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Political security: from the 1990s to the Arab Spring

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The 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) set out the definition and parameters of political security in fewer than 400 words. It was defined as the *prevention of government repression, systematic violation of human rights and threats from militarization.* This was intended to establish an agenda that would protect people against states that continued to practice political repression, systematic torture, ill treatment and disappearance. Yet, the concept of political security has evolved in both theory and practice. This has been done through an ongoing debate, which has been shaped more by immediate crises and the practice of international relations, than the parameters set out in the 1994 HDR report. In practice, achieving the ambitions of the political security agenda has become tied to questions of humanitarian assistance and intervention. This was narrowly interpreted throughout the 1990s as a debate surrounding the nature and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. In the 2000s, this was institutionalized into a Responsibility to Protect agenda, only to see the second decade of the twenty-first century reveal the need for a far more complex and nuanced debate about how this should be carried out.

Keywords: Human Development Report; political security; democracy; human rights; humanitarian intervention; R2P; Arab Spring

The relationship between human security and political security is, in the abstract, a rather simple articulation. As the Human Development Report (HDR) sets out, 'One of the most important aspects of human security is that people should be able to live in a society that honours their basic human rights' (UNDP, 1994, p. 32). Thus, while it is received wisdom in security studies that the concept of human security is difficult to define, its subcategory of political security has come to mean, at a basic level, the prevention of government repression, systematic violation of human rights and threats from militarization. The report was largely positive about the progress that had been made in that regard throughout the 1980s – a 'decade of democratic transition – as many military dictatorships ceded power to civilian administrations and one-party states opened themselves up to multi-party elections'. However, as the report made clear, there was still 'a long way to go in protecting people against state repression' (UNDP, 1994, p. 32). The report pointed to a 1993 survey by Amnesty International highlighting 110 countries that still practiced political repression, systematic torture, ill treatment and disappearance. It also drew attention to the frequent violations of human rights perpetrated in times of political unrest. To make this point all the more prescient, the year of its release saw the Rwandan genocide, a defining event of the twentieth century. Not since World War Two's Holocaust had ordinary citizens been deliberately

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massacred so rapidly, so systematically and with such a palpable genocidal objective (Human Rights Watch, 2004). At the time, national governments and international institutions failed to act, backing away from intervening in the crisis through fear of political complexities.

Over 20 years on from the publication of the 1994 HDR, this article seeks to answer how the concept of political security has evolved in both theory and practice. The argument presented makes clear that, with increasing threats to political security, evident in Rwanda through to Syria, the international community has attempted to grapple with the theoretical and practical challenges that threats to human security present. This has been done through an ongoing and vigorous debate, which has been shaped not only by more immediate crises, but also by the international milieu that has developed since the report's original publication. Yet, the debate has taken turns not originally conceived within the 1994 HDR. With the term 'political security' being dropped from subsequent HDRs,[1] it has become the preserve of academics', commentators' and policy-makers' interpretations working in the field of human security. As such, while in the 1994 report the concept was tied to a liberal utopian desire for a peace in a post-cold war world, over time it was narrowly interpreted throughout the 1990s as a debate surrounding the nature and legitimacy of humanitarian assistance. In the 2000s, this was institutionalized into a Responsibility to Protect (R2P) the agenda, only to see the second decade of the twenty-first century reveal the need for a far more complex and nuanced debate about how this should be carried out.

Political security and the 1994 HDR

The 1994 HDR asserts that 'most people instinctively understand what security means. It means safety from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression' (UNDP, 1994, p. 3). Yet, if a more analytical approach to the concept is taken it is clear that the term is far from unproblematic. For some 'defining human security clearly or consensually is impossible' as it has an 'essentially unfixable quality' (Uvin, 2004, p. 352). Further still, it has been seen as the 'latest in a long line of neologisms … that encourage policymakers and scholars to think about international security as something more than the military defence of state interests and territory' (Paris, 2001, p. 87). Yet, others regard it as 'a vital part of the international agenda' that complements 'more traditional notions of nation-based security and causing serious rethinking of many traditional precepts of statecraft' while providing a 'different lens through which to understand and implement policy' (Axworthy, 2004, p. 348).

