

Critical Assessment of Human Security Discussion

Dr. Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem:

“Does anyone have any questions?”

Diana:

“Hi, I’m Diana from Nonviolence International Southeast Asia located here in Bangkok. I actually found it rather surprising how little mention there was in this panel of the state actually being the threat to human security, especially in this region where the state is highly centralized and oppressive. Especially with the second presentation, it really scares me to hear things like ‘there needs to be more institutionalization or regional cooperation’ because what comes out of these meetings to me seems like more ideas on how they can basically oppress people more instead of really taking into account human security. Also suggestions as there should be more pressure from the bottom up—there already is a lot of pressure from bottom up but these people are dying. What more does it take? I think what this panel really failed to address was the fact that one of the questions that was raised to the type of governance and that is these highly oppressive and highly centralized states. If you look around the whole world, whether in the West or East, any centralized state does not address human security. Looking at those places where people probably enjoy the most freedom from fear and want are in those places where governance is highly decentralized. I don’t think this is being addressed here in the Asian region. I see little hope for any sort of change with people identifying their own agenda. So, not drawing a very bleak and grim picture, I’d like to suggest the first step in moving in that direction and that is stopping to rely on the state for delivering human security. Really this just gives it justification to hold more conferences or meetings cushioning their agenda into nice words whether that’s yeomen’s security or comprehensive security or whatever they come up with now, human security acts and so on. Really this is happening already. People need to survive and they do with strategies for survival and security which are happening on the ground already. It isn’t really necessary to support those efforts that are happening by everyday people in their everyday lives. Thank you very much.”

Dr. Mary Racelis:

“I’m Mary Racelis from the Philippines. It was a very interesting panel. The thing is that you did focus very much on the national security and the military. But, also from the Philippines, there is an urban panel which I’ll be convening this afternoon and I was trying to make the connection between what’s happening on the ground and the militarization side. Urban poor areas are huge in most big Asian cities—in the Philippines it’s 30% at least—urban informal settlers find themselves in really terrible circumstances. But it’s their hold on possibly improving their lives by being in the city. Okay, one point: there’s a lot of structural violence in urban slum areas, not just from the gangs and drugs and so on but the connection between local officials colluding with the mayor with whom they are connected to encourage, to get a share, a ledge, of the drugs proceeds of gangsterism, criminality, gangs and so on. The system there, there’s a lot of structural violence and many people are caught. And many people are law abiding, simply wanting

to get ahead, but get caught in that maelstrom. The military about two months ago moved into urban slum areas under the guise that they have to keep the left, the communist left, who have supposedly been infiltrating these areas recently, from taking over these poor people. So the military has to go in to keep order and prevent this from happening. Interestingly, the civil society groups who work with community groups and the POs, the people organizations, were of course very disturbed. But when we did research it is still very simple—when asking people very simply: ‘how does this strike you’, most of them were very pleased that the military was there because they have little connection with them. The ones they connect with are the police who they see as corrupt, linked with gangsters and drugs. They saw the military as providing stability and at least a counterforce against very corrupt forces who pressure and exploit different people and cause disappearances of some people which are never solved. It’s a very interesting thing how violence of one sort allows the military to come in as a savior. They’re providing human security in the minds of the urban poor in this particular case. I don’t know if you want to comment on it but I still can’t figure out how to sort it out myself. If you can give me a framework that would certainly help me. Thank you.”

Unidentified speaker:

“Zarina, may I ask you about the role of ASEAN? Do you think that when ASEAN works, it’s the state that works? In the case of Myanmar, do you think it needs to have a reform of the organization like ASEAN? Do you think that with the new secretary, with the new ASEAN secretary we’ll be able to change something? He’s talked about flexible engagement regarding the role of ASEAN in the future; if you think about regional grouping and how the leader of ASEAN will think more than just the leader of each country but in terms of grouping. Thank you.”

Abdul Shaban:

“I’m Abdul Shaban from the Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai, India. One small query I have that the focus has been within countries are actually within the region. But the major forces that are destabilizing and creating global insecurity are Western countries actually. And particularly the USA. That issue has somehow been ignored in the whole presentation. If we look at what is happening anywhere, you’ll find some Western linkage in that. It is not the national threat or community threat that is destabilizing the country. It is the international threat that needs to be tackled and needs to be discussed up front with them. Because they’re donating some money we’re not talking about them. Once we tackle that issue, the national threat within can be minimized.”

