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The Critique That Doesn't Bite: A Response to David Chandler's 'Human Security: The Dog That Didn't Bark'

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IN HIS REVIEW Of Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh & Anuradha M. Chenoy's (2007) *Human Security: Concepts and Implications* and MacLean, Black & Shaw's (2006) *A Decade of Human Security: Global Governance and New Multilateralisms*, David Chandler (2008) provides a useful deconstruction of the myth that human security represents a paradigmatic clash between state and individual security interests. However, in focusing exclusively on this myth, Chandler falls victim to another: that there is a singular human security project encompassing both the theoretical utility of critical security studies and the policy challenges of implementing the concept. Further, Chandler's three sweeping critiques of human security are rooted in a critical assessment of Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2007) and in an empirical mining of MacLean, Black & Shaw (2006) that both fall victim to this myth of a singular human security discourse.

Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, argues Chandler (2008: 428), confuse 'the aspirations of normative theorizing with policy practices in reality'. More generally, and perhaps subsequently, 'human security is "the dog that didn't bark", in that its integration into the mainstream of policymaking has reinforced, rather than challenged, existing policy frameworks' (Chandler, 2008: 428). The concept of human security, as represented by Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, has thus lost its critical utility and has instead engaged in a losing battle of attempted policy relevance. Having sought to engage with state policy in order to change it – the very entity it purports to critique – human security has been co-opted and appropriated by state advocates (realists, neoconservatives, liberal internationalists) as a way of advancing their neocolonial or imperial ambitions. Thus, according to Chandler, human security, together with its advocates, has become the unknowing Trojan Horse of state interventionism.

The principal charge – that the critical utility of human security has been co-

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opted by the state and used for nefarious purposes – is certainly severe. The hazards of solely focusing on the myth of a singular human security discourse, however, are apparent in the empirical case for this argument derived from MacLean, Black & Shaw (2006).

First, while Muggah & Krause (2006) do negatively assess the outcomes of human security-labelled policies, Chandler also points to Keane's (2006) questioning of the very rationale behind the EU's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. In this example, a potential overlap between national and human security interests is viewed by Chandler as delegitimizing any action that may result, no matter what the net positive impact.

Second, while Schittecatte (2006) and O'Manique (2006) wisely urge a wider human security focus on gender and health threats, Chandler points to Franceschet's (2006) warning of human security being 'interventionist by nature' as evidence of a slip into neocolonial interventionism. But, why must a greater focus on individual rights, whether they be gender- or health-related, necessarily lead to military intervention? Surely this is not what Schittecatte and O'Manique are advocating?

Third, Canadian human security initiatives, such as the Ottawa Convention, the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Kimberley Process and the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), are seen as tainted owing to their policy pragmatism – both because of their expediency in terms of domestic policy and because they are aimed at boosting multilateral power. Further, Smith's (2006) argument that human security policy seeks to create a picture of southern instability is approvingly endorsed. But, the Ottawa Convention had little to do with creating a fear of mounting global disorder; and, even if it was initiated owing to an overlap with Canadian capabilities and interest in middle-power institutions, how does this diminish the end result – a ban on landmines?

Each of these examples illustrate a disconnect *within* the human security discourse between critical theorists and policy academics, more than they do a clash between traditional and human security paradigms. This tension is further exemplified in the tripartite set of reasons Chandler gives for why human security has been co-opted by the state.

Claim One: Human Security Exaggerates New Post-Cold War Security Threats

Chandler's first reason for why human security has been embraced and misused by the state is that it exaggerates post-Cold War security threats – a deception both political elites and 'radical advocates' (Chandler, 2008: 435) of human security are said to endorse.

First, while there is little doubt that security threats have been magnified for political gain since the end of the Cold War, and particularly since 9/11, these have mostly been of a traditional, rather than human, nature – such as

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weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. On more human security-oriented threats – such as extreme poverty and communicable disease – there has been, unfortunately, little state buy-in.

Second, threats such as HIV/AIDS have not been maliciously exaggerated. Rather, the absence of the Cold War security discourse has simply made other 'non-traditional' vulnerabilities more visible. If 18 million people die from disease versus 300,000 from conflict, as was the case in 2000, how is shifting the focus of security to public health threats overestimating the vulnerability?

Third, while many argue that these threats should not be part of the security discourse (e.g. MacFarlane & Foong Khong 2006; Mack, 2002), Chandler makes no such conceptual claims, and even goes a step further to actually question their value. Similarly disjointed from the human security literature is the correlative reference to 'radical advocates' of human security who are neither named nor cited. In fact, it could have been presumed from the central thesis of the review that Chandler's primary concern was that human security advocates are not radical enough, subsumed as they are by the state.

