

From national security to human security—less of the same in Congo?

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With the end of the Cold War came shifts in the way security was perceived and pursued. The failing favor of the nation state provided space for the concept of human security and with it a plethora of associated security actors. Human security has particular resonance in Congo as millions of people have died, and the majority of deaths have not resulted directly from military violence. However, at the level of policy and practice, the contribution of human security is questionable: it has not inspired effective protection of the population. In addition, the relationship between human security and national security, originally theorized in terms of exclusive sovereignty, has proved to be more complex.

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What is human security?

The security debate was revived in the 1980s and gathered pace through the 1990s as the paradigm of human security emerged and was debated. A corresponding policy discourse engaged major donors, and this overlaid the notion of national security with concepts of human, environmental, economic and international security.¹ Academic and practitioner discussions have moved the concept of security away from one defined by national interest, pursued through the use of force and being dominated by northern and masculine perspectives. The concept of human security takes human populations as the referent objects of security.

There is little agreement on how human security is defined—and what is excluded,² but a seminal and referential piece of work is the 1994 Human Development Report,³ which identified the component parts of human security as being personal, economic, health, political, food, community and environmental security.

1 Peter Dombrowski (ed.), *Guns and butter: the political economy of international security*, Boulder, CO, 2005; *Human Security*, in: *St Antony's International Review*, No. 2/2005; Roland Dannreuther, *International Security. The Contemporary Agenda*, Cambridge [et al.] 2007; Karen Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, Cambridge and Malden, 2007; Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, London 1991.

2 Roland Paris, *Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?*, in: *International Security*, Fall 2001, pp. 87–102; Gary King and Christopher J. L. Murray, *Rethinking Human Security*, in: *Political Science Quarterly*, Nr. 4, 2001/2002, pp. 585–610; Jakkie Cilliers, *Human Security in Africa. A conceptual framework for review*, African Human Security Initiative, <<http://www.africanreview.org/docs/humsecjun04.pdf>>, Nairobi 2004 (16/10/2007).

3 *New dimensions of human security*, in: *Human Development Report 1994 United Nations Development Programme*, pp. 22–46, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en.pdf> (17/12/2007).

Others argue that human security and national security complement each other;⁴ but the fact that a long liberal tradition has sought ways of ameliorating the relationship between the state and the population is not in question, but rather what happens when national security and human security collide?

The political impact of the human security notion was to signal some international agreement that the state was not permitted to abuse its citizens—the rights of human populations could trump sovereignty claims and large-scale abuse would attract international disapprobation and intervention.⁵ Human security brings with it some implied criticism of the state and with it an interventionist agenda: concretely—the state is not doing its job in protecting civilians and may be threatening them, and theoretically—international war is not the major threat and major threats cannot be dealt with by states. By asserting the sovereignty of populations, the challenge was issued: two things cannot be sovereign, and if the population is sovereign, the state must cede.

Human security and politics in Congo

The end of the Cold War was significant in the Great Lakes region of Africa because support from the USA and Europe was suddenly withdrawn. Northern states' declining need for buffers or proxies was accompanied by a declining respect for national sovereignty and for clients such as Mobutu Sese Seko. An era had ended: there was no more foreign patronage—in financial or military assets—and no more pretence at internal state-led development.

The move towards a human security framework appears to have potential for protecting the population from violently neglectful and abusive leaders. The concept diversified the way that security is conceptualized, shifting the focus from international war to a more varied explanation of why people are dying. In doing so it problematized destitution in such a way as to identify areas for intervention and licensed a number of actors protecting or promoting security. Across Africa there were increasingly interventionist aid packages that addressed themselves, amongst other things, to demobilization, security sector reform and peace negotiations.⁶

4 Freedom from Fear. Canada's Foreign Policy for Human Security, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, <[http://pubx.dfaic-maeci.gc.ca/00_Global/Pubs_Cat2.nsf/0/56153893ff8dfda285256bc700653b9f/\\$FILE/Freedom_from_Fear-e.pdf](http://pubx.dfaic-maeci.gc.ca/00_Global/Pubs_Cat2.nsf/0/56153893ff8dfda285256bc700653b9f/$FILE/Freedom_from_Fear-e.pdf)> (16/10/2007); Stuart MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human security and the UN: a critical history*, Bloomington, IN, 2006.

5 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*, New York 1992, <<http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>> (17/12/2007).

6 Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars. The merging of development and security*, London and New York, 2001.

In the context of Congo, the impact of the shift in thinking and policy-making can be explored with reference to two sets of documents that have been fundamental in defining the interpretation given to the conflict; neither document mentions human security explicitly, but both address the effects of the war and have emerged from the ranks of the new security actors—NGOs and the operational arms of the UN. The first is a series of mortality surveys published by the International Rescue Committee⁷ and the second is the UN Panel of Experts Report.⁸ Both have been updated and re-released in subsequent years.

