



How to Understand and Address the Links Between Maritime Security and Human Security Vulnerabilities on Land

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Understanding and addressing the links between maritime security and human security vulnerabilities on land requires a paradigm shift: moving from seeing the sea as an isolated security space to recognizing it as a direct extension of the instability that arises in the terrestrial domain. From this perspective, crimes in the maritime domain, such as piracy or illicit trafficking, are not isolated phenomena; they are often symptoms of deep structural failures on land, where poverty, poor governance, and conflict push individuals toward the sea.

Understanding the Links

The connections between sea security and land insecurity are intrinsic and form a self-reinforcing system. We can find four major groups where this relationship is seen, which respond to three problems faced by individuals, meaning three ways in which human security is vulnerable.

Firstly, intrasocietal insecurities on land directly affect maritime crime. Extreme poverty, lack of employment, and state abandonment in coastal communities create a pool of vulnerable people who are recruited by criminal networks. For many social sectors, illicit activities such as piracy or armed robbery become a desperate alternative source of income. But this is not explained solely by social issues or vulnerabilities; the scheme is completed when the money obtained from these maritime crimes—whether from piracy ransoms or contraband—flows back to land to fund and sustain armed groups, insurgencies, or militias, closing the vicious cycle of instability.

Secondly, the sea is a critical conduit for human displacement. When people are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, political instability, economic crises, or climate disasters—including impacts on coastal areas—maritime routes become the path of irregular migration. Throughout the terrible journey, migrants and refugees are extremely vulnerable to a variety of threats such as exploitation and human trafficking, which are orchestrated by criminal networks operating with complete impunity at the land-sea interface, resulting in human tragedies and severe rights violations.

Thirdly, the exploitation of natural resources and critical raw materials inextricably links both domains. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing depletes marine resources, destroying the livelihoods of legitimate fishing communities and exacerbating food insecurity on land. This loss of income and food further drives the population into poverty or crime. Simultaneously, maritime trafficking is used for the smuggling of resources illicitly extracted on land, such as stolen minerals or hydrocarbons. This plundering deprives States of vital revenue, undermining their ability to invest in the security and human development of their populations.

Finally, the issue of pollution. The marine plastic pollution crisis highlights a deeply unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels and single-use plastics (SUP), plastic items used



only once before disposal. As an example, the Indo-Pacific region is at the epicenter of a growing marine plastic pollution crisis, with 15 of the world's 20 most polluting rivers located in Asia, channeling 80% of ocean plastics from terrestrial sources.

Addressing Interconnected Insecurities

To effectively address these challenges, a comprehensive and human-centric approach that transcends the traditional militaristic view is required. It is fundamental to adopt holistic governance that integrates maritime security with human security at the national and regional levels.

Strategies must focus on tackling deep-rooted terrestrial causes: this involves investing in the socioeconomic development of coastal communities through the creation of decent jobs and support for a sustainable Blue Economy. Strengthening the rule of law and combating corruption on land is essential to dismantle criminal networks that extend to the sea and ensure that criminals are brought to justice.

In the maritime domain, it is crucial to increase Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) with advanced technology and improve the law enforcement capacity of navies and coast guards, ensuring that their operations are carried out in strict compliance with human rights. Furthermore, solid and coordinated regional and international cooperation is required, involving both coastal and landlocked countries, to dismantle the transnational nature of the threats.

Finally, the protection of vulnerable populations must be a priority. This includes implementing rigorous policies against smuggling and human trafficking, and ensuring effective search and rescue mechanisms and a humanitarian approach for displaced persons, recognizing the impact of climate change as a threat multiplier that drives instability in both domains.

Why from the Human Security Paradigm?

An argument for expanding the concept of traditional security and using the human security perspective is based on the fact that non-military threats to individuals—such as an epidemic or environmental deterioration—can be granted the status of an “existential” threat. When certain problems are conceived as threats against the objects that must be secured, their priority on the political agenda increases, and greater resources are allocated to address them, which otherwise could not be obtained.

UNDP was correct in underscoring the existing interconnectedness between security issues, development, and forms of governance. In this sense, analyzing the real nexus between the use of violence, development, and forms of governance in each case emerges as the central issue to guide state action to confront these agendas.

