



Human Rights,
Human Security and Peace

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Abstract

This short essay tries to point out the relationship among human rights, human security and peace. The essence of the essay is to explicate the necessary conditions for peace, domestic as well as international. Peace denotes members of community living or co-existing in harmony but once conflict occurs and results in violent clashes, it will lead to a situation of *ultima ratio regum*. The paper argues that human rights and human security are vital in harmonious co-existence without which there may be war. In order to maintain peace, human rights are to be respected and these rights are now demanded by people in many parts of the world. Human security is the essential elements of human rights. Human security includes food security, health security,

political security, economic security, personal security, environmental security and community security. Human rights and human security are thus closely related. And in the final analysis, the two major elements above are related to peace. In international relations, discussions on war and peace are the common main themes. The focus is on the causes of war or the breakdown of peace and then an elaboration of mechanisms for peace by the creation of such organizations as the League of Nations and the United Nations. Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and like featured as part of the measures to protect the fundamental rights of human beings. The various organizations above, as this essay tries to explain, can have a positive effect on the maintenance of peace. The attempt is to pull the threads of human rights, human security and peace into a fabric to give a glimpse of a coherent whole. Peace presupposes protection of human rights and attempts to foster human security.

Keywords: human rights, human security, peace, war, Magna Carta.

Peace and war

Human beings are endowed with natural rights covering rights and freedom, equality and dignity. In the state of nature, men were socially, economically and politically equal until one stronger man or group of men used force to suppress others and then created an order whereby they could control other members of society. A state was thus born and those who controlled the power of the state were known as the government with a process of governing

sanctioned by laws and punitive measures. Peace, albeit enforced by fear of retribution, prevailed. Such peace was forged out from support based on fear. It was at best peace under duress.ⁱ

Real peace has to come from a willingness to live together in harmony because of common interest. Members of society find it beneficial and rewarding to live in harmony because of their shared interest. The quest for a good political system which will guarantee peace and social justice devoid of the use of force and violent means has been an endeavor throughout the history of humankind. Indeed, ancient political systems ranging from Egypt, China, India, etc., were all trying to come up with a good political system where the ruler and the ruled, and the ruled among themselves, could live in harmony. Discussions of a good and desirable political system dominated dialogues of scholars and social philosophers.ⁱⁱ But often, rulers would turn tyrants and the reign or rule became dictatorial fed on harsh measures of suppression and oppression. Within a polity, violent outbreaks were not uncommon and among two or more different political units, wars were recorded. Peace was thus destroyed and political stability was short-lived. The quest for peace had continued unabated but conflicts continued domestically and internationally. The two world wars could be seen as betraying the strenuous efforts of humankind. The birth of the League of Nations which was short-lived and eventually

ⁱ For discussion see Likhit Dhiravegin, *Thailand in Transition: Political Evolution of the Thai Society*, 2013, pp. 1 - 14. (unpublished manuscript).

ⁱⁱ Scholars like Confucius, Lao Tzu-Meng Tzu, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc. all tried to look for a good political system which will guarantees justice.

the United Nations Organization, as it was initially called, testified to the attempt of humankind to carve out a way to maintain peace, political stability and the hope of living a normal life and to pursue a peaceful livelihood devoid of war.ⁱⁱⁱ

Noble as the efforts may have been, wars continue to permeate the planet earth. Right after the Second World War, the Korean War broke out, to be followed by the Vietnam War and subsequently the war in Afghanistan and the Gulf War, the war in Iraq etc., until the present time where sporadic fighting has continued unabated in the Middle East and some other parts of the world, albeit in smaller scale.

The question is whether wars can be annihilated all together and peace forever prevail. The answer may not be promising. After all, since the birth of humankind and since the first man clubbed to death another fellow human being, the process of using violent means to settle disputes resulting from fighting for food and for mating has continued, albeit under different conditions. Fighting for economic interest has continued while fighting for mating is no longer a main cause for conflicts, but it has changed into some other abstract reasons including political ideology, values and political power known as “power politics.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Likhith Dhiravegin, “A Reflection on International Politics, International Law, International Organizations and Free Trade Agreements.” In http://www.dhiravegin.com/detail.php?item_id=000616

Economic interest or the economic factor has been argued to be responsible for the outbreak of war by some thinkers. One argument was advanced by Lenin who opined that capitalism or the capitalist economy would develop to its peak and would eventuate into the use of force to conquer other nations for raw material, labor and a bigger market. Lenin said that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism whereby a colonial system was devised to rule other weaker nations.^{iv} To arrive at that end, violent fighting would precede the coming of colonial rule. War for conquest and fighting for self-defense would be inevitable. Peace would only prevail by conquest and rule by force. Colonies were subject to rule by force and exploitation until such time that they rose to liberate themselves, removing the yoke of political control. But it is clear that war is part of the economic system which fights for economic interest. This is along the same vein as fighting for food. It is thus a built-in pitfall of a capitalist system.

