

Briefing

Human Security and the Integrated Review

Human security puts the protection and wellbeing of people at the heart of security policy. Unlike the dominant National Security approach, which prioritises the protection of national territory, government, citizens and commerce against militarised threats, it takes a broad approach to preventing, transforming and mitigating threats ranging from violent conflict to climate breakdown, pandemic disease, economic crisis and political oppression. It prioritises international cooperation for tackling the transnational challenges that undermine the shared security of humanity, rather than competitive national strategies.

The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy was launched by the PM over a year ago and is expected to report on 16 March 2021. Its [goal](#) is 'to set the long-term strategic aims of our international policy and national security, rooted in our national interests, so that our activity overseas delivers for the British people.' It is thus expected to supersede the last National Security Strategy, published in November 2015.

What is Human Security?

Human security is an approach that puts the experience and wellbeing of the individual at the centre of security policy. In broader application, since all humans are parts of humanity, the **shared security** of the global population is also of central concern. And since humanity depends on the health of its planet, so too is ecological or **planetary security**. As such, human security is intrinsically concerned with defending people against such potentially catastrophic threats as climate breakdown, pandemics and economic collapse as well as war and violence.

Human security came to prominence in 1994 when it was championed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its [annual report](#) on human development. It began as an effort to move away from the dominant 'national security' approach of competing states and geopolitical blocs and to present a framework for understanding what security might mean for individuals. It aimed to stimulate ideas of how security practice and resources could be reshaped and redirected to promote wellbeing as much as provide protection. It broke security down into seven categories: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.

Subsequently, the concept was developed by the UN and through an independent [Commission on Human Security](#) sponsored by Japan. It was broadly endorsed by the [UN World Summit](#) in 2005 and gained a universally accepted definition in the UN General Assembly [Resolution 66/290](#) of 2012. It has since been central to a number of UN-developed policy frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as being officially embraced by the EU (including its 2016 [Global Strategy](#)), Canada, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

Human security aims to reconcile the international system's responsibility for security, development and human rights. As such, it is sometimes framed around three types of freedom that the UN and national governments should uphold:

- **Freedom from fear** – including protection from violence and its threatened use, as well as from the existential threats of weapons of mass destruction, and climate and ecological collapse;

Briefing

- **Freedom from want** – including provision of decent food, housing and healthcare, and freedom from other forms of physical deprivation;
- **Freedom from indignity** – including from human rights abuses and other forms of humiliation, such as autocratic rule and racial, religious or sexual discrimination.

It places a heavy emphasis on **long-termism** in policy-making to address and transform the deep roots of conflict, marginalisation and environmental challenges. As such, it is very much focused on **conflict and crisis prevention**. **Cooperation**, domestically and internationally, is also central to human security. Cooperation in one sphere is likely to build mutual confidence towards resolving other security challenges.

Have previous National Security Strategies addressed Human Security?

Previous UK national security strategies ([2008](#), [2010](#), [2015](#)) do not provide adequate definitions of what ‘security’ means or for whom it is provided. None uses the term ‘human security’. The most recent has ‘Protect our People’ as one of its three National Security Objectives, including protecting ‘our territory, economic security, infrastructure and way of life’. Actions under this objective are overwhelmingly concerned with military defence, counter-terrorism, counter-espionage and combating organised and cyber crime.

This is striking as Public Health (primarily infectious disease and antimicrobial resistance) and Major Natural Hazards (mainly flooding) are rated as two of the six Tier One Priority Risks assessed by the 2015 National Security Risk Assessment on which the Strategy is based. However, they are given far lower priority in terms of responses and resourcing than comparable militarised threats. Climate change is mentioned often but as a long-term concern primarily affecting coastal flooding and the stability of societies in the developing world. Environmental or ecological security is not referenced.

Is ‘Human Security’ used differently by the military?

During the 2010s the term ‘human security’ began to be used by the UK military in relation to its own activities *during* armed conflict. It first began to use the term in peacekeeping operations in 2014, offering advice and training on international humanitarian law around treatment of civilians, women and children. Human security became increasingly conjoined with the military application of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including responding to sexual violence in conflict, which was a [priority](#) of the 2010-15 coalition government.

More recently, human security has also broadly been used by the MoD in lieu of or interchangeably with the concept of Protection of Civilians (PoC) in armed conflict. PoC has had a separate, [parallel development](#) to human security since the late 1990s, again led by the UN but focused on the role and responsibilities of military actors. This is sometimes referred to as a ‘narrow’ definition of human security. Practitioners differ on whether the two approaches to human security are complementary or in competition.

