

# bulletin

No. 39

July/August 2006

## Human Security: Incoherent Concept or Policy Template?

by Prof. Ramesh Thakur

The massive earthquake and devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004 was a vivid illustration of the advantages of conceptualising security within the inclusive framework of human security. The natural disaster caused catastrophic loss of life in many countries around the perimeter of the Indian Ocean, including thousands of Westerners vacationing in the pleasure resorts.

The comment of Walter Maestri, the emergency management chief in Jefferson Parish, to the Times-Picayune of New Orleans in 2004 was widely reported in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: for New Orleans locals, he said, the levee was part and parcel of security because it helped to protect them 365 days a year. Katrina thus joined last year's earthquake and tsunami in underscoring the need to reframe security in human terms.

This shows that the concept of security has been stretched both horizontally, to embrace issues beyond just the military; and vertically, moving up to embrace regional and global structures and down to local and individual identities. In the traditional framework, security is viewed in relation to wars between countries. In order to defend the nation, to pursue national security, many governments have called on citizens to make the ultimate sacrifice. This puts the individual at the service of the state, including killing others and being killed oneself, as and when called for duty by the government of the day. By contrast, human security puts the individual at the centre of the debate, analysis and policy. He or she is paramount, and the state is a collective instrument to protect human life and enhance human welfare. The fundamental components of human security—the security of people against threats to personal safety and life—can be put at risk by external aggression, but

also by factors within a country, including 'security' forces. The reformulation of national security into the concept of human security is simple, yet has profound consequences for how we see the world, how we organise our political affairs, how we make choices in public and foreign policy, and how we relate to fellow-human beings from many different countries and civilisations.

The so-called soft security threats are neither unconnected to peace and security, nor can they be ignored until the hard threats have been taken care of. This is why human security can be regarded as a foundational value from which flow other individual and social values. In this talk, I will argue that security is a contested concept and there are several ways of constructing it. The choice may reflect trade-offs between precision of meaning and breadth of coverage or between different value clusters. By the same token, framing security as human security facilitates a particular set of policies directed at protecting and prolonging the lives of individual human beings. This can be usefully illustrated by examples from health, violence against women, children in armed conflict and regional organisations.

The concept of 'security' is politically powerful, weakly conceptualised and intensively contested. The questions are: For whom is security intended—individuals, groups, nation, state, region, world? By what means is security to be achieved—military, nuclear, political, diplomatic, economic or cultural? And at what price to the economy and to the social and political values can security be achieved?

The answers to the three questions have been changing since the end of the Cold War when there occurred 'an explosion of activity around the concept of human security'. The very fact of raising these questions suggests, too, the need to explore the phenomenon of securitisation: Who securitises an issue, how and for whom?

National security is an artifice of the realists' imagination, a politically constructed concept, not an objective analytic tool. There are other ways of slicing the security cake, including economic

security, environmental security, common security, comprehensive security, and co-operative security, to take a representative sample of concepts from recent times. This is in addition, of course, to collective security attempted first through the League of Nations and then the United Nations. Two conclusions follow. First, security is an essentially contested concept because it is an intellectual and cognitive construct, not an objective fact. Second, the standard referents of security are faced by many internal inconsistencies. 'National security' is itself riddled with conceptual confusion and policy problems stemming from its integral link to the state. Putting human welfare at the centre of security concerns—the securitisation of individual life as a deliberate artifice of the liberal imagination—helps us to resolve some of these tensions. The rise in the proportion of internal wars, the use of small arms as weapons of choice and the emergence of irregular forces as the major combatants make today's violent conflicts less centralised and more brutal. Civilian casualties and displacement are no longer 'collateral damage', unintended by-products of warfare, but often deliberate war aims of the fighting. At the same time, norms, instruments and regimes have proliferated for the advancement of human rights and humanitarian laws. The intersections of the two trends—of civilians as direct targets and growing casualties of warfare and rising normative standards of military behaviour during armed conflict—has created new and higher expectations regarding enforcement of human rights and humanitarian norms.