Evidently, at its core was an attempt to shift traditional approaches to security away from the integrity of the state and state sovereignty to the community and individual. In doing so, the concept of threat is modified away from inter-state war, nuclear proliferation and revolutions per say to broader concerns with disease, poverty, natural disaster, violence, human rights abuses and genocide amongst other threats (Owen, 2010, p. 39). This idea was not new, as the 1994 HDR drew on debates that predated the end of the cold war. The report grew from deliberations in various UN forums, not least the controversy regarding the disarmament–development nexus in response to the cold war arms race, along with multiple independent commissions such as the Brandt Commission, the Brundtland Commission and the Commission on Global Governance (Acharya, 2001). Yet, the added value of the report was not only in its coining of the term 'human security', but the grounding of this concept, and its notion of political security, in a commitment to human dignity. This, as Acharya argues, was the result of, first, a growing recognition that civil wars and intrastate conflict were outnumbering conventional interstate conflicts, and becoming an increasing source of human suffering; second, the spread of democratization processes throughout the international system; third, the advent of humanitarian intervention and fourth, the growing recognition that the dynamics of globalization were creating widespread poverty, unemployment and social dislocation caused by economic crises (2001, p. 450). For the authors of the 1994 HDR,

evident in the proposed *World Social Charter*, the safety and dignity of the individual were to be enshrined through the sustained development of political systems orientated towards human rights, democracy and global governance (UNDP, 1994, p. 14). This, as the report argued, implied the 'empowerment of people' to protect 'all basic human rights' (UNDP, 1994, p. 13).

The call for empowering people highlighted the emancipatory appeal of the human security agenda. The architects of the 1994 HDR were not simply seeking to narrate the state of the international system, but to set out a pathway for progress and outline an architecture for a more peaceful world. Yet, in constructing this utopian vision of how to move forward, it was clear that they were rooting their conception of political security in the tradition of liberal political thought. This was made all the more evident by reference to Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine within the report, but was not without controversy (UNDP, 1994, p. 14). For some, the pursuit of political security, as constructed in the 1994 HDR, has been perceived as a thinly veiled attempt to further the 'West's' campaign for human rights and liberal democracy. There is legitimacy to such claims, made all the more evident in the report's 'universalism of life claims', which could be interpreted as emphasizing the individualistic ethos of liberal democracy as opposed to embracing cultural relativism and wider notions of putting the security of the community before the individual. For example, as Acharya demonstrates, this led some Asian governments to argue that the 'definition and promotion of human rights should be subjected to the different cultural contexts and historical experiences of Asia' (2001, p. 449).

Normative questions aside, it was evident that the report's articulation of political security was not devised in an intellectual vacuum. It was contextualized by a sense of triumphant exhilaration surrounding liberalism, evident in the early 1990s and exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's (1989) article *The End of History?* (Hassan, 2013, pp. 57–58). This was enhanced by what some called the 'worldwide democratic revolution' heralded by the break-up of the Soviet Union (Carothers, 1999). By defining political security in liberal terms, it fed into the belief that the universalization of Western liberal democracy was the only viable solution to creating international peace. The 1994 HDR makes clear that sustainable people-centred development was the basis upon which economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community security and political security would be built. As this collection shows, the avenues to each of these were somewhat different in emphasis. However, when it came to defining what constituted political security, it was firmly grounded in liberal beliefs that required the spread of human rights and democracy. Moreover, resonating with a wider democracy promotion consensus that was building at the time, this was seen as both ethical and necessary; that is to say, in a more familiar vernacular, it was to be built on preconceived Western 'values' and 'interests'. Thus, while Paris argues, 'The term [human security], in short, appears to be slippery by design. Cultivated ambiguity renders human security an effective campaign slogan, but it also diminishes the concept's usefulness as a guide for academic research or policymaking' (2001, p. 88). In practice, its subcategory of political security has undergone a process of reification, as Western governments have tended to redefine it in political terms, emphasizing 'freedom from fear'. For example, the Canadian government argues that human security is 'Freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives with a focus on increasing people's safety from the threat of violence' (DFAIT, 2000). This is in contrast to, for example, the Japanese government that has placed a greater prominence on 'freedom from want', defining a human security agenda more ambiguously as the comprehensive 'seizing [of] all the menaces that threaten the survival, daily life and dignity of human beings and strengthening the efforts to confront threats' (MOFA, 2001).

The differing emphases placed on 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' need not be seen as incommensurate within the concept of human security. Indeed, the report makes clear that it sees them as mutually reinforcing. However, what is evident in the 1994 HDR is that when the

document refers to political security, its emphasis is on the 'fear' side of the equation. Political security was understood as (1) the prevention of government repression, (2) the prevention of systematic violation of human rights and (3) the removal of threats from militarization. This laid the discursive tracks to the report, emphasizing concrete liberal interventionist policy recommendations. The document demanded the 'non-discrimination between all people, irrespective of gender, religion, race or ethnic origin', as it 'focuses directly on human beings respecting national sovereignty *but only as long as nation-states respect the human rights of their own people*' (UNDP, 1994, p. 14). The rationale for this comes from its empirical account of how the nature of war was changing; 'at the beginning of this century, around 90% of war casualties were military. Today, about 90% are civilian – a disastrous shift in the balance' (UNDP, 1994, p. 47). In concrete terms, the report recommends that international intervention be warranted in four situations,

> (1) mass slaughter of the population by the state, (2) decimation through starvation or the withholding of health or other services, (3) forced exodus and (4) occupation and the denial of the right to self-determination. (UNDP, 1994, p. 57)

This is qualified with the assertion that there should not be an 'occupying force' running the country, but the acceptance that the 'traditional forms of UN action need to be critically reviewed to deal with new and different challenges'. To put this into practice, it is recommended that 'Chapter VII of the UN Charter clearly needs a fundamental rethink'.

