



# Applying the concept of human security in the Arab countries

*Human insecurity is the result of pervasive, recurrent or intense threats that produce complex ripple effects*

In this first chapter, we define human security as “the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive, prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable”. The definition rests on the classic analysis of human security advanced in the 1994 global Human Development Report sponsored by UNDP, and takes into account present-day circumstances in the Arab countries.

Chapter 1 contextualises this definition. It begins by recounting why the concept of human security has been chosen to launch a new series of Arab Human Development Reports. It next discusses the evolution and scope of the concept at the global level, its relationship to similar concepts, such as human development and human rights, and the metrics used to illustrate its dimensions. The chapter then outlines a move towards Arab views of human security anchored in Arab thinking on the subject and in the realities of the region. In doing so, it sets out the methodology of the report and its approach to measurement in the Arab context. The chapter concludes by introducing a poll of citizens from four Arab countries and the views of a group of young Arabs, which reflect their understanding and assessment of human security in their respective countries.

## Why human security?

*Widespread human insecurity relentlessly undermines human development*

Human insecurity is the result of pervasive, recurrent or intense threats that produce complex ripple effects touching large numbers of people. In the Arab countries, widespread human insecurity relentlessly undermines human development. It is brought on by the depletion of natural resources under pressure, by high population growth rates and by rapid climate change, which could threaten the livelihoods, income, food and shelter of millions of Arabs. It is ingrained in the predicament of one-fifth of the people in

some Arab countries, and of more than half in others, whose lives are impoverished and cut short by hunger and want. It reverberates in the military occupation and armed conflicts witnessed in Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Human insecurity rears its head even in Arab countries that enjoy relative stability where the latter's security forces hold wide sway in curtailing or violating citizens' rights. And it is aggravated by the contrast between the lives of citizens hollowed out by scarcity and those of

*The concept shifts attention from questions of state security to that of human security*

their neighbours, whether in their own countries or countries next door, whose ills often stem from excess.

This portrayal is no exaggeration: the people of Darfur, Iraqis, Palestinians and Somalis go in fear for their lives each day, with the spectre of random violence and destruction all around them. Such fears also permeate more fortunate Arab societies which, although free from armed conflicts or occupying forces, suffer under the dead hand of authoritarian power. In many Arab countries, the ordinary person enters a police station at his or her peril, knowing he or she is liable to be hauled away on the merest suspicion of crime or public agitation. Dissenting citizens risk being thrown in prison for exercising their civic duty to speak out against state repression. Gripped by dread of actual or potential harm from fellow Arabs and foreign powers alike, torn by conflicts and hobbled by unjust laws, too many Arabs live out an existential nightmare of insecurity that numbs hope, shrivels initiative and drains the public sphere of the motivation for co-operative and peaceful change.

Few subjects, therefore, are more appropriate than human security as the starting point for the present series of reports, which seeks to reappraise the state of Arab human development in the first decade of a new millennium.

*Firstly*, the concept shifts attention from questions of state security—which are generally overemphasized in the political discourse of the region and sometimes sought at the expense of citizens' security—to that of human security, without which state security has little value. This understanding of the concept, then, views human security as a condition for the achievement of state security. Citizens liberated from fear and need are far more likely to acknowledge the political, economic, and social legitimacy of a responsible and responsive state that protects their interests. Such citizens will be motivated to work together in confronting any external or internal dangers they may face; and they will be fortified against the temptation to ally themselves with foreign powers against the interests of the state.

*Secondly*, human security, when viewed correctly, helps to re-balance the preoccupation with terror, and the so-called war on it, which have come to dominate

international and regional politics. That preoccupation, which has spread in the post-9-11 environment, has turned policy attention back to issues of national security, state enforcement and military solutions. The manner in which this so-called war has been prosecuted has created a backlash in the region that has worsened the security and rights of individual citizens. Indeed, in Iraq and other countries, it has wrought destruction, caused loss of life among Arab and foreign nationals and infringed human rights on a scale that, according to the campaign's many critics, have left the world more divided and less secure than ever.

*Thirdly*, the subject provides a framework for analysing and addressing critical hazards to which the region, at the time of writing, is increasingly vulnerable. These manifest themselves not only in direct threats to life in cases such as Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but also in the indirect threats posed by hunger, poverty and environmental stresses. The latter include the drastic consequences of external and regional competition for Arab oil, rising pressure on scarce water resources from fast-growing populations, and the impacts of repeated droughts, encroaching deserts and deteriorating climate conditions.

## The concept at the global level

In the volatile world order that has followed the end of the cold war, external and internal challenges to the integrity of states have multiplied. From without, environmental pollution, international terrorism, large population movements, a melting global financial system and other cross-border threats such as pandemics, the drug trade and human trafficking have all laid siege to traditional notions of security. Within countries, spreading poverty, unemployment, civil wars, sectarian and ethnic conflicts and state repression have sharply underlined the weak or negative role of many states in securing their citizens' lives and livelihoods. Not surprisingly, attention has shifted away from safeguarding the integrity of states to protecting the lives of the citizens who reside in them. The concept of human security emerges from this shift.

Unlike human development, human security has no widely accepted definition. Although the term has entered humanitarian, diplomatic and developmental discourse in the last twenty years, the scope of the concept behind it varies from one context to another. This is to be expected. The number of threats that could potentially befall people is almost limitless. What is, and what is not considered a threat to human security depends upon the definition adopted.

However, while definitions of human security vary in scope, their common centrepiece is the individual, and not the state. The direction of this paradigm shift is summarized below:

The differences between state security and human security may be summarized as follows:

- The source of threat to state security is generally a military one, whereas the sources of threat to human security are varied; they include the environment, the economy, and even the state itself.
- The actors who threaten the security of the state tend to be located outside the state concerned. Hence, they are generally other states or opposition organizations based in other states.
- The object of threat in the case of state security is the state itself, including its cohesiveness, its powers, and its territory, whereas the object of threat in the case of human security is individuals' lives, freedom, or both.