Another concept which will lead to violent outbreak is that of war and progress. Traditional Japan, most notably during the Meiji era, believed that war would awake the fighting spirit of the nation. Once a war broke out it would alert the people and would also unite the people for a common cause. War would lead to production of weaponry, food and other necessary items for fighting, and warfare would lead to construction after destruction. War economy is thus part of an economic system fed on loss of lives and limbs and destruction of physical structures, but it

^{iv} Vladimir Lenin, *State and Revolution*. (New York: International Publishers, 1943).

would energize the nation and lift the spirit of the nation. This line of reasoning and concept bodes ill for peace. The people would also be recruited to fight probably against their will.^v

One concept has it that war and politics are intertwined. War is fought because politics failed. Politics itself is thought of as part of a war tactic. Mao Ze-don said that politics is war without blood-letting while war is politics with blood-letting. Hence all wars are driven by political factors while politics itself is a process of fighting in the manner of a war, albeit with no blood-letting. But if it fails, it would lead to a war. The two factors are thus closely related and intertwined.^{vi}

A fascist regime is one in which a dictatorial government dovetails with a semi-capitalist economy. The regime controls political power with the use of secret police and political harassment and assassination and execution. It is also a government prepared for war. And to that end, heavy industries would be encouraged by the government. The investors with support from the dictatorial government would try to convince or influence the government to adopt a jingoistic policy and a belligerent foreign policy. War is conceived as a means to boost the economy with the building up of the economic infrastructure, strategic highways, transport, chemicals, weaponry, etc., for territorial expansion and occupation. This was exactly what happened before Hitler

^v Fukoku Kyohei “rich country, strong army” a Chinese concept adopted by the Meiji leaders

^{vi} Mao Zedong, Little Red Book, published and widely read and quoted during the Cultural Revolution in 1970’s.

invaded Poland. Japan was another case where toward the end of the Meiji period, heavy industrial development in preparation for war was taking place. The two fascist regimes were prepared for a war of invasion to boost power politics, and more importantly for economic gain.^{vii}

The U.S. system is characterized by a military-industrial complex which has the tint of fascism, but the American political system is undeniably a democracy with an elected government and legislature. This seems to be in line with the concept of war economy. Indeed, American power dominance and economic supremacy were boosted by its involvement in the Second World War and subsequent engagement in the region of Asia and elsewhere. It was argued that the Vietnam War could not end earlier because the chemicals industries tried to prevent an end to the war due to the risk of business loss. Japan was another case of economic growth as a result of wars including the First World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War from which Japan could expand its production and sale volumes. Not surprisingly, Japan could revive its war-torn economy after its defeat in a jiffy because of the opportunity presented by the wars.^{viii}

^{vii} This were argument soften mentioned in history books regarding World War II.

^{viii} This is a common observation about the US political system being that of a military-industrial complex for sale of heavy industrial products and weaponry. It is the military and industrial firms that take an important part in formulating foreign policy for the objectives.

Mechanism for Peace

It is believed that wars take place because of poor economy and because of conflicts in politics. The antidote is thus to develop a healthy economy and to try to disengage political conflicts through negotiation and cooperation. This is to be done by coming together and discussing issues of conflicts on a negotiation table. The United Nations has as its main object to preserve peace and to prevent or to curb the scale of war through mediation and peace-keeping.