In April 2019 the MoD officially established a Centre of Excellence on Human Security to provide training and guidance to UK and foreign personnel. The UK is thus unusual in having “the first military in the world to have a dedicated national defence policy on Human Security” ([MoD, 2019](#)), even though that policy appears to be very different from the ‘broad’ preventative, civilian actor-focused concept of human security developed and endorsed by the UN.

Briefing

How might the Integrated Review promote human security?

As the basis for the UK's next national security strategy, the Integrated Review should promote a human security approach in the following ways:

- 1. Defining what 'national security' means** is fundamental to any security strategy and the effective evaluation of its outcomes. This definition should be based upon sustainably developing the wellbeing of people and planet. The Integrated Review should therefore be concerned with:
 - the human security of all people within the UK;
 - the UK's contribution to the shared security of humanity;
 - the viability of the planetary ecosystem on which we all depend.
- 2. Defining the beneficiaries of security policy** is also crucial. Ensuring the wellbeing of the individual, communities and the wider population must be the first priority of a national security strategy. Such a human security approach would **prioritise opportunity, equality and inclusion for all** in our society with special emphasis on the most vulnerable and insecure.
- 3.** As part of the Integrated Review, the UK should set out its **vision of global security**. It should provide a **strategy for building a more peaceful, just and sustainable world**. It should be transformative in its aspirations to 'build back better' an international system that upholds human rights, justice and democracy and prioritises, supports and sustains peace by:
 - Promoting disarmament and demilitarisation;
 - Championing peacebuilding;
 - Committing to abide by international law, not just police others' compliance;
 - Prioritising action through the UN and multilateral institutions;
 - Expanding UK capabilities for providing emergency relief and disaster response, including to pandemic disease.
- 4.** In a context of climate & ecological emergency, **rebuilding planetary (ecological) security** must be an integral part of the UK's vision and strategy for security. Specific measures might include:
 - Elaborating an actual strategy for the UK to achieve Net Zero well before 2050;
 - Expanding the UK commitment to global environmental research, including climate, oceanographic and polar science;
 - Expanding support for renewable energy R&D in the UK and abroad.
- 5.** The Integrated Review should not be considered a one-off activity but part of an **ongoing conversation between people and government** on what can maximise their own security, resilience and happiness. **Mechanisms for ongoing societal consultation** should be included as a key output of the Review.

Briefing

Further Information and Action

A **Westminster Hall debate** on Human Security has been agreed by the Backbench Business Committee and is expected in March 2021. MPs representing at least seven parties have requested to speak.

An **Early Day Motion** ([#1384](#)) on Human Security and the Integrated Review was tabled on 20 Jan 2021. The motion's text is:

“That this House welcomes the upcoming Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy; notes with concern the changing nature of global threats to the UK, including irreversible climate change, emerging artificial intelligence and the risk of increased frequency and size of global pandemics; highlights that many of these threats could cause far greater disruption to the lives of UK citizens than traditional military threats; emphasises that unforeseen developments of this nature can occur at pace and must be pre-emptively addressed; believes that the Integrated Review is an opportunity to reframe the UK's approach to defence and security to ensure future generations are protected; and calls on the Government to champion an inclusive, positive vision of global and local security.”

About Rethinking Security

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and campaigners with expertise in peacebuilding, conflict and security research, disarmament and demilitarisation.¹ We have a shared concern that the current approach to national security in the UK and beyond often hampers efforts for peace, justice and ecological sustainability. We are committed to building a much richer understanding of what security really means, and of what is required to build sustainable security.

Beginning in March 2021 we will be conducting a three-year **Alternative Security Review** for the UK with the objective of changing the way that UK security policy is generated, based on an approach that promotes peace, human wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

For more on Rethinking Security, its work and [engagement](#) with the Integrated Review, see our [website](#) or contact our Coordinator, Richard Reeve: Richard@rethinkingsecurity.org.uk

Our [submission to the Integrated Review](#) (Sept 2020) contains further detail on our proposed approach to security strategies.

Our report, [Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American Security Strategies](#) (March 2018) compares how the UK and 19 peer states approach security in their national strategies.

¹ Rethinking Security's organisational members include Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, International Alert, Medact, Movement for the Abolition of War, Oxford Research Group, Peace Direct, Quaker Peace And Social Witness, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Saferworld, Scientists for Global Responsibility, United Nations Association – UK, and War on Want.