Studies pertaining to state security generally assume that the 'default mode' in human life and among state entities is one of struggle and conflict, whereas studies of individual human security assume that, given the common interests human beings share, they gravitate naturally toward mutual cooperation.

The primary entry points for studies related to national security are found in political science, whereas studies pertaining to human security use a variety of entry points that draw not only on political science, but also on areas such as sociology, economics, psychology, public health, and environmental science.

In the absence of a universally adopted definition of human security, various attempts have been made at the international level to identify the scope of the concept. In the main, two interpretive

Table 1-1		State security versus human security	
Form of Security	Referent	Object of Protection	Potential Threats
Traditional security	The state	The integrity and safety of the state	Inter-state war and foreign intervention Nuclear proliferation Civil disorder
Human security	The individual	The safety and freedom of the individual	Poverty Disease Environmental depletion Human rights violations Conflicts, violence and repression

Source: The Report team.

schools have emerged into which most current definitions fit. These are the narrow and broad conceptions of human security. Thus, one can compare such definitions along a spectrum.

The narrow end of the spectrum, while focused on the individual, is limited to violent threats such as those posed by landmines, the spread of small arms and grievous human rights abuses. The normative movements which gave rise to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the International Criminal Court and international campaigns to halt the spread of firearms, drug trafficking and violence against women are examples of policy actions taken in a narrow human security perspective. This approach continues to influence international initiatives in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, as well as interventions under the still-controversial rubric of the Responsibility to Protect.

The broad end incorporates a long list of possible threats, from traditional security threats such as war to developmental threats in the areas of health, poverty and the environment. The categorization adopted by UNDP in its milestone 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) is a pioneering example of this approach. The latter report posited seven dimensions of human security:

- Economic security threatened by poverty;
- Food security threatened by hunger and famine;
- Health security threatened by injury and disease;

*Sources of threat to human security are varied and include the environment, the economy, and even the state itself*

*The object of threat in the case of human security is individuals' lives, freedom, or both*

- Environmental security threatened by pollution, environmental degradation and resource depletion;
- Personal security threatened by crime and violence;
- Political security threatened by political repression;
- Community security threatened by social, ethnic or sectarian conflict.

The hallmarks of the UNDP categorization are its breadth compared to the traditional understanding of security; its incorporation of human freedom, as well as human life, as a core value; the interrelated causes and effects that it identifies among the dimensions of human security; and its focus on the individual. Importantly, the UNDP approach recognises the individual's relationship to the state as another possible threat to human security. The 1994 HDR, and the debate it prompted, underwrite the UN's commitment to a world order "free from fear and free from want", as advanced in the Millennium Report of the UN Secretary-General,<sup>1</sup> which in turn led to the establishment of the Commission on Human Security (CHS) in 2001.

The CHS defined human security as the protection of the "vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment". It also set threshold criteria that, once crossed, elevate an issue to the status of a human security threat. In the Commission's original definition, the "vital core of the individual" is that which affords a minimum level of survival. However, the

CHS subsequently extended its definition beyond issues of survival. Its revised definition transcends enabling people simply to withstand threats. Rather, it encompasses defending people's basic human rights, livelihoods and human dignity from preventable reversals and empowering them to overcome or avoid further threats through individual and collective action. Human security, by this definition, is not merely about survival; it is about re-launching people at risk on a safer course, supported by the political, economic, social and cultural building blocks for a better life.<sup>2</sup>

## Relationship to other concepts

In this fuller view, human security can be seen as the "rearguard" of human development. Whereas human development is concerned with expanding the individual's capabilities and opportunities, human security is concerned with enabling peoples to contain or avert threats to their lives, livelihoods and natural dignity. Human development, by its nature, is open-ended. It can expand to various levels of aspiration in different settings with different potentials. But in conditions of critical hazard, all people absolutely must enjoy a minimum level of security to protect their lives and livelihoods and move forward from there. Human security more narrowly prioritizes the rights, capabilities and preventive actions required in such life-threatening situations. The two look at the human condition from different ends of a continuum, summarized by Amartya Sen as "expansion with equity" (human development) and "downturn with security" (human security).<sup>3</sup> The two concepts are therefore complementary, meeting and overlapping along a line running from human desperation to human aspirations, as illustrated in (simplified) figure 1-1.

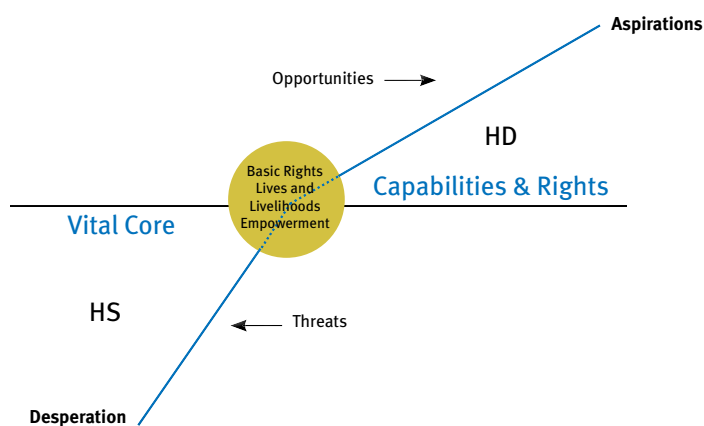
On the one hand, human security is a basic requirement for the achievement of human development, since the range of choices available to people can only expand if they are in a position to guarantee their survival and their liberty. On the other, raising people's educational levels, improving their health conditions, increasing their basic incomes and assuring their basic freedoms serves to consolidate their

*Human security is not merely about survival; it is about re-launching people at risk on a safer course*

*Human security can be seen as the 'rearguard' of human development*

Figure 1-1

Where human security meets human development – threshold and overlap



The current security picture is paradoxical. As a writer in the *Financial Times* aptly put it, “The world has rarely been more peaceful or felt so insecure.”