Just as the more vague dimensions of the report's definition of political security were being shaped by the international milieu of the early 1990s, so too was its liberal interventionist policy proposal. The summer of 1990 saw Saddam Hussein's Iraq invading Kuwait, followed later by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approving the use of force to compel Iraq's withdrawal. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the USA, UK, and France established no-fly zones (NFZ) over Northern and Southern Iraq to protect the Kurdish and Shiite populations, respectively. The rationale for this was couched in a humanitarian discourse, which argued for the necessary infringement of Iraqi sovereignty. However, while United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 688, adopted on 5 April 1991, was clear on a military campaign to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the NFZs were not authorized by the UN and not specifically sanctioned by any Security Council resolution. That is to say that the NFZs were not specifically sanctioned under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Instead, they can be better seen as an unrivalled hegemon asserting a leadership responsibility. The NFZs were to be part of what President Bush referred to as a 'New World Order'. The USA, adopting the position that the NFZs were in fact legal under UNSCR 688, would lead the world away from traditional conceptions of balance of power security, towards a more 'universalist' alternative reinvigorated by the international legal backing of the UN.

The 1994 HDR was also able to draw on the conflict in Bosnia, which with the full outbreak of war in April 1992 led to millions of Bosnians being killed, interned or becoming refugees, fleeing to neighbouring states. Far from emphasizing the need for a 'New World Order' on this occasion, the USA contended, in the words of Secretary of State James Baker, that 'we don't have a dog in this fight', and deferred the humanitarian responsibility to the UN 'protection force' and the European Community (EC) (in Bacevich, 2002, p. 86). The expectation had been that the EC would play a leading role under the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) mandated in the February 1992 Maastricht Treaty, because Bosnia fell within the European influence. Moreover, as the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Jacques Poos, chairing the EC council of ministers stated at the time,

> If one problem can be solved by the Europeans, it is the Yugoslav problem. This is a European country and it is not up to the Americans. It is not up to anyone else. (in Smith, 1996, p. 1)

Nevertheless, the international community proved highly ineffective. In August 1992, the UNSC agreed to extend the UN military presence in Bosnia and the UN Human Rights Commission condemned 'ethnic cleansing'. However, this translated into protecting humanitarian aid supplies, and not preventing the on-going fighting and what the UN General Assembly Resolution 47/121 referred to as an 'abhorrent policy of "ethnic cleansing", which is a form of genocide' (UNGA, 1992).

With this conflict dragging on, it was not until the year of the HDR in 1994 that NATO began enforcing an NFZ, which had been declared by the UN in late 1992. International organizations estimate that more than 100,000 people died between 1992 and 1995, two-thirds of whom were Bosnian Muslims, which, at the time, made it the worst act of genocide since World War II (Simons, 2007). This merely compounded the 1994 HDR observation that armed conflicts within states were increasing. As the HDR identified,

> Of the 82 armed conflicts between 1989 and 1992, only three were between states. Although often cast in ethnic divisions, many also have a political or economic character. (UNDP, 1994, p. 47)

For the authors of the HDR, the issue was not if Chapter VII of the UN Charter should be reformed to better address how the UN could best take action against individual states. The UN Charter was considered out of date given the empirical evidence presented in the report. Rather, the unresolved issues were 'When to intervene? In what way? And for how long?' Put simply the Charter would have to 'be reviewed and adapted to deal with conflicts within nations' if issues of government repression, systematic violation of human rights and threats from militarization were to be dealt with (UNDP, 1994, p. 57).

