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RESEARCH

# Human Security: Practical Possibilities

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The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed a turbulent world of inequality, failing states, crime, violence, racism and authoritarianism. But it has also opened up the practical possibilities of human security – the notion that governments and international institutions take responsibility for the wellbeing of individuals and the communities in which they live, protecting them from global ills such as Covid-19 and ensuring both material security (safety from poverty and deprivation) and physical security (safety from violence and crime). My focus on this essay is on physical security, and, in particular, how to address the problems that contemporary war inflicts upon individuals and communities. Of course, physical and material security are intimately connected. Poverty, inequality, and deprivation are undoubtedly a cause of violence and crime and, by the same token, violence accentuates precarity. But while solving the problems of material redistribution could well reduce the incentives for violence, this is extremely difficult to achieve in violent contexts where the warring parties control the flow of resources. Thus, finding ways to mitigate violence is often a precondition for material security. In this essay, I outline an understanding of human security as a tool for reducing violent conflict.

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**Keywords:** human security; conflict; human rights; development; war; state; rule of law; justice; armed groups; military

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The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed a turbulent world of inequality, failing states, crime, violence, racism and authoritarianism. But it has also opened up the practical possibilities of human security – the notion that governments and international institutions take responsibility for the wellbeing of individuals and the communities in which they live, protecting them from global ills such as Covid-19 and ensuring both material and physical security.

Human security is about the safety of the individual and the community in which she or he lives rather than about the security of the state (national security). It is both about physical security (safety from violence and crime) and material security (safety from poverty and deprivation), roughly corresponding to ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want.’ My focus on this essay is on physical security, and, in particular, how to address the problems that contemporary war inflicts upon individuals and communities. Of course, physical and material security are intimately connected. Poverty, inequality, and deprivation are undoubtedly a cause of violence and crime and, by the same token, violence accentuates precarity. But while solving the problems of material redistribution could well reduce the incentives for violence, this is extremely difficult to achieve in violent contexts where the warring parties control the flow of resources. Thus, finding ways to mitigate violence is often a precondition for material security. In this essay, I outline an understanding of human security as a tool for reducing violent conflict.

We are living through a period characterised by what Antonio Gramsci called ‘morbid symptoms,’ where the ‘old is dying and the new cannot be born.’ This is a period when our political institutions are out of step with far-reaching economic, social and technological change. The American dominated model of development based on mass production, fossil fuels, mass consumption and militarism is exhausted, and while something new based on information, communications technology and resource saving is waiting in the wings, our political institutions, mainly states, are still shaped by the outdated model. In the past, major inter-state wars played a critical role in enabling the new to be born, by transforming states and the international order. This is why legitimacy of states is bound up with classic national security strategies, based on regular military forces designed to fight war against other states.

But such conflicts are no longer the norm. Contemporary wars such as those taking place in Syria, Yemen or the Democratic Republic of Congo are very different to this classic notion of inter-state war. As I develop in the next section, instead of consolidating state power, as was the case in European inter-state wars, these contemporary conflicts instead dismantle state structures. My argument is that the link between a state’s legitimacy and its capacity to fight war no longer works. On the contrary, the effectiveness of political institutions depends on their capacity to provide human security; we need national, global and regional institutions that are able to address the spread of global violence, to reduce violence rather than to win through violence.

In developing this argument, I start by explaining the difference between what I call 'old' and 'new' wars' and why conventional approaches no longer work. I then describe the various understandings of human security, before elaborating my own version in both abstract and practical terms. And in the final section, I ask whether the Covid-19 pandemic could represent a transformational moment and consider the different possible scenarios for the future.

### Old and New Wars

What I call 'old war' is the stylised version of nineteenth and twentieth century European inter-state wars. We think of such wars as deep-rooted political contests between two sides. These wars were fought by regular armies, organised vertically under the control of the state, and the decisive encounter of the war was battle. Such wars, as Clausewitz explained [1], tended to the extreme, that is to say they involved ever increasing levels of violence, as political leaders tried to achieve their political goals, as generals tried to disarm their opponents, and hatred and fear were aroused among their populations. Of course there were other types of wars fought at this time. Colonial wars operated on a very different logic. There were also classic civil wars that involved a deep seated political contest between government and rebels, but by and large full-scale battle was avoided. The point is rather that the Eurocentric version of 'old war' is what underpins national security strategies.

