Human Security Perspectives on Developments in the Middle East

This report shares key themes from the Civil Society Network for Human Security's September 30, 2013 seminar, "Human Security Perspectives on Developments in the Middle East," hosted by the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) at the Istanbul Kültür University. The event brought together over twenty-five participants in a two day forum, which addressed the multifaceted nature of human security within the changing landscape of the Middle East.

FOREWORD

The short report on Human Security you have just begun to read is a result of the two-day workshop held under the auspices of the Global Political Trends Center on September 30, 2013 in Istanbul.

The decision to organize the workshop in Turkey was made jointly by the members of the Civil Society Network for Human Security, in particular those representing the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Human Security Collective and Global Political Trends Center.

We believe it was a good choice, both in terms of time and place. Although it was the first workshop of the network held in Turkey, the preparations went on smoothly as the topics 'naturally' emerged from the developments of the time. We were able to invite a number of respected and acknowledged experts and practitioners in the field both in Turkey and abroad.

The first-hand knowledge and practice of the speakers on the related topics coupled with strong theoretical notions helped us to gain a better understanding of challenges and possibilities in the human security field, both in Turkey and the volatile Middle Eastern region.

Among other things the Istanbul workshop taught us that while freedom from fear and freedom from want, as the sine qua non of human security, are universal rights, successful methods of assuring them might vary from country to country, from region to region.

As the threats to human security are many, there is a plethora of means to achieve it. And while the primary responsibility to protect, and thus to ensure the security of individuals, lies with the state, we believe there is always room for civil society to work together with the state towards the achievement of this mutual goal.

Lia van Broekhoven
Sylvia Tiryaki
Peter van Tuijl

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY [1]

The face of violence has changed dramatically over recent decades—becoming dispersed, disfigured and more fluid. States have struggled to respond effectively to these changes. Increasingly, there is an understanding that the changing nature of violence requires a new response, resulting in a gradual shift from national and international security to human security.

Human security grew out of dissatisfaction with state-centered approaches to security, which emphasize the integrity of state boundaries and the importance of military force. Human security offers a multifaceted and integrative approach to human development, human needs, and human rights, within a discourse that places individuals and communities at the center of analysis and prioritizes non-military mechanisms as a means of achieving security. The people-centered approach of human security recognizes that peace and social justice will not be realized unless people are protected from threats to their rights and basic needs.

The Middle East is currently a geopolitical fulcrum of conflict, and Turkey is at risk of being drawn into the mix. Both domestically and regionally, Turkey faces major challenges, and it is important to map out the potential human security policies that may be undertaken in response to these challenges. Civil society has the opportunity to foster strategic alliances, engage minorities, and elevate the voices of those actors advocating for a human security-centered approach to peace.

Adopting a human security prism in response to the crises facing the Middle East offers an opportunity for peacebuilding and development that prioritizes the wellbeing of people. Top-down nation building in the Middle East has thus far failed to incorporate human needs, and continues to suffer a deficit of democratic, inclusive politics. A wave of popular uprisings is demonstrative of the peoples' dissatisfaction with current policies. The drivers of conflict in the Middle East are radical – and therefore require radical responses.

Civil society actors are prime movers of innovative initiatives dealing with crisis in the Middle East, and civil society thus has the potential to play a crucial role in advancing human security priorities.

Civil society is in a unique position to deal with the new landscape of contemporary violence, and human security offers an approach through which they can achieve change. Local civil society, situated at the forefront of conflict settings, can provide the knowledge and expertise necessary to understanding drivers of conflict and pathways to peace.

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[1] The seminar was held under Chatham House Rules

KEY NOTE SPEECH – LIA VAN BROEKHOVEN

Human security remains a contested concept. Indeed, some doubt its usefulness as a framework that contributes to the realm of security studies. Yet human security has enduring characteristics for peacebuilding. A key tenet of human security is its relationship between the local and the global, and the importance of both real and perceived levels of security. Human security is context specific. Policies must be mainstreamed in highly variable contexts, whilst remaining sensitive to national and subnational realities. Thus human security is an outcome, and not only an academic concept. Those working in contexts of conflict and crisis see the utility of human security on a daily basis. However, operationalizing human security remains a critical endeavor for civil society: how can it be wielded as a tool to ensure the safety of people and communities, and to empower them?

Mali offers an example of the perils of ignoring a human security perspective. Almost thirty years of localized development—lavishly funded by international donors—failed to address the broader reality of governance deficits and grievances among minority groups. A markedly different example is found in the Netherlands. With high development indicators and low crime rates, official statistics show that a significant number of people feel insecure. The Dutch example illustrates how feelings of insecurity do not have to coincide with objective measurements. Perceptions of insecurity require a delicate balancing act by policymakers to ensure that they are acknowledged, yet not overstated.