According to a recent report on human security, there has been a sharp decline since the early 1990s in civil wars and other forms of armed conflict. The number of refugees has also gone down, and human rights abuses have decreased. These statistics indicate that the world is becoming more peaceful.

Yet at the same time, the collective sense of insecurity is higher than at any time before, because the forces that drive insecurity remain persistent and pervasive. These drivers of insecurity fit into four categories:

First, poverty, and poverty-related insecurities, for the billions who lack access to reliable food supplies, safe drinking water, adequate health care, and modern energy supplies. This is the rawest form of insecurity—a reality for 40 per cent of our fellow human beings, who live on the edge of survival on less than two dollars per day.

A second category is the lack of good governance—not infrequently linked to poverty—which ranges from corruption to severely repressive regimes whose hallmark is egregious human rights abuses. Democracy recently has made remarkable strides, particularly in Eastern Europe and Latin America. But many tyrants remain, in the Middle East and other regions.

A third driver of insecurity is the sense of injustice that results from the imbalance between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’—the sharp contrasts in wealth and power that we see between the North and the South. This sense of injustice is magnified by the perception that the sanctity of human life is not equally valued—that society grieves the loss of life in the developed world far more than it grieves the greater loss of life in places like Darfur or Iraq...

Fourth is the artificial polarization along religious or ethnic lines. This is a centuries-old phenomenon, but it continues to flare up recently, leading some to worry about a ‘clash of civilizations’ between Muslims and the West. In my view, it is an utter mistake to think that these tensions arise from clashing religious values. But for people who suffer gross inequities—many of them in the Muslim world—it is easy to be convinced that their suffering is due to religious or ethnic prejudice, instead of the real causes that have existed throughout history, warring people and nations, fighting over power and resources. This conviction can make them more likely to seek refuge in distorted views of religion or ethnicity in order to channel their rage and redress their grievances.

The human security picture would not be complete without factoring in the impact of globalization. Modern society is interdependent as never before. This interdependence is a double-edged sword; it provides opportunities to address these problems more effectively, but can also accentuate them...

Against this backdrop, it should be apparent why conventional concepts of security—rooted in the protection of national borders and old concepts of sovereignty—are no longer adequate. Most of the drivers of insecurity I have mentioned are without borders. If a new extremist group emerges in the Middle East, it makes me worry. If a new civil war breaks out in an African state, I will be disturbed. Not only because we are all members of the same human family—but also because of the probability that each of these developments will affect me sooner or later.

In other words, the modern age demands that we think in terms of *human security*—a concept of security that is people-centred and without borders. A concept that acknowledges the inherent linkages between economic and social development, respect for human rights, and peace.

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Source: El-Baradei 2006.

human development, which, in turn, leads to greater human security. Thus, human security and human development are mutually reinforcing.

Some thinkers have also broadened the concept of human security to cover all aspects of human rights. Yet human security is not coterminous with the concept of human rights. Rather, it would be more accurate to think of it as the *outcome* of a set of conditions, one of which is respect for all human rights—whether civil, political, economic, social, or cultural, or individual or collective. When such rights are respected, a significant degree of human security is achieved as well. However, this may not be entirely sufficient, since respect for these rights

does not, for example, protect people from climate change or natural disasters, the effects of which can deprive millions of people of shelter and employment. Indeed, such disasters can cause thousands to lose their lives, as happened during the tsunami that struck some South Asian countries in 2004. Moreover, some of these rights, such as the right to form associations, may not be necessary for the achievement of human security as defined in this report. It follows that respect for a number of fundamental human rights, particularly civil rights, as well as some economic and social rights such as the right to employment, nutrition and medical care, is a necessary but insufficient condition for the achievement of human security.

*Human security and human development are mutually reinforcing*



## Towards Arab views of human security

*Few Arabic studies deal directly with the concept of human security*

How do Arab writings on human security, few as these may be, engage with human security? How might we define the concept in the Arab context? What major threats in the region should it refer to? Do the dimensions proposed in the 1994 global Human Development Report include all those that are most significant and illuminating for our countries?

## Arab writings on the subject

Few Arabic studies deal directly with the concept of human security. However, warnings against various human threats, including non-military threats, recur in the Arab written heritage and in the popular culture of some Arab countries. These traditional references at best approximate some of the dimensions of the modern concept but do not attain its comprehensive and multidimensional stature nor did

Box 1-2

AZIZ AL AZMEH\* – Arabs and human security

The narrowing, as opposed to the broadening, of the concept of human security, is not unconnected to two other closely related notions that have left their mark on the concepts and theories of contemporary political science. Concepts associated with this phase, which are manifested in the programmes of local and international non-governmental organizations, tend, in one respect, to shift concern away from the state and the national entity while placing greater emphasis on ethnic, religious, and local groups. At the same time, such concepts tend to lend greater importance to the individual than to the group, be it national or sub-national.

When I say that these notions are closely related, what I mean by this is that they result from the discourse of democracy and pluralism, which is linked in turn to the application of market-related freedom to the realm of political freedom.

Notions such as human security are undoubtedly a result of globalization in its current phase, and the shift of attention away from the state and the national community is justified by obstacles on the path to the structural reform of Arab state systems. However, if we take this trend to its logical conclusion without any consideration for the overall national interest or even for the pan-Arab interest, we will find ourselves careening headlong into an unforeseen abyss. We will capitulate unthinkingly to exquisite but empty words and phrases instead of considering possibilities that fit with the ever-changing reality of the Arab world.

This said, it may be permissible to speak of “human security in the Arab world” if one adheres to two principles, one negative and one positive. The negative principle requires great caution in wresting their objective and subjective character from ethnic, religious, and local groups that form part of the framework of the Arab state, a state which is called upon to construct the foundations of citizenship and not those of provincialism, sectarianism, clan-ism or tribalism. This is because individual human security and such national component groups are, politically speaking, inseparable, regardless of one’s perspective on human development.