As Charles Tilly has shown [2], 'old wars' tended to be state-building. They were existential events – hugely destructive but also transformative. In wars, monarchs had to raise money and recruit soldiers and garner support for their wars. In West European countries, they did so through bargains with the newly emerging capitalist class. Such bargains led to the regularisation of borrowing and taxation, alongside more efficient administrative structures; the guarantee of certain rights for its citizens – civil rights in the eighteenth century, political rights in the nineteenth century and economic and social rights in the twentieth century. To persuade people to pay tax, monarchs had initially to provide security within the country – otherwise people were at the mercy of highwaymen, pirates, robbers, and the like (civil rights); then they had to widen the suffrage (political rights) and, during and after the wars of the twentieth century, welfare had to be provided as well. Alongside this laying of the administrative and political foundations of the modern state, wars also forged the national identities of many states, and served to rank states into an established international pecking order.

In addition, the adaptation of military means to improve performance in battle profoundly influenced the evolution of technology. Thus the Napoleonic wars led to liberal reforms; the establishment of the Concert of Europe, which largely kept the nineteenth century peace; and rapid growth of the textile industry. The wars of mid-nineteenth century led to the unification of Germany and Italy and the spread of railways and the telegraph, while the wars of the twentieth century ushered in the American model of development, which also involved the combination of national and social security. Through transforming the nature of the state and the international order, these major inter-state wars ushered in new phases of prosperity.

Contemporary wars are very different. They are better described as a social condition, or even a mutual enterprise, rather than a contest between 'sides.' They involve numerous armed groups who gain from the violence itself rather than from winning or losing. Such groups are networks of state and non-state actors, who are both global and local, for example, the Lebanese group Hezbollah, which operates in Syria alongside the Syrian government. Their goal is access to state resources but they usually fight in the name of an ethnic or religious identity. Those identities are often constructed through violence; ethnicity or religion take on much greater salience if you have to kill or risk being killed in its name. Pitched battles between armed groups are rare, with most violence instead directed against civilians; this is because the various groups establish territorial control through political rather than military means – they kill or expel those who oppose them, usually those of a different religion and ethnicity. Forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, the destruction of cultural symbols, or systemic sexual violence are all hallmarks of contemporary wars. Thus the armed groups gain in political terms through violence – they mobilise around increasingly extremist ethnic and religious ideologies.

These groups also gain in economic terms. When taxation and production falls, either as a consequence of earlier neoliberal policies or from war, the various armed groups seek alternative sources of revenue that are linked to violence. Such sources of revenue range from looting, pillaging and hostage-taking, to the creation of checkpoints and the taxation of humanitarian aid and diaspora remittances, to the smuggling of resources, whether oil, drugs, antiquities or human beings, to name but a few. This is why these are wars of state-unbuilding. They disassemble public authority and turn state power into an archipelago of armed fiefdoms. They deliberately weaken and undermine the rule of law. They construct a newly rich class of ethnic or religious warlords.

A clear example of this segmentation can be seen in modern-day Syria which has been at war since 2011 and is now comprised of four main territories: a Government controlled territory, a Kurdish controlled territory, an opposition controlled territory, and a Turkish controlled territory. All these areas are crisscrossed by literally hundreds of armed groups and militias, loosely linked into networks in the different areas and across borders, financed by outside states and private donors, as well as self-financing activities such as the smuggling of oil and antiquities, looting, hostage-taking, installing checkpoints and diverting aid. The term 'sectarianization' has been coined by Hashemi and Postel to describe the way in which the polarisation between Shia and Sunni was constructed through violence both by the Syrian regime and by opposition militias financed by religious groups in the Gulf in the first few years of the war [3]. Over half a

million people have died, the vast majority as a consequence of deliberate bombing of civilians by the Syrian regime and by Russia. Western countries also became involved because large parts of the territory were taken over by ISIS and this led to even more bloodshed. A country which, only a decade ago, used to export food is now close to famine.