Finally, the securitization discourse is invoked to root the critiques of issue-exaggeration and state-appropriation: 'In the absence of traditional enemies, human security approaches fill the gap with the securitization of every issue from health, to the economy, to the environment' (Chandler, 2008: 435). Here, however, the relevant question is not whether issues have been securitized, but what are the consequences of such an act. As Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2007: 111) note, 'Mahbub Ul-Haq saw the need for "priority zones" which would allow for more immediate policy relevance to the human development approach'. His goal was to attach immediacy to dire human development conditions via the security label. In failing to elaborate on the outcomes of securitization, Chandler is guilty of the very charge that he levels at Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, that of not acknowledging the links between normative theory and policy practices.

Claim Two: Human Security Advocates Locate These Threats in the Developing World

The vast majority of human security threats are indeed most severe in the developing world. This, however, is an empirical reality, not an ideologically driven theory. There are certainly regions within developed countries that also have human security problems – many northern aboriginal communities offer examples – and these should be highlighted. However, the reality is that over a billion people live in extreme poverty, and these are almost exclusively located in the developing world. When we shift the focus of security to the ability of individuals to live, rather than states to exist, then attention will undoubtedly and appropriately shift to those that are most vulnerable. This

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does not prescribe a necessary policy mandate – indeed, human security advocates are remarkably varied on proposed policy prescriptions. Nor does it attribute a cause to such vulnerability, as the actions of northern interests are undoubtedly responsible for some of it. It does, however, lead to a clear focus on those that are dying in the greatest numbers – which are proportionally located in the global south.

There is also a significant difference between systematizing the 'failed' state in order to highlight the vulnerabilities faced by its inhabitants, and fear-mongering about the threat this vulnerability poses to 'Western' countries. Where, as Chandler suggests, 'realists' make the connection between southern vulnerability and northern security, human security advocates make no such absolutist claim. To a certain degree, there are new global interconnections that should concern all states and their inhabitants. But, let us not – whether advocates of human security or their critics – overemphasize this connection. Indeed, it is for this very reason that the Barcelona Report gives multiple rationales for a human security-based foreign policy (Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities, 2004) – a conclusion that the author seems to suggest has underlying realist motives.

This charge of spurious causality would also seem to contradict a later concern that 'human security approaches argue that causal relationships are impossible in an interconnected world' (Chandler 2008: 436). In reality, they do no such thing. Indeed, Roland Paris (2001, 2004), who is cited for this critique, argues that it is the concept itself that makes causal relations difficult to establish analytically. This is very different from the argument Chandler is making: that they do not exist at all. In my opinion, however, both points of view are incorrect, as the analytic utility charge depends wholly on what we use as the dependent variable.

Claim Three: Human Security Facilitates Short-Term Policymaking in the Absence of Clear Strategic Foreign Policy Visions

This is a potential danger, but I think that we have to be clear about what short-term policies we are speaking of. Certainly, one aspect of a human security-based policy would need to look at crisis management, as there are countless human security emergencies that must be addressed. Indeed, any responsible wealthy state should feel a necessity to respond to humanitarian crises. This, however, in no way discounts long-term foreign policy planning. Indeed, the field of conflict prevention, with many overlaps in the human security discourse, has for a decade been advocating for long-term preventative strategies. It is not inconsistent to advocate for these while also urging emergency relief for the humanitarian emergencies that were not prevented from occurring.

It is also important to note that Chandler's critique of the lack of policy

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prioritization found within states that have used human security depends wholly on the definition of the concept that is used. The Canadian government, which takes a notably narrow approach, has managed to streamline its long-term policymaking on human security issues. Further, the point that threats should not be prioritized, made by Shahrbanou and many other human security advocates, refers not to the foreign policy mandate but to the definition. The argument being made is that no definition of security should prioritize particular threats over others for inclusion. Rather, definitions should treat all threats to individuals objectively and prioritize foreign policy on the basis of such an objective assessment of threat severity. This is the exact opposite of what Chandler suggests.

This is important, because it undermines Chandler's claim that Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy simply advocate short term-policy prescriptions. This is not the case. They advocate short-term threat identification – that is, identifying what is worst now. The mitigating mechanisms are as various as the number of actors engaged in addressing and causing a particular threat. Some will be short term, such as emergency famine relief, and some will be long term, such as the deployment of peacekeeping forces or reversing the conditions that spur gender-based violence. As Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2007: 38) state clearly, 'Making a concept applicable to reality means allowing prioritization and distribution of resources; in one word, shaping a political agenda'.