The positive principle entails covering all elements that might go to make up human security as a comprehensive concept capable of providing direction for human development in a way that transcends ‘security’—which is overly general—to give the notion cohesion and specificity.

Such a comprehensive framework for addressing the security of Arab citizens is certainly needed, for the latter are confronted with a multiplicity of threats. Their economic survival is at risk (as a result of the failure and disunity of economic structures following the atrophy of the concept of comprehensive economic and social development adopted during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s). Their personal safety is often jeopardized (owing to—in addition to physical, spiritual, familial, and societal violence—the tyranny of security apparatuses or attempts by ruling powers to terrorize societies into being virtuous and God-fearing). Their national and pan-Arab identity is disintegrating (under sectarian conflicts, wars, foreign occupation, and obstacles on the path to political reform). Their cultural and educational security has waned (which requires that we restore the concept of cultural development rather than adopting the prevailing view of our societies, which see themselves as communities founded on civilized manners, social conservatism, and cultural purity). Their social security has collapsed (resulting from the erosion of social security systems and growing negligence on the part of legal and judicial systems), and their environmental security is under great pressure, which is linked in turn to the world economy.

If we wish to combine these elements, highlight the points of intersection among them, and transform them into a comprehensive concept capable of guiding and lending cohesion to ‘human development,’ we must enrich the concept of human security by placing it within the framework of Arab community movements. We must bring it down to earth from abstraction and fuzziness, keeping clearly before our eyes that our fundamental purpose in concerning ourselves with human security is to achieve human and national development.

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they enter the mainstream culture. On the other hand, we find that the term 'human security' has made its way into the works of contemporary Arab authors, both those who write in foreign languages and those who write in their native Arabic.

Writings in Arabic on the concept of human security have appeared in the context of academic research at Western universities, speeches or writings addressed to the Western public, or Arab conferences focusing on the issue. The most significant axes that have engaged Arab authors are the relationship between human security and state security, the scope of human security, the areas included within human security, and the relationships among these concerns.

Most contemporary Arab writers express the belief in an unbreakable bond between individual human security and national security on the one hand and human security and external military threats on the other. Other writers believe that the authoritarian state is the source of the greatest threats to human security in the region (Abdul Monem Al-Mashat, in Arabic, background paper for the report). However, such writers do not maintain that the achievement of human security rules out state security. Rather, they hold that the achievement of individual human security will have the effect of transforming the authoritarian state into one that respects the rule of law. This shift may require, among other things, the reform of existing security apparatuses or possibly even the establishment of new security institutions.<sup>4</sup>

There are disparate views among Arab writers concerning the scope of the concept of human security. Some hold that the individual is the focal point and goal of human security. One representative of this view is Mohamed El Baradei, who states that "... the modern age demands that we think in terms of human security—a concept of security that is people-centred and without borders. A concept that acknowledges the inherent linkages between economic and social development, respect for human rights, and peace".<sup>5</sup> Others likewise affirm that human security is personal security and, as such, revolves around the individual—his or her rights, well-being, freedoms and dignity,<sup>6</sup> and that state security and human

security are complementary concepts, in the sense that the former should be seen as one of the means to achieve the latter.<sup>7</sup> On this view, the concept of human security is bound intimately to human rights in general and, more specifically, to women's rights, in which connection it draws authority from international covenants and agreements.

Arab writers disagree over the areas of life encompassed by the concept of human security. Some have greatly expanded its scope, rejecting its restriction to military dimensions. Others, by contrast, have narrowed the concept. Representatives of the first trend include Korany and al-Mashat. Korany, for example, holds that human security is linked to liberation from fear and respect for human dignity.<sup>8</sup> Al-Mashat maintains that the broader concept of human security depends on the achievement of material prosperity, and of balance or harmony in society. On this basis, he divides states into three types, namely, (1) safe states, in which civil society is dominant, (2) unsafe states, which are ruled by the military, and (3) states that lie somewhere between the first two. Other Arab writers either narrow the concept of human security to a single dimension, such as freedom from want, or they approach it by looking at specific social groups (such as the poor), gender groups (such as women), or age groups (such as children). In all such cases, however, they affirm the mutual interdependence and complementarity among the various areas encompassed by human security, namely, the economic, the social, the political, the domestic, and the international (Abdul Monem Al-Mashat, in Arabic, background paper for the report).

### **Human security as defined in this report**

Drawing on UNDP's broad approach and the concerns of Arab thinkers, this report defines human security as *the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive, prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable*. In this definition, freedom is a central value for the individual since, in the Arab context, it is frequently threatened from within and without, by powers at home

*The term 'human security' has made its way into the works of contemporary Arab authors*

*There are disparate views among Arab writers concerning the scope of the concept of human security*

*The distinction between state security and individual human security does not mean that one is necessarily at odds with the other*

and abroad. The definition also encompasses a well defined range of human concerns. It includes employment opportunities, income adequate to meet basic needs, nutrition, health care, peaceful relations among different identity groups, the state's fulfilment of its basic duty to protect its citizens from internal and external aggression, and the individual's safety from personal threats.

The degree of seriousness of these threats is determined by four factors: (1) intensity, (2) extent, (3) temporal duration, and (4) comprehensiveness. The *intensity* of a threat is manifested when it affects people's ability to survive and when it deprives people of the minimum level of liberty consistent with basic human freedoms. The *extent* of a threat varies depending on whether it affects a larger or smaller number of people. Similarly, the *seriousness* of a threat increases when it lasts for a longer period of time. Lastly, the more *comprehensive* the range of areas of human activity affected by a given threat, the more serious it will be. Hunger and poverty, for example, affect an individual's health, the manner in which he or she relates to the environment, his or her political participation, and individual productivity.