Such wars also drastically redefine gender relations in ways that can be disruptive to society and that can interplay with the dynamics of conflict. Wars have always been important sites for the construction of gender; it is by and large, men and boys who kill and get killed in wars, even though women are known to participate in fighting. In 'old wars,' at least in theory, a heroic 'modernist' type of masculinity was established in which men were supposed to be the defenders of women and were supposedly restrained in their behaviour [4]; of course, reality was very different and all wars seems to be associated with a rise in gender violence. The extremist ethnic and religious identities to be found in contemporary wars nearly always involve a contradictory and unstable version of masculinity in which new forms of sexual order are established. ISIS, Boko Haram or the Lord's Resistance Army are examples of this. In many cases, sexual violence represents a deliberate weapon of war in attacks against civilians. Such forms of masculinity are difficult to sustain except through more or less continuous violence [5].

In contrast to old wars that tended towards the extreme, contemporary wars tend toward persistence and spread. Their effects are felt throughout the globe, through the spread of refugees, through the virus of ethnic and religious ideologies, through organised crime – the transnational smuggling networks and associated money-laundering activities –and through the reproduction of newly cast gender relations. These wars are very difficult to end because the various armed groups need violence both to perpetuate their extremist ideologies, to generate revenue, and to reproduce an extremist form of masculinity.

In these circumstances, the classic approaches that derive from an old war mentality do not work. Conventional military intervention on one 'side' or other merely exacerbates the violence. To return to Syria, some 75 countries have intervened in the war there, but it has left the nation divided, and suffering at a level of violence and casualties much higher than in similar wars. Even where Western countries together with local allies did succeed in retaking of the territory controlled by ISIS, it has come at a huge cost in terms of the destruction of cities like Mosul or Raqqa, and the scale of casualties; meanwhile ISIS has not been eradicated and is reappearing in the liberated areas. Humanitarian intervention or 'Responsibility to Protect' is supposed to protect individuals from genocide, ethnic cleansing or massive violations of human rights, but the use of military force to achieve those ends also violates human rights. This was seen both in the war against Yugoslavia in 1999, where intervention was intended to stop the ethnic cleansing of Albanians from Kosovo, and the 2011 intervention in Libya, which sought to stop Gaddafi from killing his own citizens. Both operations had partial success. In the first case, Milosevic eventually withdrew from Kosovo, enabling Albanians to return to their homes. However, the intervention resulted in significant collateral damage, including the deaths of 500 people and the empowerment of a small armed group, the Kosovo Liberation Army, who were dependent on drug smuggling, rather than the mass non-violent movement that had preceded the intervention. It also left a lasting legacy of polarisation between Serbs and Albanians as a consequence of the acceleration of ethnic cleansing during the bombing. In the case of Libya, the goal became more ambitious as the intervention proceeded, from stopping Gaddafi's killing of his citizens to removing him from power. Although the initial intervention succeeded in destroying Gaddafi's heavy weapons and in keeping collateral damage from bombing to a minimum because of the increased accuracy of airstrikes, many civilians were ultimately killed in the ensuing fighting to overthrow the regime. Moreover, NATO allied with armed opposition groups on the ground in order to overthrow Gaddafi and it is these groups that are still fighting to this day and disassembling the Libyan state.

In old war terms, the alternative to military intervention is negotiation among the parties. In contemporary wars this is very difficult, both because there are so many armed groups, and because they have an interest in continued violence. Agreement is usually only possible if the armed groups are guaranteed a position in the future state, as was seen in the Taif agreement in Lebanon in 1983 and the Dayton agreement in Bosnia in 1995, to name but two. Even when these agreements are reached, they do not necessarily signify the end of violence, but rather the deployment of an international presence in the region. The consequence is that while violence may be reduced, as the armed groups no longer fight against each other and cannot target civilians with violence as easily by framing it in conflict terms, the agreement essentially freezes the ethnic or sectarian polarisation in time and leads to the various parties continuing to enrich themselves from state coffers at the expense of the population. Poposil and Bell call these agreements 'political unsettlements' [6]. They establish power sharing agreements among the ethnic and religious warlords, ensuring their immunity from prosecution and continued predation, but have few benefits for the society at large, with the consequences for the state including dysfunctional governance, the neglect of public services, and the absence of the rule of law. A particularly dire illustration of this can be seen in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where armed groups are actually formed in order to participate in peace talks and thereby gain access to state resources [7]. In a different example, the recent tragic explosion in Beirut has exposed the consequences of this terrifying combination of corruption and sectarianism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A special issue of the journal *Conflict, Security and Development* will focus on the link between extremist identity politics and the political marketplace (systematic corruption). See the introduction by Mary Kaldor and Alex de Waal.

