

Shifting Focus: From State Security to Human Security

Keynote speech by David Hannay at the Seminar on Disarmament, Conventional Arms Regulation and Globalisation

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When the United Nations was founded in 1945 its principal aim was declared to be to rid the world of the scourge of war. And there is little doubt that what the founding fathers had in mind when they endorsed that flashing phrase, which has sounded down the decades since, was inter-state war, above all wars of aggression by one state against another or by groups or alliances of states against each other. No wonder. They were just emerging from the singularly traumatic experience of two world wars which had left countless dead and a trail of destruction unparalleled in the world's recorded history.

The concept of what we now know as "human security", but whose title had not been coined at that time, was not however entirely absent from the minds of the founding fathers. In 1948, sixty years ago now, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated by the members of the now existent United Nations. That Declaration, which has been accepted by every to subsequently join the UN, sets out most of the principles and values which underpin human security. That same year, 1948, the Genocide Convention was adopted by a world still shocked by the holocaust of Europe's Jewish citizens. But neither the Universal Declaration nor the Genocide Convention contained any enforcement provisions. So, as a result, their contribution to achieving human security was much less than it could and should have been.

The forty-five year period of the Cold War that followed almost immediately on the signing of the Charter was not a particularly happy or productive one for the UN. Perhaps its greatest accomplishment could be summed up in the response of a French statesman who was asked what he did during the revolutionary period and replied "I survived". There were some successes – the reversal of North Korea's aggression against its southern neighbour, the establishment in the interstices of the Charter of a number of peacekeeping missions which, in a modest way, made a contribution both to state security and to human security. But the world was spared the horrors of a nuclear conflagration between the two super-powers more as a result of the chilling doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction than as a consequence of the provisions and mechanisms of the UN Charter. And many proxy wars between the allies and surrogates of the two super-powers raged on in the third world unchecked, as effective UN action was precluded by their patrons' vetoes in the Security Council. Some actions were taken which, looking back on it, did amount to some relief for the human security of citizens suffering at the hands of their own rulers – India's war with Pakistan over the secession of Bangladesh, Vietnam's overthrow of Pol Pot, Tanzania's intervention in Uganda to get rid of Idi Amin, are all examples – but these were very much humanitarian interventions which did not dare to speak their name, with no UN charter cover or legitimacy and no useable precedents or international norms for future action being established.

The first act of inter-state aggression following the end of the Cold War was Saddam Hussein's invasion and seizure of Kuwait, which brought a speedy and effective response by the international community acting under full UN authority. That reversal of an act of aggression, however unhappy its later sequels have

proved to be, demonstrated very clearly that the Security Council, led by its five permanent members, was capable of fulfilling the role laid down for it in the Charter; and the absence of any such black-and-white examples of inter-state aggression in the period since 1990 no doubt owes something to the salutary example which was then set. From that time on, too, the Security Council authorised a number of actions which clearly fall into the category of humanitarian interventions – in northern Iraq to save the Kurds from Saddam Hussein's wrath, in Somalia to avert mass starvation exacerbated by class strife and the domination of warlords, in Haiti to reverse the overthrow of a democratically elected government and the subsequent repression of the population. And the UN mounted a series of successful peacekeeping operations which brought peace and stability to populations which had suffered from the ravages of war – in Namibia, in Cambodia, in Mozambique, in El Salvador for example. But these successes were more than matched by spectacular and discreditable failures in Bosnia, in Rwanda and in Somalia – and by neglect – in Afghanistan. No new doctrines or guidelines for UN intervention had been established, just a series of ad hoc decisions, some effective, others deplorably ineffective. And the solidarity of the Security Council began to fray, as was dramatically demonstrated by the interventions in Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003, neither of which had UN legitimisation.

Such was the patchy record which existed when Kofi Annan set up in 2003 the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and subsequently sent forward to a UN Summit in September 2005 its recommendations for policy changes. Those recommendations covered the whole waterfront of inter-state and human security and, more than that, they laid down an intellectual framework which greatly widened the international definition of security threats and challenges by bringing within its scope issues such as poverty, pandemic diseases, organised crime and, above all, the many negative consequences flowing from state failure. The reforms proposed included setting guidelines for the authorisation of the use of force by the Security Council; defining and outlawing terrorism; strengthening the multilateral regimes for countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; establishing a Peace-Building Commission designed both to assist states sliding towards state failure and to help them on a sustained and coherent basis to re-build their institutions if they did fail; strengthening the support the UN could give to regional organisations to enable them to conduct peace operations either on their own or in concert with the UN. And in addition to these reforms – which either related to state security or straddled the line between state and human security – a number of reforms were proposed that directly addressed human security: the establishment of a new Human Rights Council to replace the discredited Commission on Human Rights, with a wider remit, tighter membership criteria and an increased capacity to operate throughout the year; and, the most daring and far-reaching of all the proposals, agreement to a new international norm of the "responsibility to protect" citizens of states whose governments proved either unwilling or unable to shoulder that responsibility.