In focusing on the security of individual Arab citizens, the report does not overlook the threats to the Arab world as a whole or to the individual states therein. The distinction between state security and individual human security does not mean that one is necessarily at odds with the other or that the achievement of one rules out the achievement of the other. In fact, state security is necessary for individual human security. If a state should fall under foreign occupation and lose its autonomy or territorial integrity, this will have a negative impact on individual human security. Military occupation does not generally take place peacefully, and the measures taken by occupation authorities to ensure their soldiers' safety involve, in most cases, restricting the freedoms of the citizenry of the occupied country. Indeed, they may involve wanton disregard for recognized standards for fair trials.

At the same time, state security may at times be achieved at the expense of the individual security of its citizens and those residing in its territories. This occurs when

state authorities seek to arrive at what they imagine to be 'absolute security' by resorting to extraordinary measures parading as 'law and order' and by restricting the freedoms of those they suspect of threatening national security. The continuation of such strictures on citizens' freedoms may in fact end up threatening the security of the state itself when some of its citizens might join forces with a foreign power with its own designs on their territory, and when such citizens succeed, with the help of such foreign powers, in toppling their government. In so doing, they open the door for their country to fall under foreign occupation and internal fragmentation.

In fact, it is evident that the individual can only be secure in a strong, accountable and well-governed state. After all, the process of protecting people from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and deteriorating health conditions can only succeed within a state that can manage its economy, institutions and infrastructure in a way that guarantees its citizens suitable employment, adequate incomes, and appropriate levels of nutrition and health. Such 'good governance' also ensures that relations among the country's varied ethnic and cultural groups will be peaceful and tension-free. This kind of state fulfils its responsibility to preserve security and order and is successful in maintaining its political autonomy and territorial integrity. There can be no doubt that a state's success in carrying out all these functions accountably is the basis of its ability to acquire legitimacy and to win and maintain its citizens' support. In other words, such a state will be all the stronger for protecting its citizens' individual security and welfare.

### Mapping relevant threats

Any identification of threats to Arab human security needs to reflect the status of the region as a highly diverse area which, through most periods of its history, has been the object of conflict among the world's superpowers. It is also a region that has trailed the world on leading measures of good governance, democracy and social cohesion. Consequently, while this report engages with the internationally recognized dimensions of human security

*The individual can only be secure in a strong, accountable and well-governed state*



as identified in the 1994 global Human Development Report, it also invokes specific threats to human security in the Arab countries. These include dimensions such as foreign occupation, foreign and regional military interventions, violence that springs from mobilization along primordial identities, and oppressive state practices that undermine human security.

In keeping with its status as a regional report, the present study approaches these threats to human security in Arab countries as follows:

Its primary focus is on those proximate areas of threat where the Arab countries can largely take the initiative themselves. These comprise threats to people that stem from damage to the natural resource base; that originate with, or undermine the state, including group conflicts arising from competition for power and resources; and that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. Proximate threats also cover dangers posed by economic vulnerability, unemployment, lack of social protection and other economic conditions; and by inadequate levels of nutrition and health. Such threats fall chiefly within the scope of response of the Arab countries themselves, albeit some have important global intersections and implications for the international community. The focus of most chapters lies in these areas. A final chapter, however, considers a major source of threats to human security—the foreign occupation of Arab lands—where, self-evidently, responsibility for change directly involves the powers in question. Any Arab discussion of this topic must, in the end, be addressed to those parties with whom the initiative remains. The report therefore ends with this important subject.

Thus, the sequence of topics the report addresses is:

- Pressures on environmental and natural resources
- The state and human security: performance and prospects
- The insecurity of vulnerable groups
- Economic vulnerability, poverty and unemployment
- Food security and nutrition
- Health and human security
- Occupation and foreign military intervention

In starting its analysis with pressures on natural resources, the report acknowledges

that environmental management has become a serious challenge in the region. Countries such as Somalia and Sudan have suffered in recent years from massive killer droughts. Climate change may threaten the survival, employment and income prospects of millions of Arabs. Population growth rates remain among the highest in the world. A deteriorating environment has eroded the health conditions of millions in Egypt, for example, in recent decades. Moreover, the question also includes the geostrategic importance of the region—and of its oil wealth specifically—which have long exposed some Arab states to external influence and intervention. Another precious resource—water—is increasingly behind intense struggles that may inflict a large toll on peoples and communities. For all these reasons, the dwindling of the region's natural resource base is becoming a source of human insecurity, a trend which warrants renewed policy attention.

Indeed, features of the resource base peculiar to the region, and the patterns of development to which these have led, have cast their shadow over economic conditions. The marked division between rich and poor Arab states reflects a lopsided endowment in natural wealth. Economic conditions, in their turn, impact human security with respect to the availability of employment opportunities and the ease or difficulty of obtaining food and health services; similarly, they also influence relations between various cultural groups such as farmers and pastoralists in Darfur.

## Measuring levels of human security

Can human security be measured? There have been numerous attempts to answer this question. Acknowledging the complexity of the issue, those concerned<sup>9</sup> have concluded that there are two essential approaches to dealing with measurement. The first is termed the objective approach, since it attempts to construct quantitative indicators of the various dimensions of human security in a number of different countries, and, at times, throughout the world. The most salient example of this approach is found in the metrics produced by the Human Security Centre Committee in Uppsala, Sweden, which were published

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*A major source of threat to human security is the foreign occupation of Arab lands*

*No international study based on the subjective approach to measuring human security has been made*

in 2005 under the title, 'The Human Security Audit'. This, in turn, formed part of a larger report issued by the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia in Canada under the title, "War and Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," the second part of which treats the topic of measuring human security.<sup>10</sup> The objective approach is also illustrated by a study that appeared in the magazine, Foreign Policy, issued by the Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace, which identifies and ranks what are termed 'failed states'.<sup>11</sup> Although this study does not concern itself directly with the assessment of human security, many of the indicators are relevant to the subject.