The classic methods we deploy in the face of violent conflict – military intervention by individual or allied states, humanitarian assistance coordinated by supranational agencies, and top down diplomatic negotiations – have serious shortcomings for dealing with the challenges of new wars. But if they no longer protect people's physical security, what is the alternative?

### The Concept of Human Security

The story of human security usually starts with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report of 1994. Yet the ideas and practices that came together under the umbrella of the term 'human security' had a much longer trajectory.<sup>2</sup> At the 2005 UN Summit, which explicitly adopted the concept of human security, the Secretary General introduced human security as a combination of 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear.' These references were deliberate echoes of President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms Address of 1941, which then formed part of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (UDHR) preamble. During the Cold War period, there were two strands of thinking that were to contribute to the formulation of human security in the early 1990s and indeed to the debate outlined below between so-called broad and narrow understandings of human security. Subsequently, the concept continued to evolve, with further versions expressed in the European Union and China.

The first strand of thinking, the 'broad' version of human security, concerned itself with the potential interlinking of disarmament and development. In this way, it focussed on 'freedom from want.' This broader notion of human security was motivated by concern with the financial burden of the East/West arms race and the idea that resources devoted to the amassing of arms would be better directed towards solving social problems, such as those of poverty and disease. This proposition was the subject of a series of reports undertaken by the United Nations, as well as a number of independent commissions, all of which tried to broaden the concept of security beyond physical protection from violence and crime and provide a more holistic blueprint for human survival.<sup>3</sup> For the UNDP the emphasis was on material security, even though it insisted on the link between freedom from fear and freedom from want. A clear example of this focus is seen in their 1994 Report, which lists 7 types of security (economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political), with only one, 'personal security,' referring to physical safety from violence. There was an underlying assumption that deprivation is the main cause of war and, through development, the problem of war and violence could be solved.

The second strand of thinking, or the 'narrow' version of human security, focussed more strongly on 'freedom from fear.' It drew on the growing influence of human rights in international affairs and the increasing recognition of the link between security and human rights. The post-Cold War prevalence of new wars and the high levels of violence associated in such wars gave salience to the human rights version of human security, which was all about the need to protect individuals from genocide, ethnic cleansing and massive violations of human rights. The policy high point of this strand of human security thinking was the doctrine of 'Responsibility to Protect,' put forward by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty as a principled response to such violence.<sup>4</sup>

Those who favour the broad version often argue that the narrow version is too concentrated on military intervention, while those who favour the narrow version argue that the broad version is indistinguishable from development and is too broad to be analytically useful. A further argument against the 'broad' strand is that it risks 'securitising' development; that is to say, by treating poverty as a security issue, it risks coming under the purview of armed forces and ministries of defence who may approach the resolution of these issues differently to development professionals. To some extent, this debate was reconciled by the threshold approach adopted in the 2003 Report of the Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now Protecting and Empowering People*, co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen. The idea of human security was reconceptualised as the protection of the 'vital core of human lives,' recognising that human security comprises both human rights and human development, while being simultaneously concerned with what Amartya Sen called the 'downside risks,'<sup>5</sup> that is to say situations where the violation of human rights or the absence of human development directly threaten human life.

Subsequently an alternative version of human security has emerged through the evolution of the European Defence and Security Policy. Known as the Barcelona version, this is the concept of human security contained in the Report of the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*. According to this version,

<sup>2</sup> For a 'Prehistory' of human security see Neil MacFarlane N, and Yuen Foong Khong Y., *Human Security and the UN A Critical History*. (Indiana University Press; 2006.) chapter one; Bosold, David. 2011. "Development of the human security field: A critical examination." In Chandler D and Hynek N (eds.) *Critical perspectives on human security: Rethinking emancipation and power in international relations*, edited by David Chandler and Nik Hynek, Abingdon: Routledge; 2011.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Independent Commission on International Development Issues (Brandt Commission), *North-South* (1980) and *Common Crisis* (1983); Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, *Common Security A Blueprint for Survival* (1982, Palme Report); World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987, Brundtland Report), The South Commission *The Challenge of the South* (1990) (Nyerere Report).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca/>.