The IRC mortality survey is widely cited and makes two notable contributions. One concerns the number of casualties—starting at 1.7 million in 2000 and rising by around a million a year through the war. Though heavily caveated with regard to access and methodology, this revelation established the second Congo war as the armed conflict involving the highest number of casualties since World War II. The second contributing factor was that the majority of the deaths were not the direct result of military violence, although areas of high levels of direct violence also saw the highest levels of fatalities due to disease. The population was being killed by the destitution that war occasioned. The focus on the safety of the population, the variety of vulnerabilities faced and the attention drawn to the lack of development—the destruction of infrastructure, for example—all correspond to the concept of human security.

The UN Panel of Experts Report was the document that brought international and official recognition to the widespread and unregulated exploitation of resources in eastern Congo. This document is also inspired by post-Cold War thinking on security: the invasion and occupation of two thirds of the country is not the primary issue identified by the report. Instead, what is presented is pillage, an economic venture described as “illegal”, with the “violation of sovereignty” contributing to its illegality. The violation of sovereignty is defined in terms of “extraction, production, commercialization and exports” (p. 3)—not occupation. The culprits were individuals and companies, including some military personnel, but not the states of Rwanda or Uganda. The report states that “fighting erupted” in 1998, not that Congo was invaded, and the economic agents were named and apparently shamed in an appendix. The 2001 report listed a “sample” of the companies importing minerals from Congo via Rwanda. The 2002 report presented 85 companies considered to have violated the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises.

7 International Rescue Committee, Mortality Study, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo 2000, 2002, 2003, Bukavu (DR Kongo), <<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/mortalitydrc.pdf>> (16/10/2007).

8 Report of the UN expert Panel on the Illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2001/357.

These two sets of documents have been influential in determining the kinds of intervention made in Congo. Both exemplify mainstream policy discourse on security and in their presentation of events, reinforce the interpretation of Congo as a country in need of humanitarian intervention (and ultimately development) and conformity to the market. They present a version of events that contributes to and is strengthened by the human security framework. Both documents were ‘shocking’ in the magnitude of what they described and as such have been debated at length with regard to their accuracy, reliability and purpose. Their significance, however, lies not in the details they include, but rather in the political machinery they overlook. The IRC mortality survey and the UN Panel of Experts Report combined to present the conflict as widespread human suffering and economic pillage, not as violent politics, invasion and globalized war.

What is left out?

The documents achieved certain goals: the IRC mortality surveys have been widely cited in academic and practitioner debate and by the press as a measure of suffering, and aid allocations to Congo have increased steeply over the last seven years. Similarly, the pillage of Congo has been accepted as a fact in international relations and policy circles, and some steps have been taken accordingly, including the physical withdrawal from the country of the Rwandan and Ugandan armies. What is not addressed, though, are the processes by which people are made and kept vulnerable and the political conditions that enable the extraction and exploitation of resources. As a result, foreign aid has not transformed life chances and the absence of troops has not led the trade in minerals to be regulated, less harnessed still for the development of Congo.

Nor did either report fulfill certain stated aims. The IRC survey aspired to “guide health programs” and presents the hope that “those who have influence over the warring parties and over the processes which may bring peace will add a sense of urgency to resolving the conflict” (p. 2). The UN report presented a set of recommendations—“tough measures”—including sanctions, preventive measures, reparations, reconstruction, regulation and security (p. 2). It is not obvious from either document how these aims would be achieved. As a quantitative, information-gathering exercise, the IRC is perhaps deliberately politically vague. The UN report involves an analysis that delineates events from the exploitation of resources to the continuation of conflict, rather than the other way around. This analysis accords with mainstream liberal thinking at the time,⁹ and proposes little in practical terms: for as long as there are resources, war is inevitable.

⁹ Paul Collier et al., *Greed and grievance in civil war?*, Washington, DC, 2000.

National security has always been about contract and compromise—between states to respect the sovereignty of others, and the Leviathan bargain for people to surrender some of their freedom in return for some protection. Previous to the end of the Cold War, all parties had strong—if not always compelling—incentives to respect the security machinery. However, human security is presented in terms of a number of elements that reinforce each other for mutual gain, which can be achieved through increased humanitarian assistance and voluntary corporate responsibility.

The combination of a broad—practically limitless—human security category and an evasion of any discussion on contracts or compromises are prone to critique. With no theoretical or empirical basis, human security has shifted security thinking away from a focus on territorial integrity and proposes the promotion of a new brand of security, not through arms but through sustainable development. At best this legitimizes benevolent actors to intervene to protect vulnerable populations, but there is no agreed responsibility or incentive, and no sanctions for interventions that do not achieve their goals or are not undertaken in the first place. The similarities to the frailties of humanitarianism are evident.¹⁰

Congo and the concept of human security

In Congo, the outcomes have been severe. The move away from the focus on national security contributed to the fall of Mobutu, which feted a host of non-state actors and paved the way for predatory leaders of foreign countries to lead campaigns in Congo. The rebellion led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila and the invasion by the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) a year later are two of the most extraordinary challenges to national sovereignty that have occurred in recent years, and yet neither attracted significant condemnation or intervention. The invasion by Rwanda is described as a “counterrevolution” in the IRC survey. The UN report refers to “territories conquered by the armies of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda,” but expresses little disquiet about the nature of this conquest. The situation for the majority of the population at the end of the decade was incomparably worse than it had been at the beginning of the decade: the abusive leader had been removed, but the security of the population had deteriorated.

