

## THINKING ABOUT SECURITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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### Abstract

Contemporary security risks and threats initiate a new thinking about security and a new thinking about the content of the security agenda. The world is confronting both, by traditional (military) and contemporary (nonmilitary) threats today, which must be prevented and defeated collectively, by applying a mutual set of traditional and new approaches and methods. Such a situation directly raises the dilemma about the essential thinking of security in today's modern world. Therefore, the paper analysis about these security aspects is divided into two main directions. Regarding the first one, the focus is on the evolutionary nature of the security and its changing perceptions and theoretic understandings in different contexts, while in the second one, the focus is on the contemporary understanding of security in today's modern world, especially through the prism of increasingly promoted concepts of the environmental security, food security, and energy security.

**Key words:** *risks, threats, environmental security, food security, energy security*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous definitions and interpretations of security are present in security theory and security studies. This is mainly due to the fact that different researchers apply different starting points and approaches in security analysis and research. So, security is a plastic word that means different things according to who talks about it and the entities at risk and the nature of the risks they identify. Therefore, security should be perceived as a concept which needs to be specified regarding the context it is used in. In its broadest sense, security implies freedom from threats.

The traditional understanding of security is mainly related to the external relations among the states. In this regard, security understanding is mainly focused on the military threats. Military actions of a country against another harms the core values of independence and sovereignty. Moreover, military activities and endeavors also harm the lives of military personnel as well as ordinary people. According to such security understanding (most dominant for the period until the end of the Cold War), security exists only in the absence

of any direct military threats. So, in the context of such traditional security understanding, it follows that the world today is not safe and secure, and the most concrete example of this statement is, among other things, the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This example illustrates that military threats are still burdening the security agenda, as well as that there is no respectable international entity that would initiate the de-escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, which started on 24.06.2022.

On the other hand, the non-traditional understanding of security moves beyond physical and military threats and includes a wider range of tangible and intangible threats affecting human lives. Compared to the traditional security understanding which is related to the borders of the states and conflicts between countries, the non-traditional security understanding is related to individual and community security. In this regard, non-traditional views of security have proposed several new security concepts, starting from human security and global security.

As human security is considered the protection from all threats that endanger human lives; this includes hunger, poverty, disease, violence, etc.

Global security emerged as a response to the growing unprecedented threats of global warming, epidemics, international terrorism, etc. No country can resolve global issues like these alone and therefore the elimination of global threats and risks requires common action with participation of everyone and not only a few countries.

In this sense, it is no doubt that the contemporary security environment is also burdened with security risks and threats that directly affect human and global security. The Covid-19 pandemic and the energy crisis are among the most present and actual threats in this regard.

In the Concepts of the security study launched by the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs in 1986, security is defined as a state in which states consider that there is no danger of military attack, political pressure or economic coercion, so they can develop and thrive freely (UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, 1986). However, there is no doubt that such an understanding of security is limited because security is analyzed only through the prism of relations between states and in this regard, security threats are perceived only through the prism of military-political and economic aspects.

From today's contemporary security environment point of view it can be concluded that the security understanding is based on even broader perceptions. It means that security is essentially a variable category and therefore its understanding is determined by many different factors, such as: new security threats and risks, new security actors, new security responses, new security needs and interests and changing dynamics in the international relations. Hence, it follows that the security concept has an evolutionary character and therefore it is a subject of continuous change and development in the context of specific security environments. In this regard, the importance of non-military security threats and risks is a specific feature of the modern security understanding. As a result, new security concepts are emerging on the security agenda, such as: environmental security, food security, energy security, etc.

## **2. SECURITY IN THE MODERN WORLD**

As we mentioned above, security is a variable category which is determined by many factors and processes. As a result, security perceptions and understandings change in different contexts. In this sense, ensuring security in the modern world is also a complicated political, scientific-technological and socio-economic problem. Having in mind that security

is a complicated, multifactor and hierarchized phenomenon, its analyzing and understanding should also have an interdisciplinary character. This is because of the changing nature of security. Actually, it is no doubt that the nature of security environment, the nature of security risks and threats, and the character of instruments for their elimination are essentially changing. The basis of security as a social subject consists in arrangement of the conditions for their existence, to surviving in the present time and advancement into the future. Assurance of this condition implies ability of the social subjects to eliminated threats which are defined. In situations of asymmetrical security, threats are not always clearly defined. They often consist of their own structure systems, in relationships and status of the subjects of international relations. The unbalance, discrepancy, non-parity has political, military, economic, legal, social and societal dimensions, which further enhance the complexity of today's security environment.

