

Further Reading on Human Security

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This article is the first in a series of casual book reviews on human security. Every time, I will discuss a mix of literature directly and indirectly related to this evolving field. Through the enriching experience of reading, I will highlight how our understanding of human security is gradually developing as a result of its practice. Since we have different experiences of practice and reading, the concepts of human security should differ from person to person, and this is why dialogue is so meaningful. I hope my columns will help to initiate such conversations in and around JICA.

First, I take up **Kikigaki: Ogata Sadako Kaikoroku (An Oral History: Ogata Sadako Memoirs)**, edited by Nobayashi Takeshi and Naya Masatsugu (Iwanami Shoten, 2015).

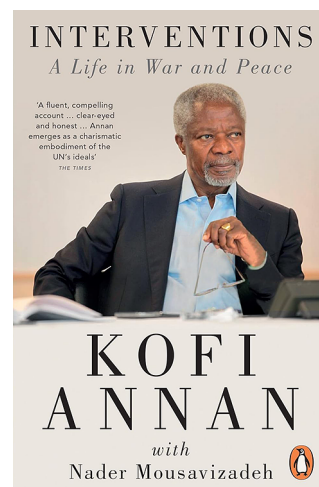
In Chapter 8, titled “Human Security,” Ogata takes a retrospective glance at the discussions at the Commission on Human Security (Ogata-Sen Commission). Human security is a composite norm that combines two strategies: protection and empowerment. In the Commission, Ogata, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), represented the protection side, while Amartya Sen, an eminent economist brought in by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), represented the empowerment side. If their arguments could be brought into alignment, protection and empowerment would be integrated. Initially, however, Ogata perceived that Sen belonged to “a different world” and that his philosophy was “too abstract” to be put into practice. The



committee had to begin by acknowledging the gap between them. Insightfully, Ogata suggested that protection would correspond ultimately to “government” and empowerment to “self-government.”

Ogata was convinced that people exposed to extreme forms of violence should be under effective protection—a belief resonating with the agenda of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). However, Ogata regarded the arguments and advocacy for R2P as “somewhat fanciful” in that they presupposed a “volunteer army.” She acknowledged that there are occasions when humanitarian actors should protect people by mobilizing military forces. Nonetheless, Ogata believed that the “legal approach,” which sought to establish written rules, lacked flexibility. While Sen’s development theory is philosophical and R2P is jurisprudential, Ogata appears to have believed in the excellence of the political. It is unfortunate that this Japanese book has not been translated into other languages, as Ogata’s forthright opinions are expressed on every page as she reflects on her dynamic life events in her own language.

Kofi Annan did not play a prominent role in the debate over human security, but it is worth recalling that the Ogata-Sen report was handed over to him as UN Secretary-General in 2003. A photo panel of Ogata and Sen presenting the report to Annan is displayed in the Ogata Sadako Memorial Gallery at the JICA Ichigaya Building. In **Interventions: A Life in War and Peace**,

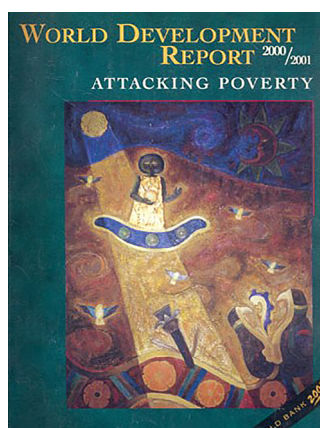


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by Kofi Annan and Nader Mousavizadeh (Penguin, 2012), Annan does not label his approach as human security, but his continuous struggle to find ways of averting humanitarian disasters resonates with Ogata's proactive stance. Like Ogata, Annan consistently tried to stand by the destitute and sought the critical moment to act in complex situations. He believed that one should not only intervene decisively but also seek compromise—even with rogue politicians—to save the innocent. Inviting great powers to exert pressure may backfire. Even when coercive measures are taken, they must be based on the common will of the international community. These were forceful messages that Annan advocated.

Some of the essential elements of human security, such as the protection of people in emergencies, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding were inspired by and embodied in the ideas and actions of Ogata and Annan. So what about the other strategy, empowerment, represented by Amartya Sen? The UNDP adapted Sen's capability theory to the policy framework of human development, which has been accepted and popularized over the past three decades (JICA has its own Human Development Department). What is the point of advocating for human security when we already have an influential perspective on human development?

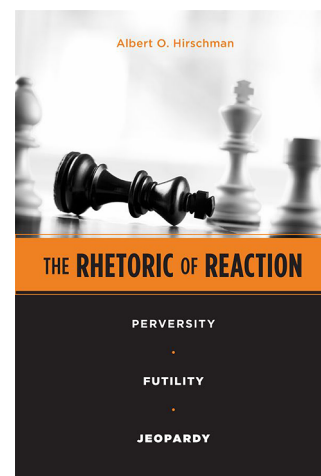
While we can answer this question in several ways, it is important to note that the discussion in the Ogata-Sen Commission was conducted at the same time that the World Bank, under President James Wolfensohn, was in the process of reconfiguring its approach to poverty, departing substantially from the prescriptive approach of structural adjustment. *The World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*, by the World Bank (Oxford University Press, 2000) addressed several topics directly related to human security: Part III of the report covered "empowerment," while Part IV was dedicated to the theme of "security."



The report proposed advancing empowerment by

strengthening the accountability of policymakers, driving decentralization forward, fostering social capital, mainstreaming the voices of the poor, and promoting racial and gender equality. The report also discussed downside risks from various angles, distinguishing between idiosyncratic risks and covariant risks. Idiosyncratic risks (e.g., accidental injury, sickness, unemployment, harvest failure, etc.) can be addressed by a combination of insurance, public support, and improved risk management techniques, even at the level of poor households. Covariant risks (global economic crises, natural disasters, war damages, etc.), by contrast, will require large-scale mobilization of public support that includes international cooperation. While social security is intended to protect people from idiosyncratic risks, the human security approach is necessary to protect people from covariant risks. Undoubtedly, the discussions around empowerment and risks at the World Bank influenced the framing of human security strategies in the Ogata-Sen Commission.

The notion of human security has faced criticism from different ideological positions. We can summarize the key criticism into the following categories: (1) human security was originally intended to humanize security but has ended up strengthening the state security discourse, (2) the ideas human security aimed to introduce merely repeat those presented by other theories and as such have no meaningful impact, and (3) human security destabilizes the international order by undermining the accomplished sovereign state system. In the viewpoint of the discursive classification elaborated in *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*, by Albert O. Hirschman (Harvard University Press, 1991), the first pattern of criticism corresponds to the perversity thesis, the second to the futility thesis, and the third to the jeopardy thesis. Progressive and reactionary narratives from the times of the French Revolution, universal suffrage, and the modern



social security system are reproduced in the critiques of human security. Reformists and conservatives are intransigent, often leading the debate to a standstill. The discourses on human security have followed a similar trajectory, and the reason this new proposition provoked intense criticism and absolute denials could be that it touched on a central problem of the evolving social order.

Finally, let me briefly introduce ***Hojoki* by Kamo no Chomei** (Yoshida Kenko, ***Essays in Idleness***, and Kamo no Chomei, ***Hojoki***, translated by Meredith McKinney, Penguin Classics, 2013), which I reread at the beginning of 2024. This short essay describes the transience of people and their homes, detailing his contemporary natural and human-induced disasters such as a great fire, a storm, a relocation of the capital city, a famine, and a major earthquake. His mind wavers between attachment and detachment to secular human society. Japan's oldest essay on human security was written in Kyoto about 800 years ago, against the backdrop of covariant risks at the end of the Heian period.