The second shift, from security through military weight to security through sustainable development, also failed to ameliorate people’s security. The decommissioning of personnel and weapons from national armies in many countries around the world contributed to the rise in private military firms and second-

¹⁰ Zoë Marriage, *Not breaking the rules, not playing the game : international assistance to countries at war*, London 2006.

hand arms markets. These phenomena impacted negatively on security in Congo: the proliferation of thousands of weapons in the area has enabled groups to arm, and demobilized soldiers have found mercenary activity lucrative. In addition, Rwanda and Uganda instituted huge non-state networks in Congo to support their own states while lauding sustainable development at home. Sustainable development—both through government policy or through external intervention—has been absent and has not enhanced any aspects of life for the population of Congo.

The result in practical terms is that the rhetorical championing of the human population over the interest of the state has informed interventions that have further undermined the Congolese. This is significant because human security has become something of an organizing principle for aid and plays a role in legitimizing other forms of intervention as well. Parallels can be seen in Iraq and Afghanistan where interventions made purportedly on behalf of human populations, or sections of them, have left those populations less secure than they were before.

There is little to suggest, though, that these events are politically naive. Human security frames the political space, not by defining what happens, but rather what is politically visible. The pursuit of power has not been curtailed by the discussion on human security, and much of the military activity in Congo can be analyzed in classic terms. Human security offers another perspective: the presentation of suffering and pillage overlooks the support given by the UK government, among others, to Rwanda and Uganda. At a sub-national level, it does not examine the processes by which power is forged during a conflict and what patterns of protection and control are established. Devoid of these analyses the documents examined become static—moments recorded in history. They do not investigate causes or processes; they say how things used to be.

Because the concept of human security is lacking in context, no serious attention is paid to its relationship with national security. The IRC survey notes that “war means disease” as areas of insecurity saw high mortality rates from disease, but the observation is not pressed further. In Congo, while human security was being developed in policy discourse as a concept to champion the security of populations over the interests of leaders, the events that contributed most forcefully to the insecurity of the population was the effectual destruction of the state, by building-up and then removing Mobutu, and the sponsorship of foreign invasion.

Furthermore, human security can be seen to patronize areas not deemed worthy of real security, or those that pose no threat. (This hypothesis is tested by the

alterations that have taken place since the War on Terror: the peace process has been promoted with renewed vigor, but the numerous setbacks and flaws suggest that Congo still does not pose a serious threat). The paradigm of security through sustainable development is not a military blueprint in northern countries. To pursue this reasoning, northern countries that have in some sense “achieved” development would no longer require military capability. The reverse is observable, whereby human security is a paradigm applied to countries in which human life is threatened daily, whilst northern countries employ a range of military and diplomatic tools to defend themselves from the threats posed by migration, non-compliant markets and terror.

Policy implications

Considering the problematic conceptualization and contradictions with actual implementation, this overview of human security and Congo gives rise to three specific policy-related conclusions:

1. The concept of human security nestles easily within the mainstream discourse of the liberal peace and as such problematizes Congo’s situation in such a way that responses can be made and carried out successfully, according to delineated criteria. Foreign aid has increased, and considerable international attention has been given to the extraction of mineral wealth from the

east of the country and the withdrawal of Rwanda and Uganda, including a demobilization program with a designated wing for the return of foreign troops.¹¹

2. The human security approach has not—empirically—improved the situation in Congo. Mortality rates continue at a disastrous level (despite the fact that most of the fighting has ceased), extractive industries have not been re-oriented to the benefit of the Congolese population; the structures of impoverishment, differentiation and violent power remain in place. Massive international investment, including funding UN troops has yet to prove its worth; the plan has not become unstuck entirely, but has been consistently violated. Human security did not give a robust means for analysis of the security situation in Congo or an action agenda.
3. Security is not “out there” to be discovered. There are dialectic processes by which the conceptualization of security influences what is perceived and prioritized and what response is given. How security is conceptualized in northern policy discourse is significant not only in recording events, but in shaping them. Misperceptions and scattergun responses may aggravate forms of violence. The security of the population is not defined solely or even largely by the Congolese—and least of all by the civilians. There is a web of political interests competing and impacting on the population. Focusing on the people’s suffering and championing their rights intimates a discourse of empowerment, but no means by which to operationalize it.

To conclude, while conventional thinking on security focuses predominantly on national interest, and is inadequate for examining the decentralized violence of Congo and the multiple forms of vulnerability that people face, the human security concept has not provided a useful analytical tool. In addition, the political shift inherent in theorizing is dangerous and the lack of respect for the nation-state has allowed for circumscribed achievements—in terms of removing leaders or increasing aid—, but has contributed to compromising further the security situation for people, most notably in Congo.

11 Marriage, Flip-flop Rebel Dollar Soldier, Demobilisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in: *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 7, No. 2/2007.