The 1990s beyond the HDR: humanitarian intervention and the R2P

James Gustave Speth signed the *Foreword* of the HDR on 16 March 1994, arguing that 'we are now poised in UNDP to move from the basic messages of the HDRs to their concrete operationalization', and asserting that 'there is no question in my mind that the Report will exercise a profound influence on global policy dialogue and on UNDP's future operations' (in UNDP, 1994, p. iv). Yet, between April and June 1994, the international community would be slow to react to events in Rwanda, which saw an estimated 800,000–1,000,000 citizens killed in a sustained genocide (Reuters, 2007). Indeed, the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda highlighted the ineffectual nature of the international community over issues of political security. Due to fears regarding the safety of UN peace monitors, the UN reduced its presence as the genocide was taking place. As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali asserted, '[the] international community did little or nothing as the killing in Rwanda continued' (in Young & Kent, 2004, p. 694). As such, even as the 1994 HDR was espousing the need for a greater focus on its conception of political security, the international community was failing to respond to the worst genocide since the Holocaust. As the December 2001 *Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* would later conclude,

> That was a failure of international will … at the highest level. Its consequence was not merely a humanitarian catastrophe for Rwanda: the genocide destabilized the entire Great Lakes region and continues to do so. In the aftermath, many African peoples concluded that, for all the rhetoric about the universality of human rights, some human lives end up mattering a great deal less to the international community than others. (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001, p. 1)

Events in Rwanda added pertinence to the milieu surrounding the release of the 1994 HDR, but they did not crystallize any renewed emphasis or agreement on how to engage with threats to political security. The tragic deaths in Rwanda simply added to the estimated 262 million people killed by their own governments in the twentieth century (Bellamy, 2013, p. 487). The

Rwandan genocide, however, has helped change the international discourse on political security. It is now commonplace with the outbreak of violence within states to ask 'is this another Rwanda?'

This change in international discourse helped to highlight tensions and omissions within the 1994 HDR, which would come to fruition in the late 1990s. The report's 'universalism of life claims' was based on a conception of natural rights. The HDR makes clear that this should be based on the construction and rule of international law. Yet, the report also set out a humanitarian agenda grounded in ethical reasoning. Problematically, the authors failed to deal with the potential tensions between these two positions. While in regards to the former it would be easier to argue that only the UNSC could make the case for intervention, thus routing action in international law, the latter may well be interpreted as a moral imperative that could include working outside international legal norms. The HDR simply obviates this issue with thin assertions such as 'Human security is easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention' (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). While 'early warning systems' and 'preventive diplomacy' should be a welcomed part of the international communities' toolkit, the authors failed to engage with, and foresee, issues with the liberal internationalist agenda they put forward under the auspices of political security. They simply did not engage with how far the ethical obligation to restore basic human rights and dignity should go after prevention fails.

The prospects of working outside international legal norms came to fruition in the 1999 Kosovo campaign. With mounting evidence of 'ethnic cleansing' taking place against Albanians, NATO launched Operation Allied Force. This contravened Article 2 (4) which prohibits the threat or use of force except in self-defence or with the authorization of the UNSC. However, the possibility of Russia stymieing intervention in Kosovo, backed by Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the interference of the UN in the domestic affairs of states, reinforced desires for a NATO alliance bombing campaign. The air campaign began on 24 March 1999, and was a direct test of the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention because it operated outside the UN framework. Indeed, the 2000 Independent International Commission on Kosovo would later define this action as 'illegal but legitimate' in their *Kosovo Report*, concluding that

> the NATO military intervention was illegal but legitimate. It was illegal because it did not receive prior approval from the United Nations Security Council. However, the Commission considers that the intervention was justified because all diplomatic avenues had been exhausted and because the intervention had the effect of liberating the majority population of Kosovo from a long period of oppression under Serbian rule. (IICK, 2000, p. 4)

What the Kosovo campaign demonstrated however was that there was a new emerging norm with regards to political security throughout the 1990s. This culminated in what Richard Falk referred to as 'the golden age of humanitarian diplomacy', and what British Prime Minister Tony Blair referred to as a 'doctrine of the international community' (in Bellamy, 2010a, p. 430). Although deeply inconsistent in practice, the UNSC was adapting its definition of international peace and security, authorizing interventions in Bosnia, Somali and Haiti. The core issue that the Kosovo campaign raised was not so much if humanitarian intervention in and of itself was acceptable, but rather questions regarding 'who can *legitimately authorize* intervention and *in what circumstances*' (Bellamy, 2010a, p. 431). The fundamental tension, which the HDR failed to address, was by the end of the 1990s the central question with regards to political security. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his 1999 address to the UN General Assembly asserted at length,

> To those for whom the greatest threat to the future of international order is the use of force in the absence of a Security Council mandate, one might ask … in the context of Rwanda: If, in those dark days and hours leading up to the genocide, a coalition of States had been prepared to act in defense of the Tutsi population but did not receive prompt Council authorization, should such a coalition have stood aside and allowed the horror to unfold?

