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Multi-Sum Security: Five Distinct Dimensions

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Five discrete but overlapping dimensions of global security are discussed – including the oft-overlooked importance of transcultural security – to extend beyond the traditional, state-centric security paradigm.

Since the 1990s, there have been a number of attempts to broaden the conception of security beyond the purely state-centric model. A cooperative security concept was advanced in response to the realization that states needed to cooperate to tackle the multiple security challenges that were identified in the post-Cold War era. This concept suggested that national security was no longer just a national concern and called for enhanced cooperation between states.

In this vein, my classification of global security is centered on what I have previously proposed as the multi-sum security principle, which states:

"In a globalized world, security can no longer be thought of as a zero-sum game involving states alone. Global security, instead, has five dimensions that include human, environmental, national, transnational and transcultural security, and therefore, global security and the security of any state or culture cannot be achieved without good governance at all levels that guarantees security through justice for all individuals, states and cultures." (The Five Dimensions of Global Security: Proposal for a Multi-security Principle. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007)
The five dimensions

I have previously proposed a new classification of global security that included five distinct but overlapping substrates: human, environmental, national, transnational and transcultural security. While the first four substrates have been previously addressed as security concepts in some form or another, the fifth, transcultural security, is sadly understudied and under-represented. I will now elaborate briefly on these five dimensions.
Human security

Proponents of human security argue for a people-centered view of security, and some call into question the primacy of national security, although it is clear that challenging the primacy of the state is not possible. The concept of human security was incorporated into the UN system with the milestone 1994 UNDP publication, "New Dimensions of Human Security." The European Union also endorsed this concept in its 2004 report, "A Human Security Doctrine for Europe."

Globalization has exacerbated threats to human security, intensifying previously existing threats and more rapidly spreading newly emerging threats. It is therefore urgent that public policies keep up with these accelerating threats because it is clear that existing systems and protection mechanisms are fast becoming inadequate. These threats to human security are many and may include: human mobility; global health; global crime; unstable financial markets; labor market instabilities; and poverty, conflict and development. Because human security implies freedom from hunger, disease, crime and repression, it cannot be achieved in the absence of strong domestic and global awareness and good governance at all levels.
Environmental security

Traditionally, environmental concerns have focused on development and conservation, but more recently, with mounting concerns about the impact of global climate change, the environment has increasingly become a major security concern. This new security field

is imbued with the understanding that it is possible to reverse environmental degradation and that it is linked to demographic and economic developments. Threats to environmental security may include: deforestation and the threat to biodiversity; water scarcity; global climate change; and ozone depletion. While environmental security may have recently been sidelined by more immediate security threats like terrorism, encouraging signs exist that it is regaining importance.

National security

The state has always constituted the primary object of security, a fact that is unlikely to change anytime soon. The primacy of state security may not be a bad thing because it remains the only entity which has the structure and legitimacy to uphold and enforce the law. The state can achieve security and order by employing military, political, economic and social means. It is clear, however, that in a globalized world, national security cannot be achieved through national capabilities alone, thus making transnational cooperation a necessity.

Transnational security

The transnational concept constitutes the globalization-mediated security of states against new, diverse and intensified transnational threats. Transnational threats tend to emerge slowly. Distracted by more pressing and immediate short-term threats, governments often do not pay enough attention to them. These insidious transnational threats are numerous and may include: organized crime, international terrorism, international migration, human trafficking, health and environmental degradation. The battle against transnational security threats at the regional or international level can prove particularly challenging in light of the difficulties inherent in establishing common norms among participating states. Logistical challenges, like the availability, management and deployment of crisis-management capabilities to distant parts of the world are another transnational challenge.

Transcultural security: Synergy, not just coexistence

Current transnational realities, such as migration and irregular immigration, can result in xenophobic and exclusionary tendencies in host societies. For this reason, an understanding of the security of groups and cultures within and beyond states is an urgent imperative. Greater tolerance, inclusion and understanding of cultures and respect for diversity could mitigate some of the most pressing security concerns of today.

Sustainable global security is not just about coexistence of cultural groups but a synergy between them. Communities are formed by individuals who identify with each other because of a common history, language, religion, political ideology or geographic location. The ideas and practices that constitute these collective identities are essential to their security dimensions. Threats to transcultural security may include: injustices; alienation; exclusion; humiliation; profiling; stereotyping and demonization; and negative portraits in political statements, educational materials and the entertainment industry.

Feelings of shame, fear and rage are inextricably linked to perceptions of alienation and injustice, and the lack of control over the situation results in despair. This in turn may lead to fatalistic attitudes by a group, coupled with tension and conflict between diverse communities within a state population or between a community and the state itself. One of the more pressing security issues today is linked to how countries manage cultural pluralism and advance the idea of transcultural harmony and synergy using all instruments of the state and society.

Global justice: A prerequisite for sustainable global security

While global justice is a difficult concept to define, it remains in my opinion, the ultimate safety valve for global security. It is understandable that national security objectives are pragmatic and reality-driven. However, the pursuit of global justice should not be viewed solely as altruistic and divorced from national security ambitions. Some may argue that this integration is impossible without a global legal authority, capable of enforcing its decisions. Nevertheless, states and international organizations must make every effort to propagate global justice.

While the idea of justice is frequently talked about, its exact meaning is nebulously defined. As a concept, I have found it valuable to understand justice in five ways: personal wrongs done to others; enforceable duties; meeting the demands of what is owed; fairness, as understood comparatively; and our moral obligations to others.

Justice can be more easily regulated at the domestic level both because the term can be more clearly defined and more easily enforced than at the global level. As a result, the pursuit of justice has been relegated largely to the domestic sphere.

Despite the commonsensical relationship between injustice and insecurity, little attention is focused on it with the exception of some post-conflict security-sector reforms. It is important, however, to trace the relationship between insecurity and injustice to the interplay of injustice, humiliation, alienation, frustration, anger and fatalistic despair.

Further study of the role of global justice in sustainable international security may include the use of military force in the absence of justice, marginalizing extremism through the pursuit of justice, and justice as a prerequisite to sustainable global security.

Respect for the cultural, ethnic and religious equality of individuals despite their differences is vital to the promotion of greater justice. Embracing justice allows people to attain their full agency as human beings capable of defining themselves and their lives in a way that is authentic to them. This pursuit of personal dignity goes together with the empowerment and prevention of structural economic and political inequalities that may lead to alienation and conflict. As long as injustice persists, those who wish to propagate instability and insecurity will always find supporters for their ideas no matter how bizarre, illogical, futile or violent. Without justice, then, any attainment of global security will prove ephemeral.

The multi-sum security principle

The multi-sum security principle brings together the five aspects of security outlined above with the notion that justice is a prerequisite for sustainable security both domestically and globally. It is imperative that justice be a central consideration when formulating security policies, negotiating an end to conflict or reconstruction in a post-conflict environment. Part of the reason for the marginalization of justice in security studies is the dominance of the state-centric paradigm of political realism, as well as the relegation of ethical concerns to the domestic realm. I believe that ethics can regulate state behavior to some extent, and when channeled through institutions, can guide behavior. At the heart of this principle is the idea that zero-sum security paradigms are dangerous and obsolete, and that sustainable global security is based on good governance at all levels, which helps ensure justice for all.