Another debate surrounding human security is its suitability in situations of acute crises. How do different stages of crisis influence the potential of human security? Will a human security approach only work in a context where communities, CSOs and governments have the sufficient capacities to perform their duties with due respect to human rights and dignity?

Human security is driven by the imperative of inclusion. No one actor can succeed alone in preventing or mitigating violence, and those in the human security field cannot remain in their traditional civil society silos. Organizations that traditionally prioritize justice must learn to work with those who value dialogue and reconciliation. Shying away from sensitive political issues will not achieve true conflict transformation, and there is a need for greater collaboration among the different strands of human security activists who are operating within soft and hard security. Civil society must also engage with the private sector on how it might play a greater role in fostering practices of human security.

The wave of unrest that has spread through the Middle East is illustrative in part of the failure of traditional notions of hard security, and demonstrates a growing dissatisfaction among the people of the Middle East toward their governments. The unstable relationship among and between states has a negative impact on human security, with major social, cultural, and political implications. Turkey has not been immune to the current state of flux. It is incumbent upon civil society actors—locally, regionally and globally – to reflect upon how they can operationalize a human security approach within the context of the Middle East.

A CHALLENGE FOR HUMAN SECURITY: REGIONAL REVOLUTIONS AND CONFLICTS

Human security opens up new lines of analysis when considering the uprisings across the Middle East, giving voice to emerging or previously silenced actors and highlighting the role of youth and the media. The demise of some authoritarian regimes and continued civil war and unrest in others demonstrates that the top-down, autocratic state model has largely failed. Efforts to prioritize development over democracy and human rights have proved insufficient, and the pillars of authoritarianism have crumbled in many countries. Two factors accelerated the decline of these systems: the mass media, and politically active youth. The latter in particular is an emerging social force—alienated, non-ideological yet heavily politicized, and often highly educated.

Despite initial euphoria, reality has been hard-hitting, with a military coup in Egypt, intractable civil war in Syria, and unrest in Iraq. There have been a number of missed opportunities for prioritizing human security. In the early stages of the non-violent removal of Hosni Mubarak, al-Qaeda and extremist groups were marginalized: their message of violence as the only hope rendered false. A return to coup tactics by the military has empowered radical Islamist groups and gained adherents to their violent approach. Nevertheless, mainstream Islamist parties have continued to state commitment to non-violent means. Also encouraging is the rediscovered will of the people—they have surpassed a certain threshold of emancipation and empowerment that cannot be suppressed. More perilously, the battlefield has now expanded to Syria, where violence quickly superseded nonviolent tactics.

Turkey has to date struggled to find the right response to the Syrian civil war, which has seen militants, refugees, sectarian tensions and scattered shellfire encroach into Turkey's borders. Syria is facing an acute humanitarian crisis, both within the country and among refugees in neighboring states. There is simply no way to quantify the scope of the disaster, nor the scale of the complex emergency that the international community now faces. Turkey alone has accepted over half a million refugees, but its generosity and capacity risks wearing thin as the crisis persists. Moreover, Turkey is facing criticism as it is thought to be tolerating the presence of Syrian fighters within the camps. The regional chaos has impacted the work of humanitarian agencies, development organizations and civil society actors in many different ways.

Particularly at risk are the many people within Syria who require urgent care. Humanitarian organizations such as Relief International have been forced to work remotely, due to dangerous conditions. Soft security counter-terrorism measures have compounded the work of humanitarian agencies—for example the post 9/11 banking transparency act eliminated the ability to do informal money transfers. This one example illustrates the cross-cutting issues facing civil society actors working within conflict affected and fragile settings, and underscores the importance of recognizing

the detrimental—and at times unintended—effects that hard and soft security measures can place on individuals and communities at risk.

Civil society faces a challenging environment in Turkey. Dependent largely on external monetary assistance, it is not wholly embraced by the government. In spite of these ongoing challenges, civil society must prepare specialized programs, conduct training, diversify target groups, advocate for the role of peacebuilding and expand beyond a humanitarian concentration. It has the potential to present a civil and democratic solution that can be applied locally. It is also important to seek out pockets of civil society where peacebuilding efforts can be developed in synthesis with humanitarianism. For example, refugee camps have established informal self-governance mechanisms. Although no panacea and at times of questionable legitimacy, these represent an opportunity for communication and self-sufficiency. Refugee communities might also provide an entry point to fostering inclusive forms of human security. Humanitarian organizations recognize this potential, and many ensure that their programs are established with input from both refugees and host communities.

THE EXPANDING ROLE OF TURKEY IN THE REGION

Turkey occupies a unique position in the Middle East, and over the past decade has moved to engage more with the region. Due to recent events, this has entailed becoming more responsive to crises and the humanitarian imperatives they have spurred. Turkey is placed to play a budding role as a peace broker in regional conflicts, although there is a great deal of uncertainty amidst a situation of rapidly changing dynamics and parameters.