> To those for whom the Kosovo action heralded a new era when States and groups of States can take military action outside the established mechanisms for enforcing international law, one might ask: Is there not a danger of such interventions undermining the imperfect, yet resilient, security system created after the second World War, and of setting dangerous precedents for the future interventions without a clear criterion to decide who might invoke these precedents, and in what circumstances? (Kofi, 1999, p. 1)

This of course is not to argue that a full consensus in the 1990s emerged, or that a policy of humanitarian intervention was consistent throughout this period. But from protection in Northern Iraq in 1991 through to Kosovo in 1999, there was an emerging recognition that states had a duty to protect their citizens, and if this was not carried out, the R2P would be passed to the international community. Evidently, the concept of security was therefore being broadened in line with the recommendations of the HDR. However, this was being done in a manner inconsistent with the report's emphasis on the rule of international law, and instead emphasized the report's calls to respect 'national sovereignty but only as long as nation-states respect the human rights of their own people' (UNDP, 1994, p. 14).

Increasingly, in the name of human rights, external military intervention was being seen as a legitimate tool for humanitarian intervention. In terms of discursive space, the political security rationale being presented by powerful international actors in the late 1990s was between bombing *or* ethnic cleansing, which was not foreseen in the report. By the end of the 1990s, where the desired preventative policies were failing, political security was becoming reified into what was becoming widely known as a 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) doctrine. Thus, while the 2000 HDR, which specifically focused on Human Rights, would illustrate that the number of major armed conflicts 'peaked at 55 in 1992 and, contrary to many impressions, later declined … to 36 in 1998' (Fukuda-Parr & Jolly, 2000, p. 6), the nature of the political security debate was fundamentally changing. This was reflected in reports by, for example, Amnesty International, which were now framing their arguments on how to respond to international action taken in Kosovo (Amnesty International, 1999). Indeed, the 2000 HDR itself acknowledged, with regards to Kosovo, that

> The form of the intervention, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), raised complex new issues of international law and sovereignty related to the rights of minorities and the obligations of the international community. (Fukuda-Parr & Jolly, 2000, p. 62)

Moreover, what is highly noticeable in the 2000 HDR is that even though it was explicitly focused on Human Rights, the term 'political security' was not invoked as part of the HDR's vernacular. The report still focused on the prevention of government repression, systematic violation of human rights and threats from militarization, and continued to use the ratio of military to social spending as an indicator, but the term itself had been jettisoned. This was hardly the impact envisaged in the 1994 HDR.

2000s: the institutionalization of R2P

By the early 2000s, the humanitarian intervention debate was the 'lightning rod' issue with regards to those that still wanted to further the political security debate. Only Cuba, Iran, Venezuela and Zimbabwe were prepared to argue that humanitarian intervention was not warranted under any circumstances. China and Russia were now prepared to publicly recognize that violations of political security in the form of mass humanitarian crises were a legitimate concern of the international community. However, they maintained the qualification that only the UNSC would be entitled to take action, which would of course provide them with the ability to endorse or veto any action through their permanent seats on the Security Council. The importance of this for international relations cannot be overstated. Accepting that humanitarian intervention is legitimate

erodes the norm of Westphalian sovereignty. This marks a break with the Hobbesian notion that sovereigns have the right to govern their citizens however they see fit, and that this was the best way of maintaining international order. What has emerged in its place is a 'fuzzy norm' of sovereignty as responsibility, where the political security of individuals conflicts with the logic of sovereignty. As Kofi Annan recognized, in his 1999 address, 'state sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined by the forces of globalization and international cooperation' (in Bellamy, 2013, p. 491).

It was in response to the growing challenges of what constituted legitimate humanitarian intervention that in September 2000 the UN General Assembly established the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). Partially funded by the Government of Canada, and led by scholars and political leaders together with a group of foundations, the ICISS was tasked with addressing the legal, moral, operational and political questions surrounding humanitarian intervention to help 'the Secretary General and everyone else find some new common ground' (Evans and Sahnoun 2001). The title of the document, *The Responsibility to Protect*, which is now commonly referred to as R2P, asserted that

> [S]overeign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe – from mass murder and rape, from starvation – but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states. (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001, p. VIII)

Notably, the foundations for this were outlined fourfold; first, in the obligations inherent in the concept of sovereignty; second, in the responsibility of the Security Council, under Article 24 of the UN Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security; third, in the specific legal obligations under human rights and human protection declarations, covenants and treaties, international humanitarian law and national law and fourth in the developing practices of states, regional organizations and the UNSC itself (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001). What is significant about this is that the ICISS not only found a legal basis for R2P, but also that the report went much further than coercive intervention alone. The ICISS outlined three specific responsibilities that invoking R2P would involve. First, there was the 'responsibility to prevent', which requires addressing the 'root causes and direct causes of internal conflict and other man-made crises putting populations at risk'. Second was a 'responsibility to react', which can include 'coercive measure like sanctions and international prosecution, and in extreme cases military intervention'. Third was 'the responsibility to rebuild', which requires 'full assistance with recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation, addressing the causes of the harm the intervention was designed to halt or avert' (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001). Further still, to address situations where the UNSC is stymied by veto action, the ICISS argued that there are potentially other legitimate sources of authority in the UN General Assembly, through an Emergency Special Session, and regional or sub-regional organizations, subject to their seeking subsequent authorization from the UNSC. Notably, this moved the debate about political security forward in a more sustained and concrete manner than the assertions of the 1994 HDR, demonstrating how in just over seven years events were forcing the international community to refocus on the issue.

