A Model of Human Security: A Comparison of Vulnerabilities and Timespace

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Abstract : For us humans, risks are intimately linked to human vulnerabilities - where there is vulnerability, there is potentially insecurity, and risk. Reducing vulnerability through compensatory measures means increasing security and decreasing risk. The paper suggests that a meaningful way to approach the study of risks (including threats, assaults, crisis etc.), is to understand the vulnerabilities these external phenomena evoke in humans. As is argued, the basis of risk evaluation, as well as responses, is the more or less subjective perception by the individual person, or a group of persons, exposed to the external event or phenomena in question. This will be determined primarily by the vulnerability or vulnerabilities that the external factor are perceived to evoke. In this way, risk perception is primarily an inward dynamic, rather than an outward one. Therefore, a route towards an understanding of the perception of risks, is a closer scrutiny of the vulnerabilities which they can evoke, thereby approaching an understanding of what in the paper is called the essence of risk (including threat, assault etc.), or that which a certain perceived risk means to an individual or group of individuals. As a necessary basis for gauging the wide spectrum of potential risks and their meaning, the paper proposes a model of human vulnerabilities, drawing from i.a. a long tradition of needs theory. In order to account for the subjectivity factor, which mediates between the innate vulnerabilities on the one hand, and the event or phenomenon out there on the other hand, an ensuing ontological discussion about the timespace characteristics of risk/threat/assault as perceived by humans leads to the positing of two dimensions. These two dimensions are applied on the vulnerabilities, resulting in a modelling effort featuring four realms of vulnerabilities which are related to each other and together represent a dynamic whole. In approaching the problem of risk perception, the paper thus defines the relevant realms of vulnerabilities, depicting them as a dynamic whole. With reference to a substantial body of literature and a growing international policy trend since the 1990s, this model is put in the language of human security - a concept relevant not only for international security studies and policy, but also for other academic disciplines and spheres of human endeavor.

Keywords : human security, timespace, vulnerabilities, risk perception