

# Can 'Human Security' Practices Protect Humans from 21st Century Threats?

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### **Can 'Human Security' Norms and Practices Protect Human Beings from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Threats More Effectively Than 'Traditional' Security Norms and Practices?**

Throughout the twentieth century, conceptions of security by the international community were embedded within the nation state model, wherein the primary security objectives related to defending territorial integrity. Thereby, states were seen to occupy a dichotic role – serving as both the internal provider of security to their citizens and as the external source of security threats to fellow states. In line with this state-centric appraisal of security, the international community adhered resolutely to the principles of national sovereignty in approaching intra-state conflicts; where, 'Even in cases of severe human rights abuses, most states formally rejected the idea that states could intervene in other states' (McCormack 2008: 115).

However, in response to the backlash faced by the international community's inaction to the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, 'traditional' security norms and practices were increasingly challenged by the emergence of a 'Moral duty to act' (Blair, quoted in Fisher 2007: 102). In this context, the 'human security' paradigm's 'people', rather than 'state', centred approach was presented as the solution to the ethical dilemma which 21<sup>st</sup> century threats, e.g. Rwanda, posed to the international community. The human security approach aims to empower the individual (McCormack 2008) by providing a two-part support system, comprised of both the state and the international community, which can be relied upon should their security be compromised. However, this essay contends the moral framework which guides 'human security' is incompatible with the reality of modern international relations. Therefore, I argue the inherently idealistic nature of human security renders it no more effective, and at times even less so, than 'traditional' security norms and practices.

Whilst united in belief that human safety, rather than states, should serve as the focus of security (Atanassova-Cornelis 2005: 88), the human security paradigm, 'is not a monolithic concept' (McCormack 2008: 116). Advocates have diverged into two distinct schools of thought – the first of which adopts a developmental approach; encompassed in the slogan, 'Freedom from want'. Embedded in the UNHDR of 1994, it promotes quality of human life as the key focus of human security, providing guidelines for advancing, 'health, education and political freedom in addition to economic wellbeing' (King and Murray 2001: 586).

Critics suggest, 'Any system that enforces human security inevitably collides with conflicting values, which are not synchronous or accepted by all individuals, states, societies, or regions' (Liotta and Owen 2006: 41); an appraisal I wish to expand in relation to developmental human security. As a normative proposal, the objective must be to achieve consensus of support across the polarised spectrum of international values. However, in endeavouring to achieve such a breadth of aims, it inevitably alienates some members of the international community, causing implementation difficulties. Chandler echoes this, stressing, 'The holistic, ambitious approaches...are unworkable and impractical for policymaking' (Chandler 2008: 428). Perhaps herein lies the reason why developmental human security, though implemented in Japan, has proved less internationally endorsable than its alternative, the 'human

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protection approach'; for I argue that the ambitions to be all-encompassing prove this approach's ultimate limitation – rendering it unworkable on a global scale and, thus, ineffective.

The second school of thought is that of the 'human protection approach', the effectivity of which I wish to focus upon. Contrasting the wide-reaching aims of its developmental alternative, this approach prioritises human *survival* rather than quality of life (Chen 1995: 139) – a more limited approach, which I argue renders it more theoretically feasible than 'freedom from want'. Accordingly, the 'human protection approach' focuses upon international response to conflict, violent crime, human rights abuses and genocide/large scale violence (Mitchell 2012). These objectives are embodied in the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), which has emerged as the most internationally-endorsed norm of human security (Bellamy 2008: 615). R2P asserts the responsibility of the state to protect its population from broadly the same atrocities as the general 'human protection' approach – and when states fail to uphold this responsibility, the duty of the international community to intervene. Whilst acknowledging the 'human protection approach' represents a *theoretically* viable approach to security, this essay will explore its impediments in practice, making particular reference to R2P.

The decision to limit its focus to severe threats to human security (such as genocide) provides R2P with a greater possibility of achieving its aims. However, I argue the sheer gravity of the crises which 'prompt' it into effect inevitably associates R2P with military intervention. Bellamy echoes this view, making reference to, 'Confusion regarding the relationship between R2P and non-consensual intervention' (Bellamy 2008: 618). In appropriating its effectivity as a human security norm, it is imperative to note that military intervention is not the primary objective of R2P. On the contrary, R2P explicitly states military intervention be used as a last resort, only when all other diplomatic forms of intervention have been exhausted (Garrigues 2007: 11). Nonetheless, it is the militarily interventionary aspects of R2P (and the 'human protection' approach in general) wherein its ineffectivity becomes most apparent.

I argue the key flaw of 'human protection' lies in its overwhelming naivety – primarily the belief that human protection interests can supersede those of the state. Superficially speaking, globalisation and the increasingly interconnected nature of IR seems to lend itself to greater facilitating international action where human security violations arise (Kaldor 2006). However, the reality is that increased globalisation, which makes international application of human security norms possible, has emerged parallel to the prevalence of inter-state alliances, e.g. military, trade, and arms production (Sponeck, 2012). Consequently, the effect produced is, rather than an *obligation* to act, a general *reluctance* to do so, in order to prevent risking such alliances.

Furthermore, successful implementation of 'human protection' rests on the notion that, in prioritising human interests above those of states, a politically/culturally impartial approach towards intervention may be adopted. Anna suggests, '(Human security) makes intervention sound apolitical yet it is a fundamentally political act' (Anna 2012), and herein, the recurring theme of naivety becomes apparent again. I argue, assuming an international community (characterised by its unequal dispersion of power) is capable of enforcing 'human security' with any degree of neutrality, endangers its aims. I propose the international community is only as objective as its most powerful states and thus, in failing to account for the inherently prejudiced nature of the community which it affords so much power (McCormack 2008: 113), renders itself ineffective in practice. Critics express concern, 'Powerful states will determine whose human rights justify departure from the principle of non-intervention' (Macfarlane, Thielking & Weiss 2004, 979), and therein lies the danger for the protection of citizens to be compromised for the sake of securing the interests of 'powerful states' – a danger realised in Palestine.