The reaction to the ICISS report, acknowledged in the report itself, was clouded by the events of 11 September 2001. As MacFarlane, Thielking, and Weiss argue, in general Western and sub-Saharan African countries, along with Latin American countries, largely welcomed the report, while East Asian countries were more cautious and Russia appeared 'lukewarm'. China, however, largely disapproved of the report, and along with most countries was 'hesitant to commit … to criteria that would require military action' (2004, p. 982). Indeed, China throughout the ICISS consultation process was keen to utterly reject the notion of humanitarian intervention (2004, p. 982). With the USA not willing to accept the substance of the ICISS report, it looked as though there was to be no formal declaration over R2P and along with it any notional progress

over political security. It was therefore only through careful diplomacy that at the 2005 World Summit the UN General Assembly unanimously committed itself to the Principle of R2P. Sections 138–139 of the summit outcome stated that

> Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.

> The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, to help protect populations from war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

For some, this amounted to a departure in international relations; deterritorializing political security away from the state, to the level of the individual. However, as Bellamy argues,

> the responsibility to protect statement in the outcome document has done little to increase the likelihood of preventing future Rwandas and Kosovos. Perhaps more worrying is that in order to secure consensus, the concept's advocates have abandoned many of its central tenets, significantly reducing the likelihood of progress in the near future. (2006, pp. 145–146)

Despite the promise of the 2005 world summit, the years that followed were marked by a reluctance to embrace R2P and there was considerable debate about what the conclusions made in 2005 were. Nevertheless, the UNSC has unanimously adopted Resolution 1674, which reaffirms the 2005 World Summit commitment, and in 2009 reaffirmed this in UNSCR 1894. However, between 2005 and 2010, the UNSC only referred to R2P in the case of the Darfur Crisis in 2006 in UNSC Resolution 1706 where a peace operation was deployed. There were of course eight other cases where R2P were referred to since that time, in Kenya (2007–2008), Georgia (2008), Myanmar (2008 and again in an ongoing reference to the treatment of ethnic minorities), Gaza (2009), Sri Lanka (2008–2009), Democratic Republic of Congo (ongoing) and North Korea. Notably, however, these references have not been exclusively conducted by the UNSC, but often by other international actors. For example, in the case of the 2008 Georgia conflict, Russia was keen to assert the R2P, but this was widely rejected and there was no consensus on the evidence that R2P crimes had been committed. This creates a very mixed picture of R2P, as while the UNSC has mandated peacekeepers to protect civilians in Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, it is only in the cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur that R2P was invoked between 2000 and 2010. In the cases of Sudan (2008-ongoing), Somalia (2006-ongoing), Iraq (2003-ongoing) and Afghanistan (2001-ongoing), the threat of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity loomed but R2P was not invoked (Bellamy, 2010b).

By 2009, as the UN report on *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* made clear, the issue with regards to political security and R2P was not *if* it was legal, but rather *how* it could be operationalized. Dealing with R2P on an ad hoc case-by-case basis demonstrated that the new legal norm was being applied selectively and arbitrarily. The enforcement of political security norms in this way, whether through the UN or unilaterally, reduces it to the political will and passions of states prepared to act. This not only diminishes the normative power and legitimacy of action, but undermines the manner in which international law is intended to reduce the arbitrary nature of state power. This selectivity, as Chandler argues, leaves R2P open to 'law-making by an elite group of Western powers sitting in judgment of their own actions' (2003, p. 14). Indeed,

appeals to humanitarian intervention (among a range of other arguments) in the run up to the 2003 Iraq war, and indeed in Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008, demonstrate this point. With action being taken in the name of humanitarian intervention, and in the name of R2P, the 2009 *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* document accepted that the current system was problematic and recommended that

> the best way to discourage States or groups of States from misusing the responsibility to protect for inappropriate purposes would be to develop fully the United Nations strategy, standards, processes, tools and practices for the responsibility to protect. (United Nations, 2009, p. 1)

The importance of this for the second decade of the twenty-first century cannot be overstated, as the Arab Spring has reignited the R2P debate. This has not only invoked new considerations of transitional support and state building but, as some transitions turned increasingly violent, also debates regarding R2P.