Unidentified speaker:

“I have a two-fold question. The first is for the first two presenters who tackled the discourse of human security. I wanted to ask whether you’ve looked into how these different approaches, whether you call it the Japanese or Canadian model, inform aid flows. Going back to the question, the points raised during the plenary about donor driven aid. I think we need to reconcile with the facts that donors, to a large extent, whether it be multilateral aid or private aid coming from charitable institution, have a very strong

ability to define what human security is, who gets funded, who gets the money, and to a large extent to a large number of activities undertaken by civil society groups.

My second point is on the issue raised by Mary Racelis on the seeming paradox between militarizing human security and what seems to be an increasing role for the military in what many see as traditionally civilian responsibilities such as the provision of human security, freedom from want, etc. I think the military is just filling in a gap where civilian agencies are missing. So wherever you have failure at the ground, on the ground, for civilian agencies to come in and do not deliver, the military will not waste one moment to just take over whatever that gap is. Too many civilian organizations, whether civil society groups operating at the local or international level, it's very scary that the military is going into areas that are traditionally where civilian humanitarian organizations or civil society groups are performing. I think a better question to ask, particularly for Raymund, is not really military taking over these roles but do the civilians even try to enhance their capacity so that they won't fail and therefore there will be no more need for the military to come in. It is not putting the blame on the military per se, but asking ourselves as civilian actors whether you belong to the state or non-state sector. What have you been doing to increase your capacity to address human security in the first place? Second, as an advocate of civilian control, I also take issue of the fact that the military is moving into roles that are non-traditional. Not so much that I think the military is incapable or usurping what are traditionally civilian domains, but I think that the proposition is dangerous if you are again placed within a system where the military involvement in these types of roles is problematic because it engenders politicized attitudes; they become more entrenched into political internal affairs of the state which later on would have some very bad effects on how they view governance in the first place. So perhaps another question to ask is what about civilian oversight capacities? There's no problem about the military going into these roles, but are civilian agencies making sure that they get a handle over what the military is doing on the ground and whether what the military doing on the ground is consistent with international humanitarian principles, for instance human rights laws. I think that's a more important question to ask. I don't have any problem with the military undertaking civil action programs – my problem is whether they're doing it in a way that violates fundamental human rights principles which wouldn't happen if civilian bodies were making sure that they wouldn't happen.”

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem:

“Let me now ask our panel speakers to respond. One minute each please.”

Zarina Othman:

“Thank you very much. To answer your question I have several things that I would like to raise. Number one, bear in mind that ASEAN members do not have the same economic capacity. We have the five top tiers and then we have the middle income and then we also have the elite components of ASEAN. So it's difficult to talk about reforming ASEAN because we have to look at the economic background of ASEAN. Number two, ASEAN does not have common interests. We have FTA with China all of a sudden, Singapore started FTA and in Thailand and Malaysia we ask why did Singapore do this and now they try to sign an FTA with the United States. We don't have common

interests but rather national interests. Number three, I think that China should play a larger role in Malaysia because they are a big brother to them. Number four, if we compare ASEAN with the EU for example, the formation of the EU was due to a bottom up approach. It started with business. But ASEAN was designed by the state and more specifically by its leaders. Now most of the leaders benefit from ASEAN but not the people. Most of us really do not benefit from ASEAN. Finally, in my opinion, rather than sending these UN special envoys, or sending ASEAN members, we should send someone who is like-minded to the Burmese regime. In this case, we should send a military regime to discuss with the people in Myanmar, and then they could read their minds.”

Raymund Jose Quilop:

“Okay, I guess some clarification needs to be made. I think one of the problems that needs to be settled is the question of just trying to present black and white pictures about for instance the role of the state. In this sense true, I agree, many of the human security issues that have to be dealt with relate to the state. It’s not only terms of the state acting in such a way that people under jurisdiction are harmed, but the other side of it has to do with the lack of capacity on the part of the state not to address precisely the needs of the country. In this sense, just presenting the state as being bad all the time has to be clarified even more. When I talk about the issue of having to increase institutionalization, what comes to mind here in relation to human security is the idea that the state capacity in fact is weak as far as trying to address those issues of concern. For instance, when you talk about human disaster mitigation – sure, people on the ground can actually deal with this over a certain period of time but to a large extent the suffering that they actually have to go through can be mitigated by state capacities that can actually help them in term of the recovery period. In this sense, part of what needs to be considered is strengthening capacity to actually increase human security. That’s what comes into the picture. When I talk about the idea of increasing ASEAN institutionalization, it relates to the idea that the ASEAN states now have to actually increase the capacity to cooperate in order to address human security concerns. This is not to say that strengthening ASEAN capacities and state capacities would automatically mean that human security concerns would be addressed. This idea must be complemented with civil society becoming – and I’m not talking about increasing pressure, pressure is there, but the kind of pressure that you put in does not matter at all if it’s not going to be effective in terms of gaining results. Sometimes it’s a matter of strategy. How can civil society groups actually get their message across to states? If this is a question of states actually being intransigent as far as those messages are concerned, then it’s a question of how do you get the state to listen, how do you force them to listen. And there are several strategies here. At the same time I agree that part of this has to do with the fact that, at the level of local communities, you do have this community actually addressing human security concerns. I’m not saying that these are things that need not be considered as far as what we’re talking about here, I’m just saying that those things that are already being done need to be strengthened with stronger state capacities to help these communities address these concerns. If we’re going to say that states are bad and we can’t rely on them to address human security issues, that’s a different thing altogether and I tend to disagree with that kind of approach.”