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Abstract from Ramesh Thakur's speech at an open lecture at Bonn town hall on 9 March 2006.

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Bonn International Center for Conversion  
bulletin  
No. 39

BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion) is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting peace and development through the efficient and effective transformation of military-related structures, assets, functions and processes.

This newsletter is published quarterly by  
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An der Elisabethkirche 25, 53113 Bonn, Germany.

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## Staff Spotlight

### Volker Franke



Volker Franke joined BICC as its new Research Director in May 2006 returning from a lengthy stay abroad. Volker was born and grew up in the beautiful Nahe region around Bad Kreuznach and studied political science and sociology in Mainz (1983–1990). Upon completion of his MA degree, Volker moved to the United States to pursue a Master's degree in public administration at North Carolina State University. Near the end of his studies in 1992, he had the opportunity to teach an undergraduate course in, of all areas, research methods. The fun and challenge of this experience convinced him to continue graduate studies at the Doctoral level and to pursue a career in academia.

In 1992, Volker packed his bags and moved from America's sunny South to the bitterly cold North to start his studies at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University in upstate New York, focusing on international relations, security studies and political psychology. In 1998, Volker joined the Maxwell School's National Security Studies (NSS) program and assumed the position of Director of the NSS case program which publishes case studies, exercises, and simulations pertaining to security-related policy issues. From the fall of 1999 until just a few weeks ago, Volker taught international relations and US foreign and national security policy at McDaniel College, a small (some 1,700 students) liberal arts college in Westminster, Maryland, approximately 80 km north of Washington, DC.

Outside of work, Volker's most important current activity is spending time with his two-and-a-half year old son Niklas and travelling with his family. Aside from that, he enjoys listening to music, running, camping, cooking and spending time with friends.

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## “My first shot”— A Documentary on SALW

This documentary has been produced as part of BICC's Training and Education on Small Arms project (TRESA), in cooperation with the Macedonian NGO CIVIL and deals with questions such as: How do children and adolescents experience SALW and armed violence? What do they feel and think about weapons? And how do small arms influence their lives? Such questions led to the organization of a video workshop for children and youth on SALW in Skopje/Macedonia. During the workshop, Sandhya Suri, an award-winning British filmmaker, taught the 14 participants basic skills in how to handle video cameras, sound, directing and work as a film team. At the same time, the young people aged 9–17, who came both from ethnic Albanian and Macedonian families, discussed their experiences with small arms. Almost all had already seen a gun or heard gun shots either during the conflict in 2001 or on other occasions, such as hunting or celebratory fire during weddings or New Year celebrations. Some of these stories were selected and translated into film. The output is a documentary, telling four very personal stories about growing up during conflict, what it is like for a child to hear gun shots, the dangers of unexploded ordnance, and violence at school. The film “My first shot” is to be used as a training tool, for awareness-raising and risk education, for children and adolescents and adults alike. It will be available free of cost on [www.tresa-online.org](http://www.tresa-online.org) and as DVD with English subtitles at BICC.

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## Study for the European Parliament on The Cost of Non-Europe in the Area of Security and Defence

The defense sector is excluded from the European Single Market. Military requirements for weapons and other equipment are satisfied in 25 national markets using 25 largely uncoordinated national procurement budgets. The study will analyze the economic disadvantages and outline the steps toward a European defense market as a pillar of the European Security and Defence Policy.

First, the study will analyze the national defense budgets of the EU Member States and the United States, drawing upon the statistics provided by NATO, OECD and SIPRI. The projected result will show the tremendous gap between the US and the EU. Not only does the US spend much more than all EU-Member States together in general terms but also with regard to important ratios such as research and development.

A severe problem is the duplication of development and production of major weapons systems in Europe leading to smaller product units with higher prices. The study will collect and aggregate illustrative data for duplication of efforts in particular sub-markets. It will also present some data on prices of weapon systems for customers in the US and EU Member States.

Interviews with defense companies and the European Defence Agency will be conducted on the institutional aspects of building a European defense market. BICC will also contact national experts on procurement to gather additional information on the practical aspects of moving towards a more integrated equipment market.