No single study based on people's perceptions, or what might be termed the subjective approach to measuring human security, has been made on an international scale. However, many of the questions used in the most well-known studies of values and

**Box 1-3**

**THE HUMAN SECURITY SURVEY – Overall findings**

To explore the various dimensions of the concept of human security as understood by Arab citizens, the participants were asked to consider up to 21 potential threats to human security, and choose whether or not they thought each one was indeed a threat in their context. Responses across the four surveys varied extensively. Environmental pollutants were considered the most serious threat by Kuwaitis, whereas Lebanese participants felt that assaults on persons and private property were the leading threats, followed by hunger. By contrast the overwhelming majority of Palestinians regarded foreign occupation as the greatest threat to their safety, while

Moroccans thought that poverty and unemployment caused the greatest insecurity.

Where the survey explored in greater depth, Lebanese and Palestinians agreed in their assessment of the seriousness of specific threats, such as the government's relative inability to protect citizens' lives, water shortages, slow legal procedures, and the difficulty of exercising basic rights. They also focused on tense relations among rival groups, corruption, disintegration of the family, and foreign occupation, though without rating these in the same order of importance:

**Principal perceived threats to human security (%)**

Threats	Countries	Kuwait	Lebanon	Morocco	OPT
Environmental pollutants		91.2	77.8	74.9	..
Water shortages		73.5	80.5	76.9	82.3
Deterioration of agricultural land		..	..	..	78.4
Occupation and foreign influence		..	85.1	..	96.2
Governmental failure to protect citizens		..	87	..	86.9
Arbitrariness of government		..	80.1	..	..
Lack of social protection		..	73.4	..	71
Poor health services		..	80.9	72.3	73.4
Poor educational services		..	..	..	..
The spread of corruption		..	86.3	..	89.4
Slow legal procedures and difficulty in obtaining rights		..	73.2	..	73.7
Weak solidarity among members of society		..	70.2	..	..
Tense relations among different groups		..	80.8	..	83.7
Religious extremism		..	79.9	..	..
Disintegration of the family		..	74.7	..	75.2
Lack of access to basic services		..	81.1	..	75.4
Epidemics and communicable diseases		..	86.2	70	75.6
Unemployment		..	86.5	81.2	91
Poverty		..	86.4	86	90.6
Hunger		..	88.7	75.9	85.4
Assaults on persons and private property		..	89.1	..	80.4

.. = not available

attitudes throughout the world are closely linked with human security. Such studies include the Pew Global Attitudes Project<sup>12</sup> and the World Values Survey undertaken by the University of Michigan.<sup>13</sup>

Despite differences of approach, these international attempts at measurement show that levels of human security in Arab countries have deteriorated in recent years, albeit in varying degrees. However, most of these attempts were either not related to human security directly, did not cover all Arab states, contained value judgments of questionable validity or are now out-of-date since they were conducted before recent major developments in the Arab countries. It may thus be necessary to take a different approach to gauging levels of human security in the region at the present time.

Is it possible to arrive at a general composite indicator of human security? Whereas the Human Development Index (HDI), which is built on basic, universal and quantifiable variables, constitutes a robust and viable composite indicator for that concept, a universally satisfactory human security index remains out of reach. Statistical research on this subject shows how complex and difficult it would be to arrive at such an index.

Firstly, there is no universally accepted definition of human security. Narrow approaches centre on thresholds of survival and major harm (death, extreme violence, life-threatening injury, etc). Broad approaches include a wide range of development and human rights indicators.

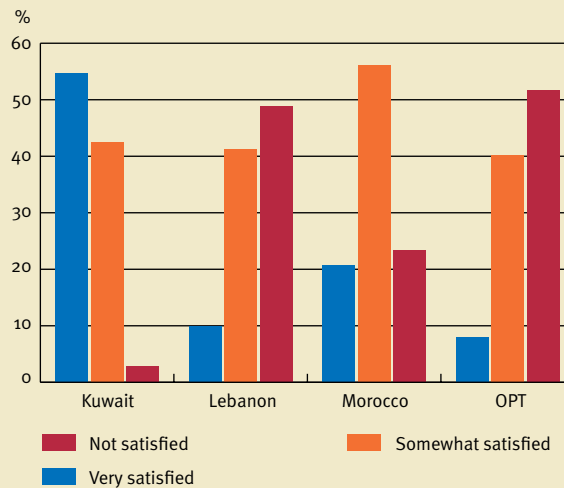
Secondly, human security relates to material and moral dimensions, and is context-specific. It is best illustrated by both qualitative indicators that denote perceptions of risk as well as quantitative indicators of objective threats. Combining these two types in one index is highly problematic and open to criticisms of subjectivity.

Thirdly, the value of any indicator lies in its ability to direct public policy makers and civil society organizations to priority areas. The kind of general indicator that assigns each country an arithmetical average would do nothing to reveal the areas that require intervention, since the arithmetical average would conceal the very conditions that call for such intervention.

Finally, a composite indicator in this field presents real problems of comparability and weighting. It would be difficult,

**Box 1-4**

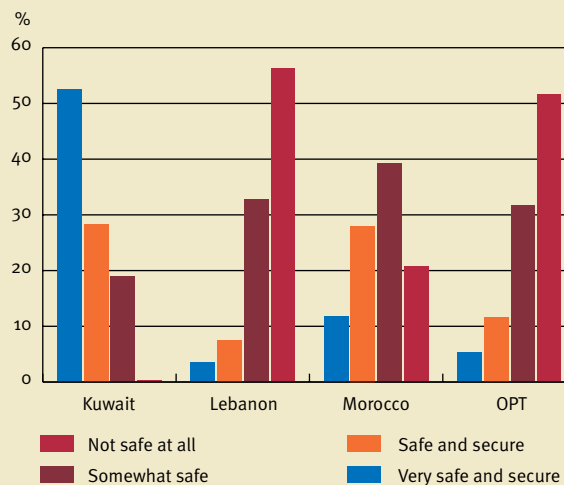
**THE HUMAN SECURITY SURVEY – Satisfaction with the present situation**



