Strategic Currents

Issues in Human Security in Asia

Yang Razali Kassim
Editor
‘Human security is not a concern with weapons
— it is a concern with human life and dignity.’

The *Strategic Currents* series

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This volume is dedicated to the study of Human Security in Asia. Conceptually, it resides within the broader framework of Non-Traditional Security.

Human security is still very much a contested concept. This notwithstanding, there is no disagreement among scholars that, at the core, human security is about the well-being of the individual—in contrast to the well-being of the state. This well-being of the individual is measured in terms of two basic freedoms: freedom from want and freedom from fear. An individual who is free from deprivation of his basic needs, such as food, water and shelter, can be described as a secure person. A society that is free from fear for its safety can equally be deemed as a secure society.

Human security therefore views security not in terms of the traditional notion of security of the state but the non-traditional concept of the security of the individual. Hence, human security is people-centred. The definition of human security reached a conceptual highpoint in 1994 when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a Human Development Report, which defined human security as “not a concern with weapons” but “a concern with human life and dignity”. The UNDP identified seven categories of threat to human security: environment, food, health, economy, personal, community and political.

There are four key characteristics of human security as defined by UNDP: that it is universal, interdependent in its components, is preventive and is people-oriented. Scholars see the UNDP version of human security as an organising concept in security studies.

This volume focuses on human security at a time when security of the Asian person is increasingly under siege from the forces of nature and man-made disasters, especially in the last few years. There has been an increase in the numbers as well as the frequency of natural calamities around the world. All of them triggered consequences that led to human tragedy and suffering; some even generated political consequences. The year 2010 began with a major earthquake in Haiti. Though geographically distant, it had lessons for Asia. Since that event, several major earthquakes had erupted in Asia. In 2011, one of the worst earthquakes to hit Japan caused a tsunami and, later, a nuclear disaster.
Strategic Currents is a periodic volume based on the regular series of commentaries by staff and affiliates of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). This issue continues what hopefully will become a tradition of republishing select articles adapted from RSIS Commentaries, in the case of this particular volume, since January 2010. These articles include some perspectives on major events that rocked the world in 2011 with implications on human security in Asia, such as the triple disasters in Japan, Wikileaks, the death of Osama bin Laden, and the Arab uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

This is the third volume of Strategic Currents. The first was published in 2006 by the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies to mark its transition to RSIS. The second was published in 2009 by RSIS in co-publication for distribution with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).

Yang Razali Kassim
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