With an interest in stabilizing the Middle East, Turkey introduced a "Zero Problems with Neighbors" approach in the new century, which included visa free travel, foreign trade investment, and renewed strategic relationships. The prominent role of private sector and trade interest is a driver of Turkey's foreign policy, and it has been accompanied by unprecedented economic growth and liberal economic development within Turkey's borders. Since the early 2000s, Turkey's economic influence in the Middle East has increased, with a slight waning of trade with Europe.

The Arab Spring, although initially cautiously welcomed by Turkey, has challenged its "Zero Problem" foreign policy. Regional polarization has proved problematic, and Turkey's previously good relations have been hampered by growing animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran. One of the major weaknesses for Turkey is that it has largely failed to translate its soft power into a political outcome. Although Turkey would

like to take the lead in democratic transformation of the region, it lacks the political assets to manage ongoing crises, particularly vis-à-vis Syria. Questions are arising as to whether the politics Turkey adopted in the last decade have been successful, and many critics of Erdogan are pointing to the persistent divisions within Turkey that preclude it from being a leader in the Middle East.

As one discussant noted, there is rhetoric within Turkish foreign policy that elevates freedom and democracy, yet this lacks substance in its domestic affairs with media censorship, paternalistic policies and a lack of protection afforded to ethnic and religious minorities. This apparent contradiction was discussed further in later panels, and underscores the intimate linkages between global and local policies.

THE TURKISH KURDISH RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Ataturk famously declared, "Peace in the world, peace in Turkey." However Turkey is far from wholly peaceful. Kurds in particular continue to feel insecure, facing political and cultural repression. Negotiations between the PKK and Turkish government have been underway since late 2012, yet the ceasefire remains tenuous. A breakthrough in these negotiations would not only improve the human security of the Kurdish community, but the Turkish population in general.

In order to solve the Kurdish issue, standards of democracy and law must be improved. Recent years have seen a gradual thawing of relations from the Turkish government toward Kurds. A democracy package unveiled by the Erdogan administration is a first step, although remains insufficient. Both the Alevi and Kurdish community were not satisfied with the proposal. The reconciliation process is not transparent or visible to the people of Turkey or those in various areas of Kurdistan.

The Kurdish issue highlights the intricate links between the global and the local. The Kurdish problem is a major issue in at least four countries, not least in Turkey where most of the global Kurdish population is based. Many have begun to predict the collapse of the current geo-political boundaries within the Middle East, and the Kurdish people are preparing for this eventuality. This would cause momentous upheaval across the region, and profoundly affect the security of countless people. At the same time, the Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq is experiencing significant growth. In the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq, there has been strong economic development since 2005. There is growing contact between Erbil and Baghdad. Hundreds of Turkish companies operate in Iraqi Kurdistan, offering major economic growth for the region.

Although Turkey has undertaken a number of positive reforms for minorities, it must take a comprehensive approach to the Kurdish issue, and present a package of true political, constitutional, social and cultural reform. If Turkey is not at peace with itself, it will not be credible as an external peacemaker. The Turkish-PKK reconciliation process is therefore of major importance, with external and internal geopolitical implications.

TURKEY'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC HUMAN SECURITY CHALLENGES

Social turmoil erupted in Turkey in mid-2013, with widespread popular protests across the country. The events highlighted the challenges facing domestic politics, and raised awareness of the internal human security issues that Turkey faces. One panelist characterized the wide-spread anti-government protests as a "confrontation between old and new Turkey," and a reflection of the dissatisfaction of different streams of Turkish society. The reaction against authoritarianism was met with reluctance from the AKP to heed the protestors' demands, and the at times heavy-handed response by Turkey's security forces raised concerns worldwide.

Young people were the frontrunners of the protest, although participants ranged in age, class, ideology and educational background. Although many explanations have been offered for the protests, little enquiry has been made into the views of the protestors themselves. To remedy this, academics from Istanbul Kültür University engaged in participant observation with the protestors, in pursuit of an actor-oriented analysis.

From the Turkish government's point of view, Gezi was proof of international conspiracy and foreign intervention. When asked of the validity of this perspective, differences emerged within the protesters. Those of the older generation tended to agree with government circles that foreign intervention had been instrumental in the protests. Younger protesters, however, felt that the international media reports were largely objective, and international sympathy did not stem from Western manipulation, but rather as a direct result of the civil protests. Most protesters also expressed a belief that the Gezi protests would not have emerged had the opposition parties adopted successful strategies and formed an effective opposition. Finally, interviewees described how police brutality and the excessive use of force had served to unite the protest movement and had created solidarity. Such insights into the Gezi park protest movements are valuable, as they offer a more nuanced perspective of the events and experiences that took place in Turkey – often differing significantly from the accounts expressed in

the mainstream media or by politicians. It is important to elevate these voices to gain genuine insight into events.