To realize the objectives above, many organizations and programs have been developed by the United Nations and its related agencies. The core philosophy, “swords into ploughshares,” is well known and well recognized. But the U.N. cannot get over the mentality of the victors who wanted to maintain the status quo while retaining intact the power and privilege of the five permanent members in the Security Council. This includes the U.S., Great Britain, France, The Soviet Union, now Russia and China, who the victors in the war. At any rate, the concept of peace-keeping has been maintained at least in principle if not impressively successful in reality.^{ix}

The other factors are development, with its off-shoots of finance and trade. These organizations are the World Bank or the International Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund or IMF and the World Trade Organization or WTO. All these would suggest that they were the economic elements conceived to be

^{ix} Likhith Dhiravegin, “A Reflection on International Politics...,” op.cit.

instrumental in bringing about a healthy economy and well-being for the people, thereby it would help reduce the domestic problems of the various countries and a more stable government would be the concomitant result, which should help reduce domestic turbulence and thus reduce domestic crisis, a cause for externalization of internal unrest.

But of equal, if not more importance, for peace is a liberal political system whereby rights and freedom are guaranteed and social justice is maintained. This is a democratic form of government which will guarantee human rights and maintain social welfare and the well-being of the populace, including the environment and community. The two elements, human rights and human security, are the foundation upon which peace may be better maintained. A discussion of the subjects is now in order.

Human Rights

Human rights are the fundamental rights of every individual who dwells on the planet earth. It is natural rights endowed by the creator or the Almighty. Such rights as Habeas Corpus, the right of earning a livelihood, freedom of expression, freedom of travel, due process of law, etc., are spelled out in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These rights are not born out of a vacuum. There have been centuries of struggle and fight for a guarantee of such rights. Indeed, the oft-quoted document, although not quite broad enough to cover all the items of today, is the Magna Carta of 1215.

In today's era of globalization, human rights are part of the demands of the people in a democracy. Apart from the concrete demands of the four basic needs of food, shelter, clothes and medicine, there are demands for equitable income distribution. But the vocal demands are the abstract demands for rights and freedom, equality, justice, human rights and human dignity. These are the fundamental rights of a democracy demanded by the people who are now politically conscious and have changed from that of a people with a *subject political culture* to that of a *participant political culture* or a combination with the latter being predominant. The democratic system of a *representative democracy* has also been combined with *participatory democracy* in which the people participate more in the decision-making process apart from exercising their right by casting their ballots.^x

Human rights are part of a liberal political system in which conflicts can be sorted out through debates and bargaining with the majority rule principle. If such a system is genuinely executed, it will foster peace through peaceful resolution of conflicts. If human rights are not respected, one can hardly expect any peaceful coexistence. Peace will thus always have human rights as the foundation. Respect for human rights will thus serve as the foundational principle for peace.

^x Likhith Dhiravegin, *China and AEC relationship*. Paper presented at Beijing from 2014 The Harmony of Civilizations and Prosperity for All—China and the World Tradition, Reality and Future, 7 - 9 November 2014, Beijing, China.

Human Security^{xi}

While human rights are imperative for peace, they must be spelled out in order to have concrete tangible results. Related to human rights is, thus, human security which has been outlined by the United Nations Development Program or UNDP as follows: 1) Food security 2) Health security 3) Personal security 4) Political security 5) Economic security 6) Environmental security 7) Community security.

Food security is imperative for human existence. Starvation will have ramifications of negative consequences. Plundering, looting, violent fighting for food and water and other necessities of life will spell doom for a community, let alone a country. Peace and stability cannot exist in a situation in which the stomach is empty. Malnutrition and death by starvation is a pathetic and unforgivable situation. A political system which cannot feed its people is a failed state and, as such, must be replaced. It is silly to talk about morals, principles, right and wrong, devotion and sacrifice when the body and soul is breaking apart from starvation. Thanks to the advances of science and technology in food production the Malthus law of food being produced arithmetically while the population is growing geometrically has been proven wrong. But due to human folly, starvation still occurs due to warfare and

^{xi} See Likhit Dhiravegin, *“Inclusive growth, poverty reduction, human security and governance reform.”* Special Lecture “The 7th NRCT–ICSSR Joint Seminar on Inclusive Growth, Poverty Reduction and Human Security” 24 - 26 August 2013, Bangkok Convention Center, Central World, Bangkok; Likhit Dhiravegin, “Human Security,” in http://www.dhiravegin.com/detail.php?item_id=001242

wrong policy adopted by foolhardy regimes. Food security is a factor which is related to the maintenance of peace.