When the dust had settled following the 2005 UN Summit and its follow-up what were we left with? The guidelines for authorising the use of force, the definition and outlawing of terrorism, any new action against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, were trampled underfoot in the melée of inter-state rivalries, sharpened by the tensions arising from the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Peace-Building Commission survived, but shorn of any responsibility for helping prevent state failure in the first place, it has got off to a pretty hesitant and unambitious

start and is still underperforming its potential. The Human Rights Council has been established, but its first steps too have been dogged by controversy and by a regrettable tendency to return to the diplomatic manoeuvring of its unlamented predecessor the Commission. To the surprise of many, the doctrine of "the responsibility to protect" was endorsed by consensus; it remains however little more than words on paper, with the continuing mayhem in Darfur a constant rebuke and a reminder of how far we are from yet turning warm words into effective action. It is worth noting that the reform proposals relating to human security fared somewhat better than those relating to state security, at least in principle even if practice has so far lagged behind. So it could be said that the shift in focus from state to human security has been reflected in those decisions by the international community. And this conclusion is reinforced if one factors in the challenge to the culture of impunity for war crimes and gross breaches of international humanitarian law which is represented by the operations of the Yugoslav, Rwandan, Cambodian and Sierra Leonean tribunals and by the setting up of an International Criminal Court. This massive expansion of the scope of international law should not, I would argue, simply be seen as retributive in intention but also, over time, hopefully as deterrent too.

So where should the international community go from here, confronted by the unsatisfactory score-card it has turned in so far and the huge amount of unfinished business left over from the reform campaign of 2003-6? First a few general points. I think we should be a little cautious about any suggestion that human security has completely supplanted state security as the main focus of international efforts. I have heard some of the leading campaigners for strengthening human security speaking almost as if it was the only show in town, as if state security had receded out of sight and could safely be put out of mind. I do not believe that is right; or that it has. The challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation regime represented by the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran, with the possibility, indeed likelihood, of wider, regional break-outs from the regime if those challenges are not successfully countered, are one reminder of that reality. So are the unresolved disputes over Palestine, over Kashmir and on the Korean Peninsula. The self-styled "peaceful rise" of China, the shift in global power away from the Atlantic region towards Asia, the break-up of the old Soviet empire are all developments that have so far passed off with relatively few threats to state security. But it would surely be a bit foolhardy to assume that that will inevitably continue to be the case.

Then secondly I doubt if it would be wise to mount another system-wide UN reform campaign of the sort which Kofi Annan led between 2003 and 2006, at least for some time to come. There is a real risk of reform fatigue setting in and of diminishing returns discrediting an instrument, the UN, which we need now as much or more than we ever did. Better, I would suggest, to push forward on a sectoral basis, making progress where a reasonable consensus can be achieved, making sure in every case that we get the policy horse in front of the institutional cart and not, as so often happens when reform of the international system is broached, the other way around. To give you one example, there will not be much point in establishing a new environmental agency with much wider powers and responsibilities than UNEP currently has if we cannot agree an effective and legally binding post-Kyoto regime for combating climate change; but, if we can agree that, then we will urgently need such an agency to help to implement it.

And thirdly some question whether we should be concentrating international efforts to achieve greater security, both state security and human security, on the

existing institutions, admitted by all to be functioning imperfectly and requiring much reform and strengthening, or whether we should be looking for something new like the frequently-touted League of Democracies. I find the arguments for a League of Democracies pretty unpersuasive, indeed flawed. Do we really want, so soon after we have emerged from the Cold War, to systematise a division of the world into democratic sheep and undemocratic goats, to place China, Russia and many of the countries of the Middle East on the wrong side of that line? Is it understood that a League of Democracies could aspire to no international legality or even legitimacy if it were to move from being a talking shop to action? Is there any reason to believe that the great democracies of the developing world – India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa – all of them traditionally opposed to interventionism, would be prepared to sign up for such a journey to an unknown destination? I would hope therefore that, on mature consideration, this idea will not be pursued inter-governmentally but rather left to grace the proceedings of think tanks and symposia.