It is from this perspective that we can point out some actions to confront these threats:

1. Strengthening Cooperation and Prevention

It appears necessary that the focus of the public policies adopted takes into account the deep-rooted causes of the problems. In this sense, implementing Community Sustainable Development Programs in vulnerable coastal areas responds to more than one of the dimensions indicated by human security (Economic Security against the threat of poverty



and Food Security against the threat of hunger). These must prioritize the creation of legal employment (Blue Economy) to reduce the need to resort to piracy or illegal exploitation. Likewise, at the inter-state level, efforts must be made to establish regional information exchange mechanisms, not only military, but also concerning migratory flows, illegal fishing patterns, and environmental degradation hotspots, with an early warning component to protect lives. Sharing this sensitive data is not an easy task, but it is a priority for achieving results.

2. Protection of People at Sea

The existing Search and Rescue (SAR) Protocols and Agreements must be complemented by actions from a Human Rights perspective, such as establishing safe and efficient evacuation routes. For this, the demilitarization of the response to migration, prioritizing the rescue and medical attention of migrants, is an unavoidable prerequisite for States. But these state measures would not be enough if we did not incorporate the community. Individuals should be the object of security, but also, where possible, the subject who acts to achieve that security¹. In this sense, Public-private programs aimed at training Fishermen and Sailors should be relevant elements of the policies implemented.

According to the priorities of each location, implementing community programs for self-protection training (against piracy) and in sustainable and legal fishing practices, certified and supported by the State, participatory coastal surveillance, allowing fishermen and communities to report incidents of piracy, pollution, or illegal fishing, among others, are initiatives that result in the success of these policies.

3. Integrated Governance of the Marine Environment and Resources

The challenge of achieving effective control of coastal zones brings us to the need to establish Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), incorporating local actors (fishermen, indigenous peoples, tourism) into the management and protection of sensitive marine ecosystems, promoting their environmental empowerment.

It also appears desirable to consider the possibility of reinforcing the traceability of fishery and marine products to combat IUU fishing. This includes rigorous inspection in ports and effective sanctioning of those responsible, including the companies and actors who benefit.

Finally, strengthening specialized judicial mechanisms to sanction serious pollution and crimes of illegal resource exploitation, ensuring damage repair and compensation to affected communities.

Conclusions

Maritime security is fundamental to peace, development, and human rights, due to the global dependence on the oceans. However, maritime security governance presents challenges due to the lack of an overarching strategy or a coordinating body within the UN system, resulting in fragmented responses. Current challenges include armed conflicts, terrorism, and "blue crimes," and emerging ones are related to new technologies and the interaction with climate change and biodiversity loss.

¹ The various initiatives that promote community participation are of vital importance for developing human security strategies.



To be effective, the response requires a comprehensive and human-centric approach that transcends the militaristic view. It is fundamental to adopt holistic governance that integrates maritime security with human security at the national and regional levels. Strategies must focus on tackling deep-rooted terrestrial causes, investing in the socioeconomic development of coastal communities through the creation of decent jobs and support for a sustainable Blue Economy. Addressing deep-rooted terrestrial causes involves investing in sustainable land management, resource governance, and strengthening the rule of law to reduce pressure on coastal areas and mitigate displacement.

Strengthening community resilience and the socioeconomic well-being of coastal communities is required. Furthermore, integrated and coherent strategies must be developed, where the UN evaluates options for a coordinated strategy that integrates the human security dimension. At the national level, security strategies that recognize the land-sea nexus are required, involving inter-agency collaboration.

From within, consider the risks, vulnerabilities, and threats to be faced from the human security paradigm, enabling coordination among agencies.

From sub-regional cooperation with neighbors, such as the South Atlantic Cooperation and Peace Zone, concrete actions could be coordinated within this framework.

From the macro-region, establish a framework agreement to distribute responsibilities, consider combined and joint actions, but primarily to trace the flow of money.

Finally, all this effort and these public policies must lead to concrete Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms with Human Security Indicators. This must contain indicators that measure the impact of policies not only on the reduction of incidents (piracy, seizures), but also on the improvement of food, health, and economic security of coastal communities.



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