Health security is another factor which has great impact upon food production and economic growth. Bad health, most notably malnutrition, epidemics, pandemics, incurable diseases such as cancer and aids, all weaken the human species and the populace. With bad health and poor sanitation, the economy will be affected and food will be short due to poor production, most especially if famine threatens the community such as the case of the Potato Famine. It could be deadly and could be a curse on the community and the nation, for that matter, if not nipped in the bud. Peace cannot be maintained in a situation in which nations are plagued by starvation.

Personal security is part of a liberal political system. As mentioned, a person must possess all the rights and freedom endowed by the natural law and by state law which guarantees the various freedoms without harassment by the state authorities. Of more importance, personal safety must be given top priority. Safety of the body, life and property must be safeguarded by law and its enforcement. One should be able to walk in the streets without fear of being assaulted, killed or robbed of property. Personal security must be safeguarded from harm done by state authorities and fellow countrymen or fellow human beings. Any system which cannot provide personal security to its citizens could be counted as a failed state on this particular aspect.

Political security involves having a stable political system where there is a continuity of public policy and rights and freedom and due process of law have been institutionalized. The political

system must have a peaceful transfer of power. The system enjoys political legitimacy and can be classified as viable and sustainable. Changes of leadership or government must have a regular interval devoid of extra-systemic events such as power seizures. In other words, the political order must be orderly and the continuity of the system is to be predicted. The political structure and process must be institutionalized. Without political security, political stability will be missing and peace naturally cannot be guaranteed.

Economic security is very important in terms of political stability, and other related aspects such as food and health security. Of great importance, as is already discussed, is its direct relation to peace. The 1930s depression, it will be remembered, led to the Second World War. A failed economy will lead to instability of the government which is likely to lead to political trouble with the concomitant result of the dire consequences. Internal problems may compel the leadership to divert attention by externalizing internal issues. The economic trouble may thus spill across borders. Peace will thus be affected. Economic prosperity is good not only for each individual country but for its neighbors as well and this will help enhance peace.

Environmental security is directly related to quality of life and health and other related aspects as in other cases. In these days of the great hazard from global warming, protection of the environment has become one of the most important world trends. The environment can also have either positive or negative effects on health, economic production, clean food, etc. It reflects the conscience of the government and the people and whether necessary laws are in place. It may also reflect the existence or

the absence of good governance. It is part and parcel of a good political and administrative and management system. The opposite of the said desirable attributes, expressed or implied, would have far-reaching negative impacts on the quality of life and eventually a peaceful pursuance of happiness.

Community security is to be maintained if peace is to prevail. A people whose community is totally destroyed by unscrupulous public policy and uncontrolled development programs would put community life in shambles. Lost will be the identity and uniqueness of a community together with its unique history and way of life, which should be cherished. When community security is destroyed a sense of belonging will be lost and pride and happiness in the locale will be totally wiped out by the destruction of the community. The anti-globalization movement and the demands for the preservation of culture and traditional ways of life, most notably the identity of a people with a distinctive culture, reflects the desire to maintain what is considered a community or a national culture. To stand against development and progress is not possible but to ignore totally traditional ways of life, cultures and identities is not a good and desirable option. It is not something one will choose willingly and to be sure this part of security is no less, if not most, important than other aspects. Progress does not mean a total annihilation of the legacies of the past, but a peaceful juxtaposition of the old and the new. Resistance against modernity, such as the construction of hydro-electric dams, may lead to violent conflicts which have been the cases of late in many places such as Myanmar and Thailand. Peace cannot prevail in a community plagued by conflicts of values and priorities.

Conclusion:

Human Rights, Human Security and Peace are related. Human rights and human security are intertwined while peace is related to the existence of these twins. To maintain peace, the issues of human rights must be addressed in earnest and concrete action programs developed by the nations concerned. To spell out human rights, the human security definition of UNDP should serve as a guideline for action. The two core factors, if insightfully addressed and successfully handled, will bring about political development, economic prosperity, personal and political securities, food, health, environment and community securities which will foster political stability, economic well-being and the related aspects which will lead to peaceful co-existence. Peace can thus be generated by the two core elements above, human rights and human security. The trilogy of human rights, human security and peace will serve to create a world of peaceful co-existence, mutual benefit, prosperity and happiness. It sounds like utopia, but it is an ideal much like a star which is the ultimate goal. We may not be able to reach the destination, the star, but it helps navigate our journey to the right direction.