2010s: political security and the Arab Spring

Starting in December 2010, the Tunisian revolution took just 28 days to overthrow the 23-year dictatorial rule of President Ben Ali. What the Tunisian people had achieved was a demonstration of new political possibilities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This demonstration effect would soon culminate in Egypt with the removal of President Mubarak, who on 11 February 2011 stepped down from power, ending his nearly thirty years of autocratic rule. Within less than two months the status quo in the MENA had been irreparably changed, and popular protests began to spread to greater and lesser degrees in Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In Libya, a civil war against Colonel Gaddafi's regime began, and threats of genocide led the UNSC to pass Resolution 1973, to back a NATO intervention and to secure an NFZ. However, in Syria, March 2011 saw the beginnings of an uprising that would become increasingly violent and ferment into a longer civil war.

The difference between the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, and those in more violent transitions ultimately came down to the role of the military in the revolutions themselves. The Tunisian and Egyptian militaries chose not to use force against the demonstrators in the first waves of the revolutions. This removed a structural impediment faced by protesters, and ultimately caused El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak to be removed from power. Indeed, when Ben Ali ordered the military to fire upon protesters, they refused. Similarly, in Egypt, the military decided not to intervene against the revolts in 2011, and instead applied pressure on Mubarak to step down.

The alternative military model was demonstrated in Libya and Syria. In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, the Libyan and Syrian militaries were not autonomous institutions. They were a fundamental part of the ruling regimes. Indeed, Colonel Qaddafi's son headed the most important military units involved in early attempts to suppress the revolt. In Syria, the al-Assad family and members of their al-Matawirah tribe dominated the upper ranks of the military, intelligence and security services with the sole purpose of protecting the family and the minority Alawite religious sect. These militaries were therefore the hard power institutions of the regimes themselves, embedded within their state structures. The survival of their regimes was explicitly linked to the survival of their militaries (Croft & Hassan, 2015). As such, it is unsurprising that these were the revolts that became violent, and came to directly challenge the international communities' notions of political security.

The cases of Libya and Syria lie in stark contrast to how the international community has sought to operationalize political security in the contemporary era. In the early days of the Libyan uprising an armed opposition group emerged to challenge Colonel Gaddafi's regime,

making it clear that any transition process was not likely to be peaceful. The Interim Transitional National Council was soon able to establish its authority over the cities of Benghazi and Tobruk, while claiming to have taken control of many other major cities throughout the country, only to be met by Colonel Gaddafi's forces. By late February and early March, Gaddafi's forces had driven the rebels back to Benghazi in a counteroffensive, and by the middle of March were threatening to take Benghazi. Notably, Gaddafi was threatening to 'purify' the country and execute 'any Libyan that takes arms against Libya', highlighting the threat of political violence against demonstrators. With European governments, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council all calling for the establishment of an NFZ, in response to Gaddafi's threats to crush the rebellion, combined with considerable UN secretariat activism, the nature of the discussion was framed and UNSCR 1970 was passed. The resolution sought to end the violence and allow humanitarian assistance into Libya, which was denied by the regime. With growing fear of a massacre in Benghazi, and the increasing acknowledgment that diplomacy alone would not prevent this, international and regional actors began to call for action (Bellamy & Williams, 2011, p. 861).

On 17 March 2011, Resolution 1973, which authorized NATO intervention to protect civilians, was passed. Led by Britain and France, along with regional organizations, the Obama administration hesitantly decided to intervene in the hopes of preventing a humanitarian disaster (Bellamy & Williams, 2011). By 19 March, the Obama administration was 'leading from behind' in a NATO intervention that would last seven months and decisively contribute to the rebel victory (Lizza, 2011). Notably, however, Resolution 1973 was passed by ten votes in favour but Brazil, China, Germany, India and Russia abstained. Moreover, once Resolution 1973 was passed, there were controversies over how it was to be interpreted. What NATO intervention in Libya amounted to, however, was de facto regime change. For Bellamy and Williams, the fact that the UNSC was willing to authorize the use of force for the first time in its history for humanitarian protection purposes, and against the wishes of the host state, is tantamount to what they call 'the new politics of protection' (2011, p. 865).

The perception that a humanitarian mission was used for a de facto coup in Libya has had serious effects on the ability of the international community to mobilize effectively towards a resolution to the conflict in Syria. Indeed, Russia and China have been stalwart defenders of the Assad regime, vetoing attempts to condemn the Syrian regime. As such, the possibility of repeating a resolution akin to UNSCR 1973 remains highly unlikely. This is in spite of the UN assessing, in late 2013 that 9.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, 6.5 million of whom are internally displaced within the country and 2.4 million are refugees in neighbouring countries. Indeed, with estimated casualties of the conflict totaling over 100,000, the UN has stopped updating its death toll numbers, citing a lack of verification capacity (Heilprin, 2014).