Bennett Richardson:

“Thank you for the questions. Yes, I agree with you that the state can be a threat. The point that I wanted to make was not so much that the state was a physical threat but that it is a threat in the way in that it controls the debate or can control the debate. So the one point that I wanted to make is the fact that countries, which happen to be Canada and Japan, control the definitions and the perimeters. They set the very fields that we operate in by making or dominating the discussion about human security and what it should be. The Canadian example in some ways is quite scary. Within a few months of the funding of the Canadian Consortium Commission on Human Security saying that health should be a human security issue, a position which the Canadian government disagreed. So they cut the funding. I’m not saying that Canada is an oppressive state in the way that Myanmar is an oppressive state but to cut funding just because a group sets out a different point of view is frankly a totalitarian tactic. Yes, the state can be a threat in many ways and one of them is certainly conceptual. Also thank you for the question or the point about the USA. I would like to make the point that there are certain groups in the USA that disagree with the current administration’s approach. As I mentioned in my talk I spent time at the Carter Center and Jimmy Carter is a guy that goes around cleaning up George Bush’s mess. It’s a very strange situation to have a former president of the United States say that the current president is the worst US president in history. He can only say that because he’s a former president. I think a lot of other people would like to say that but don’t really feel like they can. The Carter Center has a very interesting approach especially in relation to issues that faith should play in human security and human rights – they strongly agree that in countries like Malaysia, groups like Sisters in Islam are doing faith-based work. I’m going to mix up my terms here, to explain faith-based human rights. I know it doesn’t work in terms of the local debate and in terms of Islam. But to explain it, to make it more concrete, groups like these revisit passages in the Koran that talk about equality for women. And they talk about equality in the same way that women’s rights movements in the West talk about them, though they don’t put it in those terms. The effect of that is that they talk to the local population in terms that they understand fully and in terms of their own culture that relates to them. It also helps them climb back aspects of Islam which may have been dominated by more conservative mullahs who, I agree, are intellectually insecure. Finally, to address the last point about the donors and how to fix things on the ground, I’m not sure if I can answer that very well, but in terms of positional issues, I think that Thailand takes a very interesting position. Thailand is part of the global human security network but it also sets out in its legislation a broader approach towards human security that includes freedom from fear and freedom from want so it has a foot in both camps. I’d like to call it in the Air New Zealand effect. It’s the only airline that part of the STAR Alliance and One World. Nobody is really sure how it happened, but it’s very good because you can use mileage in both systems. So Thailand can do that. They can use mileage in both systems as part of the global human security network but claim to be part of the broader Japanese approach. As far as funding goes, they have a wider range of options available to them because they belong to both the STAR Alliance and One World.”

Aries A. Arugay:

“Just two quick points. With regard to the issue of the state being the threat – this is to a certain extent true. When we argue that we should stop relying on the state on implementing human security mechanisms or measures to whom are we going to rely on at the end of the day. Ourselves? That may be easier said than done to be honest. At the end of the day you still need to have the state. It’s a difficult question.

Let me move on to the issue of the growing role of the military, particularly in the case of the Philippines and I’ve always been arguing that it’s a double-edged sword. To a certain extent people welcome the military going in but that practically further opens the floodgates to be involved in certain areas where they are not supposed to be. But it’s actually an indictment of the failure of civilian agencies to perform what they’re supposed to perform. To a certain extent, the military in the case of the Philippines is already starting to complain: why is it that there are so many things put on its shoulders? When the government wants to get something done, it goes to the military – it’s efficient and effective to accomplish the mission at hand.” [Tape ends]