broad range of securities to sustain life, rights and the wellbeing of the people of Sri Lanka.