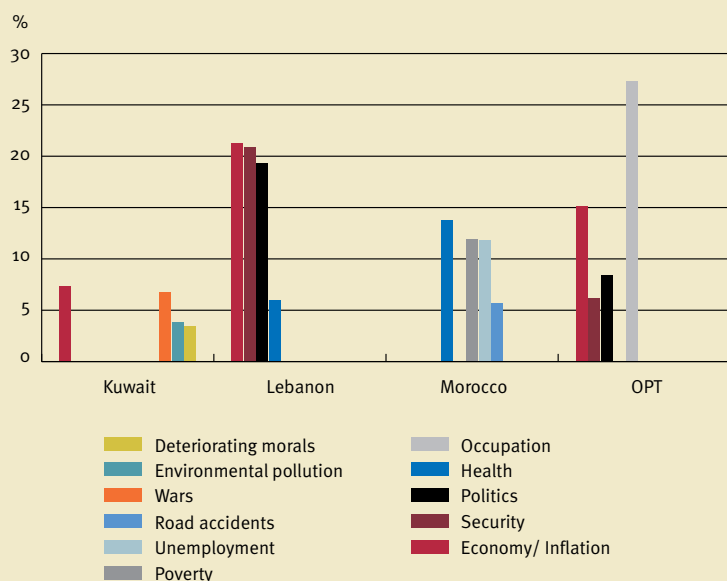
Responses from those sampled in the four countries represent three patterns of response which recur throughout. More than half of Kuwaitis were completely satisfied with their circumstances in terms of the main threats, whereas more than half polled in Morocco were moderately satisfied. In Lebanon and OPT, however, about a half of respondents were dissatisfied. This picture evidently reflects perceptions of the degree of human security in the four countries at the time the questionnaire was administered, that is, in the spring and winter of 2008.

**Box 1-5**

**THE HUMAN SECURITY SURVEY – How safe do citizens feel?**



Do present conditions give citizens a sense of security? The figure above presents responses to this question in the four countries. Survey results place Kuwait at one end of the spectrum and Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) at the other, with respondents from Morocco somewhere in between. More than half those sampled in Kuwait felt very safe, while more than one-fourth of them felt moderately safe. In Lebanon and OPT, by contrast, nearly half felt unsafe, whereas in Morocco, the majority of those sampled felt safe or somewhat safe, while one-fifth of those sampled did not feel safe. It may be noted that those who felt very safe made up a minority of little more than one-tenth of those in Morocco, and barely 5 per cent in OPT and Lebanon.



To determine how secure Arab citizens feel, the respondents were asked to specify the most important sources of threat, for themselves personally. In all four countries, economic conditions were viewed as a threat to security. However, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, foreign occupation ranked as the most serious threat, followed by deteriorating economic conditions, deteriorating political conditions, and a lack of personal security. In Lebanon, concern over the economy took first place, followed by a lack of personal security and deteriorating political conditions. In Morocco, by contrast, the sources of threat were less directly linked to political conditions. Instead, health conditions came first in importance, followed by poverty and unemployment, then traffic accidents. Economic threats and war or external threats were given first place by Kuwaiti respondents, followed by environmental pollution and deteriorating morals.

Poor nutrition did not figure directly among the most significant threats felt by citizens in the four countries although it may have been implied in references to poverty and unemployment, given that these latter phenomena reduce the ability to obtain food.

*The Report team investigated Arab citizens' personal views on human security*

for instance, to combine the threats that result from deteriorating environmental conditions with those that result from civil wars. If it were decided to weight various human security threats differently, it would be virtually impossible to reach agreement on the specific values to attach to each, and the results would remain arbitrary.

It was for reasons such as these that the report team discontinued attempts to construct a single composite indicator of human security in Arab countries. Instead, it elected to assess discretely the various dimensions of human security as they apply to individual Arab countries in order to capture important differences among the Arab states.

## Polling Arab views on human security

In order to supplement its quantitative assessments, the team investigated Arab citizens' personal views on human security by means of a questionnaire, designed and distributed with the help of opinion-polling organisations in four Arab states that represent a range of political and cultural contexts for human security. These were (1) Morocco, considered to have gone farther than any other Arab state along the path of political emancipation, (2) Lebanon, which combines political emancipation with sharp sectarian divisions that have erupted more than once into civil war, (3) Kuwait, which reflects a distinctive culture, and whose citizens enjoy one of the highest levels of affluence in the Arab countries, and (4) the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which still languishes under Israeli occupation.

In each of the four countries, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of one thousand individuals who had been randomly selected in such a way as to represent a variety of age groups and educational and economic levels while also providing a representative cross-section in terms of gender, ethnicity, and geographical location. The questions revolved around the perception of security, the sources of threat to such security, the relative seriousness and importance of these threats, respondents' opinions of state efforts to confront these threats, and what more they believed should be done to confront them.

The questionnaire addressed eight aspects<sup>14</sup> of human security: the concept; environmental security; security in its political and global dimensions; security in society (relations among groups); economic security; nutritional security; health security; and personal safety.

### How young Arabs see human security—the youth forums

The report team organized three discussion forums<sup>15</sup> with young Arabs between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, all of whom had track records as civil society activists.

These young people made important contributions to the discussions, reference

to which will be made throughout the chapters of the present report. The most important included how they conceptualized human security and how they prioritized threats to human security in the region. The majority of the participants from both the Arab East and the Arab West agreed that the concept of human security is a comprehensive one with multiple dimensions, including the political, the economic, the environmental, and the physical, and that it differs from one context to another. Contributions reflected a high level of awareness of the complexity of the concept and the interdependence among its various components. As such, participants were able to draw connections among the various levels and dimensions of human security.