Evans discredits the, 'frequently heard objection to the R2P norm...(that) R2P applies only to weak and friendless countries, never to the strong' (Evans 2008: 61). However, contrary to Evans' appraisal, rarely has implementation of R2P been more inhibited by the will of 'strong countries', or by having friends in strong countries, than in Palestine. Weiss argues, 'Critics and sceptics of humanitarian intervention should be less preoccupied that military action will be taken too often for insufficient humanitarian reasons (and) more concerned that it will be taken too rarely for the right ones' (Weiss 2004, 149) – a concept I will explore further in relation to Palestine, particularly the Gaza War of 2008-2009.

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Despite the deaths of 1385 Palestinians and 12 Israelis within a 22 day period and multiple failed attempts at ceasefires and diplomatic intervention, no military intervention was undertaken by the international community in Gaza (Humanitarian Coordinator 2009). Furthermore, in the aftermath of the conflict, the UN Fact Finding Committee released a report concluding, 'Members of the IDF committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide in the course of operation Cast Lead...the League of Arab States should request the Security Council...to exercise its Responsibility to Protect...in respect of Gaza' (Independent Fact Finding Committee 2009). It is notable that the terms 'genocide', 'war crimes', and 'crimes against humanity' are all defined as substantive for military intervention through R2P (General Assembly 2005), yet no intervention was undertaken.

I argue the reason behind international inaction in Palestine is simple: when military intervention, in accordance with human security norms, is not conducive to the interests of the 'strong' countries or their allies, e.g. Israel (USA) and Syria (Russia), then humanitarian violations may be disregarded and R2P treated as, 'no one's responsibility' (AbuZayd 2009) – clearly asserting the ineffectivity of human security measures in protecting human life against the corruption of IR and prompting suggestions, 'On the one hand, the R2P community is silent on the plight of the Palestinians. On the other...it agitates for Western intervention in countries that maintain unfriendly business and investment climates...or have coveted strategic assets' (Gowans 2009).

This notion of military intervention in countries who maintain unfriendly relations with 'power players' highlights another challenge to the effective translation of human security norms into practice. Namely, the paradigm of 'human security' negates the potential for the term's abuse in order to promote agendas of powerful countries, under the guise of 'humanitarian intervention' and at the expense of human protection. McCormack concurs, noting, 'The re-characterisation of sovereignty as responsibility...potentially allows powerful states or international institutions greater freedom to intervene in and regulate weaker states' (McCormack 2008: 114). I propose this 'regulation' of weaker states can be observed in the role of NATO in the Libyan Civil War 2011.

Military intervention was 'justified' in terms of 'human security', citing Gaddafi's planned air attacks upon innocent civilians (Kaldor 2011). However, 'having crippled Libyan air capabilities', NATO continued to target Gaddafi's own compound (Modeme 2012: 20) – prompting critics to note, 'The boundaries between protecting civilians and pursuing regime change became increasingly blurred' (Dembinski and Reinold 2011: 6). Furthermore, concerns were raised that, contrary to the principles of human security, diplomatic means had not been exhausted prior to NATO deployment (Modeme 2012: 13). Whilst there is little doubt Gaddafi's genocidal language (Dembinski and Reinold 2011: 6) prior to intervention indicated mass violence against civilians was imminent, I argue sustained NATO attacks against Gaddafi himself offers proof that regime change, rather than protection of human life, if not constituting the *entire* rationale behind the intervention, certainly discredited the claim that it was solely in the interests of protecting human life. Moreover, reports show that whilst 519 fatalities occurred as a result of government forces (OnIslam 2011), 1108 were attributed to NATO (Ostroumova 2012) – further undermining 'human security' and pointing to its ineffectivity, as the potential for abuse served as the *cause* of human lives lost, rather than its 'solution'.

Furthermore, in then-Foreign Secretary Jack Straw vowing, 'To put R2P at the heart of', British involvement in Iraq (BBC 2005), 'human security' was also used to justify the Iraq War – a now internationally-condemned intervention. I argue the association of human security with Western imperialism and overzealous military intervention (e.g. Iraq and, arguably, Libya) has provoked international apprehension towards further implementing it – a view mirrored by Weiss, suggesting, 'Future attempts to intervene in...human rights violations could be discredited merely by referring to the war in Iraq' (MacFarlane, Thielking & Weiss 2004, 977). Consequently, I argue backlash against powerful states abusing 'human security' has led to its inconsistent application – *depriving* vulnerable citizens of protection rather than *empowering* them; subsequently rendering it ineffective in practice.

Whilst 'traditional' security norms and practices failed to protect citizens from threats posed by their own state, the 'human security' paradigm simultaneously undermines state-citizen relationships and renders citizens dependent on the international community for protection. However, it fails to adequately consider whether the latter can be relied upon to uphold human security objectives in light of repeated failures to act with neutrality. Therefore, the greatest flaw of 'human security' lies in its attempts to reconcile the idealist principles of universally equal rights to protection

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and moral obligation, with the realities of an unequal and, at times, amoral international community. In conclusion, I suggest this approach to security allows for greater potential that citizens be deprived of protection, and burdens weaker nations with the ever greater threat of humanitarian crises – thus rendering 'human security' fundamentally ineffective in practice.

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# **Can 'Human Security' Practices Protect Humans from 21st Century Threats?**

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