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Q1(c)

Explain the non-traditional security threats in the context of food and environmental crises.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Define non-traditional security against the military-state core of traditional security
- Explain food crisis as a security problem (availability, access, supply shocks)
- Explain environmental crisis as a security problem (climate, water, disaster, migration)
- Link both to human security and state stability

Revision summary

- **Non-traditional security covers harms beyond organised military attack:** food, environment, health, cyber and crime.

Food security is availability, access, utilisation and stability; war, climate and export bans can all break it.

Environmental crisis is a threat multiplier through climate, water, disaster and migration.

UNDP 1994 human security and Buzan's sectors supply the theory.

These shocks overload the state and also force cooperation through FAO, WHO, Paris and regional reserves.

Introduction

Traditional security is the state's survival against organised violence. **Non-traditional security is survival against harms that do not wear a uniform: hunger, pathogens, climate, water, cyber and crime.** Barry Buzan and the **Copenhagen school** widened the sectors. The **UNDP Human Development Report 1994** named human security. Food and environment are two of its sharpest tests.

Body**Food as security**

A food crisis is not only a harvest failure. It is a break in **availability, access, utilisation and stability** (FAO). War on Ukraine disrupted Black Sea grain and fertiliser; drought and El Niño have cut output in parts of Africa and South Asia; export bans travel as political weapons. For importing states, bread prices become regime risk - a lesson from 2007-08 and from several Arab uprisings. India's own buffer stocks, MSP politics and the WTO public-stockholding fight show that food is both a domestic bargain and an IR dossier. **Amartya Sen's** entitlement approach still bites: famine can occur without a fall in aggregate food if access collapses.

Environment as security

Climate change is a **threat multiplier**. Sea-level rise, glacial melt in the Himalaya, heat, floods and crop-zone shifts produce disaster, fiscal stress and movement of people. Water contests on shared rivers, from the Nile to the Indus and the Brahmaputra, sit at the edge of classical geopolitics. The **Paris Agreement**, loss-and-damage finance, and arguments over a Global South-sensitive climate regime are security talks in another vocabulary. Pandemics, as COVID-19 showed, are environmental-biological shocks that shut borders faster than tanks.

Why the state still matters

Non-traditional threats do not abolish the state; they **overload** it. Weak public health and empty granaries can undo a military that looks strong on paper. They also create cooperation: FAO, UNEP, WHO, the Sendai disaster framework, and regional rice reserves in ASEAN. They create conflict when powerful states treat climate or food as someone else's problem - as in fights over WHO funding and vaccine nationalism. Food and environment now sit on the same agenda as alliances, because they can kill, displace and topple.

Flow diagram

Non-traditional security -> Food crisis
Non-traditional security -> Environment climate water
Food crisis -> Human security
Environment climate water -> Human security
Human security -> State stability

Conclusion

- **Food and environmental crises are non-traditional in origin and traditional in effect:** they can starve, move and unseat. Human security and state security meet in the granary and the floodplain.

Facts & figures

UNDP 1994

Human Development Report popularised human security: freedom from fear and want, including food and environmental security.

Copenhagen school

Buzan, Wæver and others securitised sectors beyond the military: political, economic, societal and environmental.

FAO four pillars

Availability, access, utilisation and stability - the operational definition of food security.