Similarly, the young people demonstrated awareness of the distinctions between the concept's subjective and objective dimensions. As they saw it, the concept of human security involves a dual notion which is related to a balanced relationship between moral and material dimensions. The points of contrast among participants' perspectives on the concept revolved around the question of whether it encompasses the individual, the state, or the external environment, with some holding that the concept of human security is a personal concept that relates to the individual's right to exercise civil rights, to obtain shelter and food, and to have access to such things in a democratic setting.

Expressing the modern outlook of many young Arabs, some participants believed that human security in the Arab countries should mean being able to choose between different options and having the opportunity to contribute to society, without being subjected to social or political pressures. Another team expressed the view that human security has to do with the state, that is, with the latter guaranteeing and respecting the rights of individuals by providing educational and employment opportunities and by ensuring the security of those who take part in political activities. Others thought of human security in terms of a global model that concerns not just Arab countries, but human beings wherever they happen to be. The main feature of this global model is that it guarantees

human freedom within a framework of responsibility.

Some believed that the subjective aspect of human security is more important than its objective dimensions while others argued the opposite case. Still another group thought that the moral and material dimensions of human security are inseparable, pointing, for example, to the link between human dignity, awareness of one's rights, and a sense of freedom on the one hand, and sound legal systems and stable economic conditions on the other. This group also observed that an individual's psychological security affects his or her social, cultural, and intellectual security, and is itself affected by whether or not basic needs are being met. Similarly, security was linked with other values such as those of freedom, dignity, and peace, and the effect these have on education, health and the economy. A consensus emerged that human beings should be able to live in a threat-free environment which provides them with dignity, a suitable standard of living, and freedom.

Most participants had difficulty prioritizing threats to human security. In all three forums, they took the view that all dimensions of life involve potential sources of threat to human security in the Arab countries, and that all dimensions of human security are interlinked and interdependent.

## Conclusion

As this chapter emphasizes, the concept of human security has particular relevance to Arab countries at this juncture. Yet valuable as the concept is, it is not free from ambiguities, notably as it relates to considerations of state security, a fact that can open it to appropriation for questionable ends. The concept can—and has—been used as another means to license foreign interference, including military intervention, in the affairs of sovereign states, as the cases of Iraq and, to some extent, Somalia illustrate. The so-called war on terror has at times provided spurious justification for such interference. In a review of national human development reports and the human security framework, two international scholars have discussed how the principles of human

*The Report team organized three discussion forums with young Arabs*

*The concept of human security has particular relevance to Arab countries at this juncture*



*The attainment of security by one party cannot come at the expense of the security of another*

*The Report openly addresses both governments and enlightened Arab public opinion*

security can be distorted when the concept is hijacked to serve vested interests. They conclude:

“In the post-9/11 security environment, this concept has effectively been turned on its head... Whereas the goal of human security has been the empowerment of people and communities, the same cannot be said for initiatives undertaken in the name of human security in the post-9/11 world.”<sup>16</sup>

A concept should not be judged by its abuse but by the positive contribution it can make to the public and private good. This Report believes that human security offers a strong framework for addressing threats to human development by promoting freedom from fear and freedom from want.<sup>17</sup> Thus, this Report agrees with Jolly and Ray that when “the human security of people in other countries is largely ignored, this approach to human security must be judged as seriously unbalanced and far from the basic concept. Human security properly conceived is not a zero-sum calculation—the attainment of security by one party cannot come at the expense of the security of another party.”<sup>18</sup>

In light of the understanding of the concept of human security discussed in this chapter, this Report does not aim merely to list the various types of threats to which Arabs are vulnerable. Rather, the objective

is to examine the roots of these threats and to suggest strategies for coping with them. Moreover, there is no predisposition in its analysis either against or for Arab governments; rather, this Report addresses itself openly to both governments and enlightened Arab public opinion. Given the supreme importance of this subject to the well being of the Arab peoples, it hopes its analysis and findings will be taken up, discussed and applied by policy makers and civil society alike.

The chapters that follow set out the challenges that confront human security in the Arab countries within their historical context, recognizing them to be the outcome of specific conditions that prevail in the region at the present time. However, there is no reason to believe that such conditions are permanent or inevitable. On the contrary, they can undoubtedly change if the relevant Arab players summon the resolve to envision and test their scope of influence within their particular circumstances and those that prevail regionally and internationally. This Report draws encouragement from the experiences of other peoples of the world, particularly in those developing countries that have faced situations similar to those that challenge the Arab countries in the opening decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Annan 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> Commission on Human Security 2003 (in Arabic).
- <sup>3</sup> Commission on Human Security 2003 (in Arabic).
- <sup>4</sup> Korany 2005a, 2005b.
- <sup>5</sup> El-Baradei 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Abdel Samad 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Abdel Samad and Zeidan 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> Korany 2005a, 2005b.
- <sup>9</sup> Bajpai 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> Bajpai 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Foreign Policy Magazine 2008.
- <sup>12</sup> The Pew Global Project Attitudes 2007.
- <sup>13</sup> Inglehart et al 2008.
- <sup>14</sup> See Annex III.
- <sup>15</sup> The first forum, held in Cairo on 15-16 December, 2007, brought together thirty young men and women from Djibouti, Egypt, the Sudan, and Somalia. The second, held in Amman on 11-12 January, 2008, involved thirty-one young men and women from Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The third forum, held in Cairo on 8-9 February, 2008, brought together a number of young men from Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Participants were chosen by the UNDP office in Beirut and the report team to provide a balanced representation in terms of gender, nationality, major capitals, regional cities, and professional backgrounds, with an age range of eighteen to twenty-five years. The discussions held by these young people revolved around the same five major questions addressed by the country survey.
- <sup>16</sup> Jolly and Basu Ray 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> In this context, the authors recall US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1941 Congressional Address in which he articulated his Four Freedoms: freedom of speech and of religion and freedom from want and from fear. This celebrated formulation influenced both the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in fact, the second pair of freedoms anticipated the human security approach.
- <sup>18</sup> Jolly and Basu Ray 2006.