As a result, new security concepts based on a broader and deeper understanding of security have emerged. Such are: environmental security, food security, energy security, cyber security, financial security, pandemic security, etc. These new security concepts are initiating increasing attention in the security research and the security agenda, while the reasons about this are mainly related to the increasing frequency of non-traditional security threats and risks. The current energy crisis, as well as the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic are the most concrete confirmation in regard of such perception and conclusion.

In this paper, such new and extended security understanding in the modern world is specifically analyzed through the prism of environmental security, food security, and energy security.

### **3. ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY**

Environmental change poses risks to the territorial integrity and economic growth of the states, as well as to the health and welfare of people and communities and it may increase the risk of violent conflict. In these aspects, environmental change can be seen as generating problems for national and human security. Regarding the trajectory of the so-called environmental insecurity, it could be noted that the broad history of human-environment relations and interactions has been one of the factors for increasing population growth, increasing use of resources per capita and increasing inequality between the richest and poorest people in the world in terms of consumption and pollution. These trends, combined with the development of industrialization as the dominant mode of production, capitalism as the near-universal economic order, and the centralized control of the means of violence (mainly by the state), have given rise to a condition where environmental change increasingly poses risks to people, states, and peace (Giddens, 1985).

The world's population has rapidly grown from 2,5 billion people in 1950, to around 6.7 billion in 2008 and will most likely peak at 9 billion people in 2050 (Boyden, 1987). The vast majority (80%) of people live in developing countries. Such a growing world population has directly affected bigger production and consumption of needed products for normal human existence. This directly produced greater use of resources, which in turn has initiated significant environmental pollution.

Poverty is also a powerful driver of vulnerability to environmental change as the poor have few means at their disposal to avoid, reduce or adjust to risks to livelihoods created by environmental changes. As a result, poorer regions are more exposed to the risks of environmental changes. In this regard, diarrhea, malaria, undernutrition, and inadequate access to clean water, pose serious risks for these regions and its population. The World

Health Organization estimates that, in 2030, sub-Saharan Africa will have the greatest burden of mortality attributable to climate change, while in 2050 South-East Asia will be the region most affected by the health impacts of climate change (WHO, 2014). Globally, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is projected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year from increased rates of malaria infection, diarrhea, heat stress and undernutrition, while direct health damages will cost an estimated \$2 billion to \$4 billion a year by 2030 (WHO, 2021).

As a result, it could be noted that combined poverty and environmental change are producing environmental insecurity, which is the vulnerability of individuals and groups to critical adverse effects caused directly or indirectly by environmental change. In this regard, environmental security is achieved when individuals and groups have the ability to avoid or adapt to environmental change so that their basic needs, rights, and values are not undermined (Barnet, 2001). Environmental insecurity is therefore the product of the global political economy which sustains a situation where the wealthy consume a disproportionate amount of resources and produce a disproportionate amount of pollution. It follows that environmental security will be achieved when the aggregate impact of human consumption does not exceed the capacity of the earth's systems to provide resources and absorb wastes now and for future generations, while ensuring that everyone enjoys a minimum standard of well-being which can be maintained despite periods of perturbation and change in the environmental and social systems.

#### **4. FOOD SECURITY**

Food security is a basic human right. In fact, having access to at least an adequate amount of nutritious food could be seen as the most basic of all human rights. Yet, for hundreds of millions of people, this right is not met, usually for reasons entirely out of their control.

As mentioned above, undernutrition is one of the contemporary threats which is underlying cause of over 4.6 million child deaths each year. In this sense, food security is about assuring individuals of their capacity to lead their lives, being able to move physically for work and leisure. It also means that as infants and children they were fed well enough to aid the development of their physical and mental powers. When people are food insecure, they cannot fully function, and this may entail additional insecurity since they may respond in dangerous ways. For instance, a hungry person may undertake commercial sex work, engage in crime, or migrate to find work and assistance regardless of the dangers of the route or the destination.

Food security also embraces the idea that not only should a physical state be achieved, but that anxieties and fears that one may be hungry and in discomfort, unable to function fully and prone to potentially dangerous responses, should be removed. In this context, it can be seen as one of the cornerstones of human existence; without food security other securities are undermined. At the most basic level, a hungry and malnourished individual is less able to fight or flee from physical danger. (Wiggins & Slater, 2010)

Food security applies to all individuals, regardless of their place in the family, household or society. Food security is a continuing state: it applies at all times, through life cycles and through seasonal and other temporal variations. Satisfying these conditions is thus challenging for policy-makers (Wiggins & Slater, 2010).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security exists when: “all people at all times have physical and economic access to

sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996).