Turning then to security specifics and focusing, as I have urged, on both parts of the equation, both state and human security, what should be the priorities? On state security I would myself give the highest priority to a revival, to a renaissance, in the process of multilateral nuclear disarmament which made such progress in the later years of the Cold War and the period immediately following it and which has stagnated ever since. For that to become a reality the new incumbent in the White House and the Medvedev/Putin duo will have to take up the challenge thrown down by Messrs Shultz, Nunn, Perry and Kissinger and they will need the active cooperation of the other accepted nuclear powers – China, France and Britain. The aim should be to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force following US ratification; to negotiate a fissile material cut off treaty; to extend and strengthen existing arms control measures on long, medium and short range missiles; to further reducing substantially the number of warheads and moving the nuclear dimension in strategic planning and combat readiness so that it becomes a last resort and not an integral part of preparedness for hostilities; and to setting up a bank or drawing facility for civil nuclear users which will remove the incentive to develop new uranium enrichment or reprocessing facilities. The overall aim should be to set the world definitively on a new course leading towards nuclear disarmament which would enable real progress to be made at the next Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2010.

The other top priority in the field of state security should, I suggest, be a renewed effort to achieve a Middle East peace settlement between Israel and its neighbours. Recent developments, the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire in Gaza, the indirect talks between Israel and Syria facilitated by Turkey, the Israeli calls for solution of the remaining issue between them and Lebanon, along with the continuing talks between the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President are a welcome turning away from the drift back towards hostilities but it seems hardly likely that any of them will bear fruit before the US election in November. In that case it really will be vital that the new President throw his full weight behind comprehensive and fully inclusive peace negotiations from the outset of his term of office, not like previous incumbents somewhere towards the end of his second term; and that we Europeans make a more imaginative, independent and proactive reality of our membership of the Quartet.

The human security agenda is, if anything, even more crowded than that for state security. I believe we must give a very high priority to rescuing the "responsibility to protect" from the limbo in which it is currently languishing, with its

credibility leaching away. In that context the UN Secretary-General's recent appointment of Professor Ed Luck as his Special Advisor on responsibility to protect is a welcome first step. What we surely need to do is to move away from regarding responsibility to protect as an exclusively military option for intervention against the will of a sovereign state and back towards a more sophisticated, multi-faceted, step-by-step, approach which includes prevention as well as the last resort of intervention. Such an approach would be designed to identify an impending responsibility to protect problem as it was emerging, to summon up outside help often on a regional basis, from the neighbours of the country in question, to avoid the situation deteriorating further. The reasoning behind this is that, as we have seen in the cases of Burma and Zimbabwe, and to some extent even in Darfur, it is hard to see how responsibility to protect can be operated effectively in practice without the willing cooperation of the country-in-question's neighbours. This will always be difficult to obtain but not, I would hope, impossible, particularly as the damaging consequences of inaction, particularly in terms of refugee flows and regional de-stabilisation, come to be better understood. We need now an intensified dialogue on all these issues involving both developing countries and those like Russia and China who remain most wary and suspicious of the whole responsibility to protect concept. We have to achieve a wider understanding of the benefits for all of making a living reality of the responsibility to protect and not to allow it to be caricatured as a purely Western fad.

And that raises another human security priority which is to develop and strengthen the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in achieving such security. Our own experience in Europe should have brought home to us, and have demonstrated to non-Europeans, what a remarkable contribution our regional organisations – the EU, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe – have played in this field. In many parts of the world where both state and human security are challenged – for instance in the Gulf, in South Asia and in North-East Asia – there are simply no such organisations at all, or, if there are, they are ineffective ones. That vacuum surely needs to be filled. And where, as in Africa, there are young organisations like the African Union which are seeking actively to develop a role across the whole range of state and human security we should be giving them every kind of assistance, in training, in logistics and in finance to enable them to take on the often complex and costly tasks which it is in our, as much as in their, interests that they should undertake. If we want African peacekeeping capabilities to expand and the African Peer Group mechanism for human rights to become more effective, as I believe we should, since both of them have the potential to address the challenges of human security, then we will have to reach into our pockets because it is no use thinking that the continent which is home to so many of what has been called “the bottom billion” will be able to do all that unaided.

I have taken some liberties with the title of my talk which you might have supposed was about a move away from state security towards a concentration on human security. Whereas I have argued the case for a renewed effort to move forward on both. I hope you find it compelling. More importantly I hope that governments, at this important moment when changes are taking or have recently taken place in the leadership of several major countries will seize the opportunity to turn over a new leaf and to close an unhappy chapter in international relations characterised more by divisions and disorder than by the concerted and united efforts needed if we are to master the global challenges that face us.