Conclusion: Human Security and the State

At the centre of the contention between Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy's policy-driven view of human security and Chandler's critical lens lies a conflict over the role of the state in the promotion of, and interaction with, the concept of human security. In one sense, the parties would likely agree. Despite Chandler's charge to the contrary, neither believes that the state and human security exist in separate paradigms. Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy believe that the state is an important, albeit not exclusive, purveyor of human security. It is the state, they argue, that has not only the primary responsibility to promote human security but also the potential to abuse its related powers, in terms of both how it defines threats and how it responds to them. Human and state security must therefore work symbiotically. Chandler agrees that the two paradigms are inseparable, but sees a fundamental problem with the state interacting with a concept outside of its sovereign design. In a power relation between state and human interests, he argues the state will always promote its own rights over those of disempowered individuals. Owing to this imbalanced power dynamic, the two – state and human interest – simply cannot coexist.

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Therein lies a potentially irreconcilable division within the human security discourse. For over a decade, two very different communities have shared the use of the term. The UN, development and foreign policy communities have used it as a means of bringing more issues into the security mandate. They have quite literally 'securitized' issues in order to assign them the urgency and importance traditionally only afforded to wars between states. In the area of critical security studies, however, the principal use of human security has been as a critical lens to shed light on the failures of state-based security.

These two uses of the concept can coexist as long as the former recognizes that the state is often the cause of the insecurity of those it is meant to protect, and the latter recognizes that criticizing the state is a process in which better state policy is the end goal, rather than theoretical critique itself. In the end, though, there may be an irreconcilable tension between human security as a critical tool and as a policy paradigm.[1]

Returning to Chandler's argument, if the state has co-opted human security, and if this will inevitably lead to its misuse, then he is right that we need to radically rethink the utility of the concept. But, before we come to such a conclusion, it would be useful to ask two questions. First, has the state indeed co-opted human security? Second, what does the absolutism of the critical theory language achieve when trying to improve policy?

First, then, has the state really co-opted the human security concept? The cases of it being used as a dominant foreign policy narrative are relatively few. And, when this has been the case, the policy outcomes have been generally quite benign. In the case of Canada, it has led to admittedly narrowly focused, but in the end relatively positive, policy initiatives, such as the Mine Ban Treaty. In Japan, the concept has led directly to a larger role for the country's development organization. While they are undoubtedly limited in their impact, Chandler's qualification of the Ottawa Convention, the ICC, the Kimberley Process and Canada's sponsorship of R2P – using quotation marks around 'successes' – seems somewhat exaggerated.

Similarly, while state-driven by organizational definition, the UN's use of the concept has hardly been disreputable. For example, there is little particularly problematic in Kofi Annan's (2000) use of the concept in his initial advocacy for UN reform. Indeed, the very fact that human security was dropped from the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (United Nations, 2004) as well as the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (United Nations, 2005) is probably more telling as to how states, particularly powerful ones, view security conceptualizations that question their sover-

[1] Pauline Kerr (2003) persuasively argues that this tension is in fact a dialectic between state-centric and human-centric approaches, one that suffers from imbalance on any given security issue. She identifies this tension in the human security work of Lodgaard (2000), Thomas & Tow (2002), Anwar (2003) and Suhrke (1999).

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eign rights. Human security simply clashed too much with the enshrined norm of collective security that has dominated the UN since its founding.

In the cases of both middle-power governments and the UN, the relevant question is how they use the concept. The qualitative result of the appropriation – or of partnership between actors promoting human security – should be seen as more important than the act of securitizing itself. This leads to my second question regarding the use of human security as critical theory, particularly as evidenced in Chandler's review essay: what is the desired end result of theoretical attacks on the state use of human security? Are critiques of state use of human security absolute or qualitative? If the former, then the desired end goal is ambiguous, and the exercise will likely remain in the domain of theory. If, however, they are qualitative, then we need to be willing to engage with the questions of human security for whom, and by what means, which both feature prominently in Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy's work. As those authors state:

> considering Human Security as the fundamental and inviolable right of all individuals – regardless of state citizenship – automatically impacts upon the question of responsibility, paving the way for the provision of human security in terms of an obligation incumbent upon a wide range of actors above and beyond the state. (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007: 237)

Presumably, these actors include NGOs, community groups, private corporations and individuals. The action of these actors, however, like those of the state, must be assessed – which brings us back to policy relevancy versus theoretical critiques. By what metrics should actions be assessed? One of the useful elements of human security is that it focuses on the livelihood of individuals – the very ability of people to live. This provides a useful, albeit not absolute, metric by which to assess the very worst conditions that threaten people, regardless of the threat source. Where the cause – and, in turn, the mitigating mechanisms – become important is in the response to these threats. But, this means engaging with *all* actors involved in responses, both state and non-state, and assessing, rather than simply dismissing, their actions.

While Chandler argues that critical theory offers insight into this policy exercise, and seeks to build a bridge between the two discourses, I am less certain that they are compatible. If the end result of his merging of the theoretical and policy discourses is a rejection of the human security concept *in toto*, then perhaps a more conciliatory approach may acknowledge that these are simply incompatible discourses, and should henceforth be treated as such.

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