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## BICC Annual Report 2005/2006

- Comments on BICC's three key areas of work: arms control, peacebuilding, and conflict
- Analysis of worldwide armament and disarmament trends
- Insight into BICC's project work
- Business report

The *Annual Report 2005/2006* is available for free in English and German at [www.bicc.de](http://www.bicc.de) and can also be ordered in a printed version from [pr@bicc.de](mailto:pr@bicc.de)

## New BICC Publications

BICC. 2006. *Jahresbericht 2005/2006*. May

BICC. 2006. *Annual Report 2005/2006*. July

brief 33:

Volker Böge. 2006. *Water Governance in Southern Africa—Cooperation and Conflict Prevention in Transboundary River Basins*. June

brief 34:

Tobias Pietz. 2006. *Defense Reform and Conversion in Albania, Macedonia and Croatia*. July

paper 49:

Stefan Wieschollek. 2006. *Konversion: Ein totgeborenes Kind in Wünsdorf-Waldstadt? Probleme der Umnutzung des ehemaligen Hauptquartiers der Westgruppe der Truppen zur zivilen Kleinstadt*. April

focus 1:

Marc von Boemcken und Jerry Sommer. 2006. *Der Streit um das iranische Atomprogramm: Auf der Suche nach dem „kreativen Kompromiss“ Zum aktuellen Angebotspaket und den Erfolgsaussichten von Sanktionen*. June

## BICC Notes

On 22 August 2006, BICC Director Peter J. Croll and Lars Wirkus (Senior Researcher) will lead a workshop on “Tools for Benefit—Sharing in Transboundary Settings” in the framework of the World Water Week (20–26 August) in Stockholm. The workshop will be held in cooperation with the World Bank and the convenor of the World Water Week—the Stockholm International Water Institute. Under the overarching topic of transboundary water management, issues of the workshop will include: (potential) benefits from collaboration in transboundary settings, and implications of benefit sharing on all levels.

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The United Nations Review Conference (RevCon) took place at the UN Headquarters in New York from 26 June–7 July 2006. The conference discussed the progress made in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, agreed in 2001, and discuss the follow-up process on small arms control on the international, regional and national

level. Representatives of BICC coorganized two side events of the RevCon. The side event—a book launch with SAS (Small Arms Survey) “No Refuge. The Crisis of Refugee Militarization in Africa” took place on 5 July and on 6 July 2006 BICC, together with IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms), offered a workshop with the title: “Beyond the PoA: Addressing Gun Control in Fragile States”.

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On 14 June 2006, BICC together with the IFSH (Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy the University of Hamburg) organized the panel discussion “Iran: Ways out of the Nuclear Impasse. Options, Barriers and Chances for a Negotiated Compromise”. The keynote speech was given by Karim Sadjadpur, one of the authors of the International Crisis Group’s (ICG) report “Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?” (available at: [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)). Other panelists were Prof. Tim Guldemann, former Ambassador of Switzerland in Teheran, Co-author of the ICG-report, Dr. Bernd Kubbig, Project Director Ballistic Missile Defense Research International, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF/HSFK), Dr. Oliver Meier, International Representative and Correspondent, Arms Control Association and IFSH (Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg), Dr. Götz Neuneck, IFSH, member of the Pugwash Council and Peter J. Croll, Director BICC (moderator).

A paper documenting the panelists’ speeches will be published in August 2006.

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On 1 June 2006, the Friedensgutachten 2006, the joint annual yearbook publication and report of the five major peace research institutes in Germany (IFSH, HSKF, BICC; INEF, FEST), was presented at the Federal Press Office in Berlin. This was followed by a discussion with members of several parliamentary bodies such as foreign policy, development cooperation, and defense. This year’s issue is focused around conflicting concepts of security as reflected in (1) the asymmetrical international order, (2) economic and social inequalities, (3) failing state structures, (4) the increasingly threatening arms race, including nuclear weapons, and (5) Germany’s and the EU’s foreign and security politics.

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