In this sense, food insecurity is the converse of the above mentioned. Physically, food insecurity ultimately results in malnutrition through undernutrition. Malnutrition varies by degree, from severe to moderate conditions. Its impacts on welfare vary amongst individuals by age, sex, and maternity. Some conditions are temporary, while others are chronic. Sudden increases in food insecurity, on a large scale, produce food crises that in severe cases can be classified as famine (Wiggins & Slater, 2010).

The concept of food security can be divided into four main components, also known as the “4 pillars of food security”.

*Availability* - refers to the existence of food within a community. This is closely linked to the efficacy of food production. Availability can become an issue when there is a lack of necessary resources, such as water for irrigation or when land which is used for food production is damaged or degraded.

*Access* - having enough food in a community means very little if there is poor access to it. True food security means that individuals have the resources they need to obtain a sufficient quality of nutritious food. Access to food is affected by a myriad of physical, social and policy related factors. Factors such as pricing, household proximity to suppliers and infrastructure all affect our access to food.

*Utilization* - not all food is of equal or sufficient value. To be food secure, it is crucial that the food which is accessed is of a good quality. It is paramount that food is nutritious and healthy enough to provide the energy people need for their daily activities. It is also crucial that individuals have the necessary knowledge and tools to properly ‘utilize’ the food available to them. This includes having the utilities to properly select, prepare, and store foods that are available and accessible.

*Stability* - Good food stability means that access, availability and utilization of food remain relatively stable over time. It is important to try to minimize any threats to this stability. Threats to food stability include natural disasters, climate change, conflict and economic factors such as volatile price fluctuations.

Over the past few decades, the changing climate, the growth of the global population, the rise of the food prices, and the environmental stressors have produced a significant impact on the food security. In this regard, perhaps the most concrete example in actual environment is today's situation in Sri Lanka, which is facing the worst economic crisis in the last 70 years. Characteristical of this example is that in an effort to tackle economic challenges, the government of Sri Lanka has decided that Friday should be a non-working day for public sector employees, to encourage them, (among other things), to grow vegetables and fruits to feed themselves and their families. As a result, it is no doubt that adaptation strategies and policy responses to global change, including options for handling water allocation, land use patterns, food trade, postharvest food processing, and food prices and safety are urgently needed.

Regarding the relation between food security and security dimensions, we should note that although hungry people may constitute a reservoir of disaffected persons liable to extreme political action and insurrection, there is still little direct evidence to support this. If food security does not generally exacerbate other forms of insecurity, the reverse does not apply. Actually, other security dimensions affect food security strongly. For example, conflicts, especially protracted ones, in areas of high poverty dislocate economies and societies and provoke food crises and famines, which directly affects the further deterioration of the security situation.

## 5. ENERGY SECURITY

Nowadays, there are many different definitions of energy security, capturing various aspects of this term. Actually, there are numerous definitions of security and the same holds true for energy security. In historical point of view, energy security was primarily associated with oil supply issue. While, oil supply remains a key issue, the increasing complexity of energy systems requires systematic and rigorous understanding of wider range of vulnerabilities. Disruptions can affect other fuel sources, infrastructure or end-use sectors. Thus, analysis of oil supply security alone is no longer sufficient for understanding of the energy security complexity.

In general, both at global and at national level, energy security implies the availability of energy sources at an affordable price, as well as stable delivery and physical security of pipelines and oil pipelines (Милески, 2014).

The common definition of energy security, in theoretical perspective, underlines secured access to sufficient quantities of energy at affordable prices. Oppositely, energy insecurity can be defined as loss of welfare that may occur as a result of a change in the price or in energy availability. Whether, energy insecurity stems from price or physical availability concerns, it is mainly depended by the nature and effectiveness of price-volume linkages in the market.

In regulated energy markets, prices are fixed or pegged to other energy commodities. Notably, it is a case of natural gas prices which in many world's regions are indexed to oil prices. Such arrangements may bring greater security price, yet the lack of price-volume linkages raises important physical availability concerns. For example, in case of a supply shortfall, prices are difficult to adjust, leading to excessive demand compared to available volumes, which raises the risk of physical unavailability.