The ineffectual nature of the international community to prevent and halt this crisis was evident with the failure of the UNSC to endorse a peace plan. Accepted by the Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) as 26 March 2012, the plan had called for a ceasefire, unrestricted humanitarian access and the withdrawal of military personnel from populated areas. This has, however, never fully taken effect and subsequent violations of political security have occurred. A team of UN chemical weapons inspectors confirmed that the nerve agent sarin was used in an attack on the Ghouta agricultural belt around Damascus on the morning of 21 August 2013. This led to the UN Secretary General reporting to the UNSC that he believed the attack constituted a war crime, in what was the most significant 'confirmed use of chemical weapons against civilians since Saddam Hussein used them' in Halabja in 1988 (Ki-moon, 2013). While the international community came to an agreement with the SARG regarding a timetable for removing chemical weapons, averting the USA from starting the process of unilateral action, reports continued of more conventional collective punishments targeted at civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Moreover, relief organizations continued to outline the limits of

humanitarian access, and the UN estimated that by 2014 over 2.5 million people could not be reached.

The divergent responses to the crises in Libya and Syria are revealing with regards to the political security debate in the 2010s. First, in the case of Libya, while far from perfect, international intervention authorized by the UNSC was achievable on the basis of R2P, and was relatively successful with regards to preventing genocide. Yet, in the aftermath of removing Gaddafi, the international community has turned away from Libya and the larger 'responsibility to rebuild'. The political security situation has, as a result, deteriorated further as armed militias emerged as the main security actors in the country. Yet, in Syria a resolution through the UN and existing international legal frameworks have not been found. This is not only a demonstration of the ineffective nature of the UN, which has still not resolved the challenge set out by Kofi Annan in 1999, but testimony of how international politics is changing the political security debate. Without the USA willing to lead unilateral humanitarian intervention in Syria, political security cannot be established. Yet, the unwillingness of the USA to take up such a role is itself symptomatic not only of war fatigue in the Middle East, but of a recognition that such action could be the catalyst for further instability. Such failings clearly highlight the difficulties of pursuing a political security agenda, where there are 'no good options'. The notion of an 'end of history' that was so palpable in the 1994 HDR has been extinguished along with a sense of America's unbound hubris. Moreover, Russia and China's stymieing action at the UNSC level and insistence on a slow political process, which as of the end of January 2014 had seen 'no progress', are testimonies of powerful political actors reemerging. The 1990s may well have been the 'golden age of humanitarian diplomacy', but they were framed around a debate of 'bombing or ethnic cleansing'. The political security debate in the 2000s was framed around who can *legitimately authorize* intervention and *in what circumstances* as R2P was being institutionalized. However, in a time of perceived Western decline and global competition, the political security debate has come to reflect a much wider set of limitations. The second decade of the twenty-first century has revealed that a far more complex and nuanced debate regarding political security is necessary in situations like the Syrian civil war. Over 20 years onwards from the release of the 1994 HDR, it is clear that the international environment has changed in a manner unforeseen in the original report. Of course, this in and of itself comes at a price for the practical application of political security moving forward.

Conclusion

Over 20 years onwards from the release of the 1994 HDR it is clear that government repression, systematic human rights abuse and militarization continue. As such, the document's call for a focus on political security remains pertinent in today's international society. Yet, the nature of that debate in both theoretical and concrete terms has been altered by events and the international environment. Since the early 1990s it is clear that the post-cold war environment opened up the possibility for an evolving theory and practice of political security to emerge. Within this context, the 1994 UNHDR is important for helping to contribute to the wider discourse about humanitarian intervention and R2P. With increasing threats to political security evident, from Rwanda through to Syria, the international community has attempted to at least deal with the theoretical and practical challenges. The current debate for those carrying forward a political security agenda does not surround whether there is a R2P, but rather who can *legitimately authorize* intervention and *in what circumstances.* It is within this context that political security, humanitarian intervention and R2P have become part of a discourse and practice of the international community. However, there is still contestation over what exactly this means. The 'new politics of protection' is riddled with disagreement over the right to intervention, how and when this should be exercised

and under whose authority. Indeed, the ICISS conclusion that the war in Kosovo was 'illegal but legitimate' has done little to help address these questions. Furthermore, the failure of subsequent HDRs to clarify and reclaim the meaning of 'political security' has done little to help. Nevertheless, the 1994 HDR's prescriptions for political security remain not only ethically pertinent but also in the interests of the international community, because as the report describes, 'famine, disease, pollution, drug trafficking, terrorism, ethnic disputes and social disintegration are no longer isolated events, confined within national borders. Their consequences travel the globe' (UNDP, 1994, p. 22).

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Note

1. A textual analysis of all subsequent HDRs shows that following the 1994 HDR through to the 2013 report, not a single instance of the term 'political security' has been used.

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