<sup>5</sup> Sen has asserted that 'a reasoned concentration on the downside risks of human lives, rather than on the overall expansion of effective freedom in general (contrasting with the broader objective of the promotion of "human development") is an element that must underpin human security'; Amartya Sen, 'Basic Education and Human Security', Kolkata, January 2002, at <http://www.unocha.org/humansecurity/chs/activities/outreach/Kolkata.pdf>.



human security is what individuals enjoy in rights-based, law-governed societies. It is assumed that the state will protect individuals from existential threats and that emergency services – including ambulances, firefighters, and police – are part of state provision. According to this version, human security is about extending individual rights beyond domestic borders and about developing a capacity at a regional or global level to provide emergency services that can be deployed in situations where states either lack capacity or are themselves the violators of rights. This approach recognises that national security cannot be assured unilaterally, and that security in any part of the world depends on a global or human security system. Thus instead of defending borders against external attack, the security capabilities of states are designed to contribute to global emergency services. The advantage of this approach is that while it includes both physical and material security, it focuses on the 'downside risks' and how to address them. The means are not necessarily military but the use of force is not excluded.

Finally, mention should be made of the way the concept has been adopted in China – a sort of model of Chinese style stabilisation. If human security is about 'spreading the inside outwards,' that's is to say about overcoming the division between inside security based on policing and the rule of law, and outside security based on war and diplomacy, then one scenario is the spread, not of rights based law governed societies, as in the European version, but rather something akin to the Chinese inside, characterised by surveillance and repression. The Chinese use the language of human security but they appear to understand human security as infrastructure plus peace-keeping. The Chinese are now the largest contributor to UN peace-keeping among Security Council members and they fund the African Union peace and security architecture. Their version of human security can be interpreted in terms of the need to protect the Belt and Road investments and it would likely amount to a top-down and ruthless approach. It is also difficult to see how such a strategy could actually address the new war condition without a huge increase in military style global policing.

I favour the European approach because it has the greatest potential to address seriously contemporary wars and the next section addresses what its practical implementation might involve.

### Implementing Human Security

A practical strategy of human security is complex, multi-dimensional, and multi-scalar. A human security response force would build on the agglomerations or assemblages of multinational operations that already exist in many parts of the world and would involve gender balanced combinations of civilian and military personnel. But it would differ from existing operations in that it would be based on a different understanding of contemporary violence. Rather than 'solving' a deep-seated political contest, the aim would be to transform the social condition that constitutes a new war. In the following, I sketch some elements of such an approach.

- *Political.* New wars take place where states are weak or failing. Central to any effort to dismantle the mutual enterprise of war is the establishment of a legitimate political authority. A political authority could be a state, an international institution, or a municipality or a regional government. In rights-based, law-governed societies, we feel safe because we expect people to act lawfully, not so much because of fear of the consequences of violating the law, but because we think we are participants in an implicit social contract where we respect agreed rules. The presence of police and the existence of law courts symbolises this respect. In other words, compliance with the rule of law is only possible where people trust political authority. Contemporary wars happen where this trust has broken down.

ISIS, for example, can be regarded as a symptom of the absence of legitimacy rather than a cause. In the case of Iraq, Al Qaeda was marginalised during the civil war of 2007–8 when Sunni insurgents began to distance themselves from Al Qaeda and co-operate with American forces. Unfortunately this was not followed up with increased Sunni participation in the Iraqi government. Instead, the continued sectarian behaviour of the Iraqi government in subsequent years provided the opportunity for ISIS to take control of some of the Sunni-controlled areas. In Syria, it was the collapse of state authority in parts of Syria as a consequence of the conflict that enabled ISIS to take over large parts of the country. In those areas where the local authorities commanded local respect and support, ISIS was unable to move in and establish a foothold [8].

Involving civil society in political discussions at all levels is a prerequisite for the establishment of a legitimate political authority. By civil society, I do not mean NGOs; rather I refer to civilians or active citizens who are not involved in fighting and who are concerned about the public interest, especially women, and who offer a political alternative to sectarian identities. In places like Bosnia, Syria, Libya, or Ukraine, the pro-democracy protest movements did not morph into military rebellion when the wars began even though this is the standard narrative. Rather, the rebels were recruited from often poor unemployed young men, while those, often the more educated, who took part in the protests, transformed themselves into civil society groups –providing humanitarian assistance, mediating between different groups, and monitoring human rights abuses. Yet the rebels are the ones included in peace talks and civic activists tend to be marginalised. Instead of the rebels, or at least alongside them, civic minded people should be involved in political discussions and negotiations, at all levels.