While energy security always consists of both a physical unavailability component and a price component, the relative importance of these depends on the market structure, and in particular extent to which prices are set competitively or not.

Regarding the connection between energy and security, Daniel Yergin proposes broadening of the usual energy security definition. Actually, according to him, “availability of sufficient supplies at affordable prices” should be broadened by the diversification of supplies, resilience, recognition of the reality of integration, importance of information and the influence of the globalization to the energy security system (Yergin, 2006).

He has pointed out several dimensions of energy security. The first one is physical security which includes safeguarding and safety of assets, infrastructure, supply chain and trade routes. The second dimension relates to the criticality of energy security access. It means the ability of developing and acquiring of energy (physical, contractual, and commercial). The third one refers to the fact that energy security is a consisted system of national policies and international institutions that are designed for coordinated respond to all challenges associated with the normal supply of energy resources. It is also inevitable that energy security is directly depended by investments in a long-term period. Actually, the energy security requires policies and innovations which would provide assurance that adequate amounts of stock and infrastructure will be available in the future (Yergin, 2011).

In this sense, Gawdat Bahgat has defined energy security in terms of sustainable and reliable supplies at reasonable prices, elimination of the risk of sudden and severe fluctuations, sufficient level of investment, spare capacity and diversification of supply (Bahgat, 2006).

Additional important dilemma is how the energy policy-security aspects linked to its non-security problems. Frain ois Heoisbourd has formulated the problem aptly in relation to the EU: “if energy is a strategic good, should a European Union energy policy be primarily about the liberalization of the energy market?” (Egenhofer, 2006).

In other sense, what is and should be the relation between the market forces (whose positive impact on global economic growth is widely acknowledged), and the intervention of the state or organization, therefore? The European Commission has defined it as: “the ability to ensure that future essential energy needs can be met, both by means of adequate domestic resources worked under economically acceptable conditions or maintained as strategic reserves, and by calling upon accessible and stable external sources supplemented where appropriate by strategic stocks “(Bahgat, 2006).

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), energy security corresponds to the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. Therefore, energy security has many dimensions: long-term energy security mainly deals with timely investments to supply energy in line with economic developments and sustainable environmental needs. On other hand, short-term energy security focuses on the ability of the energy system to react promptly to sudden changes within the supply-demand balance. Lack of energy security is thus linked to the negative economic and social impacts of either physical unavailability of energy, or prices that are not competitive or are overly volatile.

In regard to energy security policy, a distinction can be made between government actions to mitigate the short-terms risks of physical unavailability occurring in case of a supply disruption and efforts to improve energy security in long-term. Related to the first aspect, actions include establishing strategic reserves, dialogue with producers, and determining contingency plans to curtail consumption in times of important supply disruptions. From the second aspect, policies tend to focus on tackling the root causes of energy insecurity. These can be broken down into four broad categories: 1) energy system disruptions linked to extreme weather conditions or accidents; 2) short-term balancing of demand and supply in the electricity market; 3) regulatory failures; and 4) concentration of fossil fuel resources.

It could be concluded that energy security is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. At its heart, it is about ensuring that there are sufficient energy supplies at reasonable prices to meet the socio-economic needs of the society.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The new era in which we live today is a dynamically and rapidly evolving innovation landscape, where increasing numbers of diverse threats, risks, actors and disruptive technologies are leading to new thinking about security. In this sense, in contrast to the traditional arms race and the dominant importance of military threats and risks, pressure on the environment, its ecosystems and on society are increasingly being exploited as a means of gaining advantage in geopolitical competition. Perhaps the most famous examples in this context, are: the control of energy resources and raw materials, economic tools and trade control, aid policies, communication infrastructures, and the control of data and cyberspace. In parallel, hybrid threats are also increasing (i.e., the blending of conventional with political warfare), even using migrants, fake news and/or election intervention tactics and so on. All of these aspects and the changing security paradigm that comes with them require new security understanding as well as taking of comprehensive and effective common action.

This is even more necessary given the fact that security risks and threats are no longer isolated but inherently dynamic in nature and crossing many spheres of influence.

Threats and risks associated with the above presented concepts of environmental security, food security, and energy security also confirm the complexity of the modern security environment and at the same time highlight the vulnerability of humanity today. As a result, security understanding and thinking about security nowadays should be based on a broad basis that will cover all the necessary aspects for the normal existence and functioning of the people, the states, and the international system as a whole.

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