The movement was not geographically restricted to Istanbul, with Hatay one of many regions that experienced unrest. Demonstrators in Hatay came from all walks of life, but there was a strong Arab Alawite presence among them. The insecurity and vulnerability felt by Alevis is particularly pressing when considered in juxtaposition with the Syrian crisis, and it is possible to make connections between the unfolding protest movement in Hatay and spillover from Syria's civil war. Turkey's support for the Syrian armed opposition has brought social unrest and fear of sectarian conflict among Alevis, accentuating existing sectarian cleavages within Antakya and beyond.

One panelist emphasized the need to create safe public spaces for dialogue, in order to assuage feelings of insecurity. Gezi is a manifestation of a new participatory rhetoric, and it would be beneficial to replicate these spaces in other regions such as Hatay. These parks are the seeds of urgently needed new public spaces. During the protests, people gathered in a new manner, which is valuable and should be stimulated. Also notable was the use of social media as a tool for leveraging greater human security. Open dialogue through new forums and mediums is a way in which various disparate groups in Turkey may be able to move from protest to proposal, and play an active role in conveying their concerns and needs to others.

LOOKING FORWARD

In 1995, the author of the first UNDP Human Development report, Mahbub ul Haq remarked:

> The world is entering a new era in which the very concept of security will change-and change dramatically. Security will be interpreted as: security of people, not just territory. Security of individuals, not just nations. Security through development, not through arms. Security of all the people everywhere - in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities, in their environment.[2]

Almost one decade on, this statement remains as—if not more—relevant to the international community, and particularly so in the Middle East.

The concept of human security is both contested and ambiguous. However, as one panelist noted, this is a "positive confusion" – part of the process of defining, shaping, informing, and continuous change. Achieving a rich contextual analysis of the challenges illustrates the stratified and interconnected layers of conflict present. There is understandable pessimism, yet also room for hope.

Civil society has a unique responsibility to utilize human security in order to make meaning of these analyses in a way that can be used to foster resilient societies. This requires looking between the lines to see where there may be room for leverage, as well as identifying good practices and existing shortcomings. It will entail identifying and mapping out pockets of civil society—among youth, minorities, women's groups—that are already undertaking creative experiments aimed at empowering citizens to shape the policies that most affect them, as well as building new structures for peace and security in chaotic settings of crisis and conflict. Inclusivity must be the mainstay of

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[2] Mahbub ul-Haq, *Reflections on Human Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 115.

this approach—in many respects, a lot of the challenges faced by the region are due to a long-standing lack of inclusiveness in political life. Human security is an outcome of approaches that are implemented in real-life, and not merely as an academic concept. In the many different contexts of the Middle East, human security can and will change and respond to changing circumstances.

Robust human security is still some way off for many in the MENA region, but in its absence civil society has the imperative to engage with key institutions, processes and actors in order to inject people-centered human security perspectives into dialogue, and to seek collaborative solutions to conflict transformation. Civil society is well suited to advocate for a human security centered response, with intensified cooperation and engagement amongst grassroots actors and state-level policy makers. Civil society can serve as a conduit of multi-level communication, and convey and express the needs and wants of the people. It is important to develop strategies that ensure that the human security needs of people and communities are incorporated into policymaking processes, through linking local realities to policy dialogue and decision-making.

Networks are a crucial component of effective civil society advocacy in human security. They facilitate learning and information exchange at horizontal and vertical levels. They increase leverage and allow different actors to share experiences. Networks may also offer vulnerable organizations a degree of protection. Certainly, membership in a network provides moral support and fosters relationships of mutual trust and social capital. Finally, a network synthesizes approaches through the coordination of activities.

A central premise of human security is genuine engagement in order to prevent extreme violence and to safeguard freedom from want and fear, and the freedom to express oneself with dignity. Remaining in civil society silos, shying away from sensitive political issues, and turning a blind eye to the politics behind development initiatives failures or collapsed peace processes will not achieve true conflict transformation.

Turkey is faced with a set of contradictions and challenges. The civil war in Syria and associated relief efforts emphasize that humanitarian actors are a key pillar in the human security endeavor. Operating as they do on the front lines, they are crucial resources for advancing human security in complex and chaotic settings. The long-standing Kurdish issue remains unresolved, although there are promising developments—however tenuous—in talks with the PKK. Unfolding protests across the country in mid-2013 further underscore the urgency of attending to the fears and needs of societies. The interconnectedness between the local and the global issues that Turkey and the Middle East face give a sense of the complexity of the current situation. Human security offers a framework of action when societies are under stress. It offers a channel through which individuals can operate no longer as subjects, but as citizens and change makers.