Of course, political talks under the aegis of the international community are necessary as a focal point for addressing conflict. But the political track needs to be viewed as a process, as opposed to a single top-down agreement, aimed at addressing specific issues related to human suffering on the ground such as sieges, humanitarian needs, justice, and so on rather than or as well as an overall political settlement. It should involve different levels of author-

ity (municipalities, governorates, regional and international arrangements) rather than an exclusive focus on the national state level, and it should include civil society, especially women. The civil society room and the women's advisory board in the Syria talks are a good example of the latter.<sup>6</sup>

Because new wars are decentralised and fragmented, it is always possible to identify what might be called 'islands of civility' where local authorities have succeeded in avoiding violence, for example, places like Tuzla in Bosnia, Hama in Syria, or Novi Pazar in Serbia. External efforts should focus on how to sustain and replicate such cases.

- *Economic and Social.* The establishment of a legitimate political authority is inextricably linked to the creation of legitimate livelihoods. In war zones, young men have little choice but to join a militia, to engage in criminal activities, or to rely on humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance is a permanent feature of persistent conflicts and has become interwoven into the predatory war economy. Every conflict area has a specific yet distinct combination of predatory activities, such as extortion and kidnapping, smuggling or 'taxation' of humanitarian assistance. Shifting the sources of revenue of political authorities from predatory activities to taxation is central to the establishment of legitimacy.

Standard neo-liberal recipes in what are known as post-conflict situations focus on macro-economic stabilisation, liberalisation, and privatisation. While these situations often experience rapid economic growth as a result of the provision of aid and the international presence, they also tend to be characterized by deepening inequality, high levels of unemployment and increased corruption, often linked to privatisation and state contracting, and consequently, the continuation and even spread of the predatory war economy.

For instance, it has been estimated that aid to Bosnia over the period 1995 to 2008 has been five times that of Marshall aid – \$679 per head compared with \$129 for recipients of Marshall aid in 2008 dollars [9]. Yet owing to a process of 'ethnic privatisation,' state enterprises became a source of predation for the warring parties that came to power as a consequence of the Dayton Peace Agreement, and very little aid reached ordinary people. To this day, unemployment and inequality remain far higher than before the war. For example, an investigation into the Croat company Herzegovina Holdings in 2001 revealed how a range of its operations, including tax evasion, loans to privileged customers, bail-outs, and money laundering, contributed to the personal enrichment of the Bosnian Croat elite, rather than meaningfully addressing the economic and social difficulties that Bosnians faced [10].

An alternative approach would both tackle some of the worst aspects of the war economy in very specific ways, but simultaneously focus on creating legitimate livelihoods, while developing public works and the provision of core services. It is possible to identify concrete proposals for addressing the war economy and promoting legitimate livelihoods so as to reduce the incentives for war but these proposals are different in different areas and can only be identified through analysis and communication at local levels, particularly with civil society. Such proposals might include international pressure to lift sieges, targeted sanctions, the international control of borders, or the regulation of trade in small arms, diamonds or antiquities, as well as the provision of inputs such as diesel oil or seeds. Often the warring parties make agreements about economic issues –the exchange of water for electricity, for example, between ISIS and the Government in Syria; such agreements should be leveraged to assist individuals and their communities.

- *Justice and Accountability.* It is often argued that justice must come after peace because it is the criminalised armed groups that are expected to negotiate a peace agreement.<sup>7</sup> If we understand contemporary war as a social condition the opposite should be the case. Addressing impunity is the only way to establish the rule of law and to deal with armed groups. In such a situation effective justice mechanisms, including the arrest and trial of war criminals and economic criminals, as well as the accountability of international personnel, is key to establishing political legitimacy. If the combination of a predatory economy and discriminatory identity politics is to be addressed, justice is central. This means supporting legal activism and documentation of war crimes, as well as, where possible, building courts, training judges and lawyers, establishing trusted police forces, and monitoring court cases.
- *Peace-keeping.* Traditionally, peace-keeping was about separating sides and monitoring cease-fires. Instead, peace-keepers should have the task of protecting humanitarian space, which disappears when violence is directed against civilians. Such a role involves dampening down violence, defending people and property, and, where possible, arresting rather than killing those responsible for criminal acts. In other words, it should be more like policing than either war-fighting or traditional peace-keeping. Peace-keepers would need to be located on the ground together with regular forces (police and military) at local levels, able to participate in the negotiation and monitoring of local ceasefires and, together with civilian counterparts, helping to reconstruct legitimate forms of governance

<sup>6</sup> See Rim Turkmani R, and Marika Theros M., 'A Process in its Own Right: the Syrian Civil Society Support Room', Conflict Research Programme Report., June 2020. And Marika Theros M, and Rim Turkmani R., 'Engendering Civiness in Intra-Syrian Political Talks: a Case Study of the Civil Society Support Room'. Journal of Civil Society, forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Jack Snyder J, and Leslie Vinjamuri L., 'Trials and Errors: Principle and Pragmatism in Strategies of International Justice.' International Security. 2003/2004; 28(3):5–44.

and to provide public services at local levels, including justice and social services. This would also help to provide a bulwark against further take-overs by armed groups. Something similar was undertaken by General Petraeus in Baghdad 2007–8 and this led to a dramatic fall in violence. However, it was never followed through politically at national and international levels, which is why the situation has deteriorated. The most that peace-keepers can do is to help stabilise the situation and create a context within which legitimate political authority can be sustained or constructed.

These four dimensions of a human security approach are not exclusive. They illustrate the far-reaching and interconnected strategy required to reverse the social condition of a new war. They bring together the political, legal, material and physical aspects of society. Human security has to be more than just 'bare life' [11]. To be human is to be young or old, religious or secular, gendered, and so on. Being human is all about context; these numerous aspects of humanity that are embedded in specific milieux and have to be taken into account.

### Prognosis

Political institutions are shaped by the kind of security they provide and vice versa. We trust our institutions if we believe they keep us safe. National security strategies, based on concepts of deterrence or traditional military capabilities, are based on the assumption that a third world war is the worst contingency we can imagine. However, this approach to security seems increasingly anachronistic when a range of other existential threats appear more immediate – climate change or deadly pandemics, for example.

International institutions, such as the UN or the EU, were established to end or prevent wars. This is reflected in their security strategies, which aim at the provision of mediation, peace-keeping, humanitarian assistance and development. Both institutions espouse the concept of human security, although the UN version is closer to the broad UNDP concept. The efforts of these institutions have helped to dampen down violence; nevertheless, they tend to be informed by an old-fashioned conception of war and therefore their implementation is weak. A more effective human security strategy as outlined above would enhance their legitimacy and make possible productive strategies in a range of fields. How feasible is this in a Covid-19 moment?

Perhaps the most likely scenario is a continuation of 'morbid symptoms' – a strengthening of populist authoritarian tendencies making use of the state of exception as a consequence of Covid-19 and the increase in surveillance capacities. In material terms, this is likely to be associated with increased unemployment, inequality and poverty especially in the poorest countries. The combination of identity politics and systematic corruption that can be found in conflict zones characterises these new tendencies. Contemporary populist leaders also favour traditional 'old war' rhetoric and continued priority to the defence sector. In most places, they are nevertheless losing legitimacy because of their failure to save lives during the pandemic (the exception is China where authoritarian efforts to control the pandemic appear to have been effective). But there is a risk that they will foment violence, as in Venezuela, as a way of remaining in power. At the time of writing, Joe Biden has won the US elections, however, President Trump's continued resistance and his overtures towards far-right militias could betoken the spread of violence and the evolution of a persistent social condition akin to that found in conflict zones – one that is very difficult to end without a broad strategy involving political, economic, social, legal and policing elements. In this scenario, the spread of the new war social condition involves further dissembling of states and ever widening persistent violence.

The approach I have outlined is actually the only practical strategy for reversing the social condition of new wars. It would require a major commitment of resources and a profound restructuring of capabilities. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that governments are willing to prioritise individual wellbeing and commit health capabilities and finance. Could this be extended to the victims of violence? Does increased expenditure at the EU level make possible a renewed commitment to human security? These are political questions, and all depends on whether the existential threat posed by illness can bring about the kind of transformation that earlier was brought by inter-state war.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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