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Peace Operations and Human Security

Introduction to the Special Issue

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Human Security in the Context of Peace Operations

Peace operations, conducted by various international organisations, make a major, daily contribution to international peace and security. UN peace operations in particular have broadened beyond traditional objectives of observing ceasefires and today include robust protection of civilians (PoC), security sector reform (SSR), quick impact projects (QIPs), state-building activities to extend state authority, community and civil society engagement, coordination with the UN Country Team's humanitarian efforts and much more. Missions have also seen many calls for more kinetic PoC and willingness to use force in the face of threats to civilians.[1] The primacy of PoC and the perceived UN responsibility to directly engage forces that seek to harm civilians has led to lofty expectations of the effectiveness of the military component in countering threats with a robust posture and the capability to respond with force.[2]

The 2010s also saw UN peace operations seeking *stabilization* of a country. Literature has discussed in depth how UN forces are increasingly involved in the extension of state authority that embeds the state as the legitimate authority, joint operations with or the provision of logistical support to the host state armed forces, and examples have been analysed where peacekeepers have been said to have taken the initiative in the use of force.[3] Stabilization became buzzword within the UN Security Council with research finding that 10% of Council meetings in 2001 mentioned stabilization but by 2014

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[1] See e.g. Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, 'Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We Need to Change the Way We Are Doing Business' https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf accessed 24 November 2023.

[2] Alexander Gilder, 'The UN and the Protection of Civilians: Sustaining the Momentum', *Journal of Conflict & Security Law*, vol. 28, 2023, 317-348.

[3] See e.g. Aditi Gorur, 'Defining the Boundaries of UN Stabilization Missions' (Stimson Center, December 2016) https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Defining-Boundaries-UN-Stabilization-Missions.pdf accessed 24 November 2023; Cedric de Coning, Chiyuki Aoi and John Karlsrud (eds), *UN Peacekeeping Doctrine in a New Era* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); John Karlsrud, *The UN at War: Peace Operations in a New Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

stabilization was mentioned in 44%.[4] Part of the trend is due to the fact four UN peace operations have included stabilization in their title since 2004. Namely, (1) the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH (2004 – 2017); (2) the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO (1999 – present, established as MONUC and renamed MONUSCO to include stabilization in 2010); (3) the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA (2013 – 2023); and (4) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA (2014 – present).

No new UN peace operations have been deployed since 2014 and current peace operations deployed by regional organisations have been criticised for being more focused on military intervention than on promoting and protecting human rights and building institutions.[5] The UN has also come under pressure to reduce the size of current missions and do more with fewer resources.[6] The increasing influence of China, Russian rivalry with the West and fragmentation of the international system have all fed into current thinking and the trajectory of peace operations alongside criticism that militarised approaches to conflict resolution have been less successful than hoped.[7]

The largest UN missions over the last decade, including MINUSMA, MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS, have all faced different but substantial challenges that have led to questions about the future of UN peacekeeping. For instance, throughout its mandate, MINUSMA was tasked with working alongside French and regional G5-Sahel forces to counter extremism and terrorist activity in the north of Mali. But, after substantial expenditure and varying types of engagement from the international community, Mali suffered two coups and now remains in the hands of a military junta that is cooperating with the Wagner Group. MINUSMA has closed its doors after being asked to leave by the host state, the Malian government had already withdrawn from the G5-Sahel Joint Force and the variety of other international interventions from European nations (such as, Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Task Force) had departed in 2022.

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[4] David Curran and Paul Holtom, 'Resonating, Rejecting, Reinterpreting: Mapping the Stabilization Discourse in the United Nations Security Council, 2000-14', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development,* vol. 4, no.1, 2015, 1-18, p.9.

[5] Claudia Pfeifer Cruz, 'Multilateral peace operations in 2022: Developments and trends', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2023/multilateral-peace-operations-2022-developments-and-trends#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2064%20multilateral%20peace,multilateral%20peace%20operations%2C%20at%2020 accessed 8 April 2024.

[6] Katharina P Coleman, 'Downsizing in UN Peacekeeping: The Impact on Civilian Peacekeepers and the Missions Employing Them', *International Peacekeeping*, vol 27, no.5, 2020, pp 703–731; Cedric de Coning, 'The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Parallel Operations' New York: International Peace Institute. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Future-of-Peace-Operations-and-Parallel-Forces-js.pdf accessed 8 April 2024

[7] John Karlsrud, 'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice: Exist Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 17, no.3, 2023, pp. 258-272; Alexander Gilder, David Curran, Georgina Holmes and Fiifi Edu-Afful, 'The Future Trajectory of UN Peace Operations' in: Alexander Gilder, David Curran, Georgina Holmes and Fiifi Edu-Afful (eds), *Multidisciplinary Futures of UN Peace Operations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023) pp 1-17, p.1; Louise W Moe and Finn Stepputat, 'Peacebuilding in an Era of Pragmatism: Introduction', *International Affairs*, vol 94, no.2, 2018, pp 293–299; John Karlsrud, 'From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism' *International Peacekeeping*, vol 26, no.1, 2019, pp 1–21.

As another example, UNMISS faced a tumultuous period where civilians, often under threat from host state forces, fled to UN bases around South Sudan. UNMISS housed upwards of 200,000 civilians and faced new problems to solve around governing and policing large PoC sites with tens of thousands of residents from across South Sudan's ethic and religious spectrum.[8] Since 2020 the PoC sites have begun to be redesignated as IDP camps under the jurisdiction of the South Sudanese government and now the UN must undertake lessons learned studies on how the mission handled the day-to-day governance of the sites. MONUSCO has also not escaped its fair share of problems with violent backlash in 2022 after widespread dissatisfaction with the mission's inability to protect civilians despite the mission having use of a Force Intervention Brigade with a mandate to 'neutralize' rebel groups.

How then do we rethink international practice on peace operations? No special issue or edited volume would be able to offer complete coverage of such a topic. But what academia can do well is capture particular themes and develop research that digs into that theme and its influence or prospects for peace operations. The theme chosen by this special issue is 'human security' but what actually is 'human security'?

I have argued elsewhere that the concept of human security can serve as a conceptual framework to guide the UN's activities in relation to international peace and security.[9] Similarly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted a human security approach at the Madrid Summit in June 2022 and is operationalising the military contribution to human security (MC2HS) across the organization. NATO's understanding of human security is as a multi-sectoral, organising concept that encompasses: combatting trafficking in human beings; protection of children in armed conflict; preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence; protection of civilians; and cultural property protection.[10] But why have organisations used the term human security as distinct from others? What is different about human security and why could it make a valuable contribution to the UN and other organization's work?

The concept of human security seeks to shift the referent object of security from the state to the individual by challenging realist views and giving the individual intrinsic value. Where the individual's interests compete with that of the state or society, the former should be given priority. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) coined the term in their 1994 Human Development Report building on the earlier goal of achieving freedom from fear and want found in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Report attempted to create a vision of human security that could be adopted by states and the UN in furthering social development.[11] The team behind the Report sought to create an approach that focused on issues such as poverty, disease, threats of violent conflict, and restrictions on political freedom.[12] This conception of human security sought to direct resources and attention to more than just physical security and instead to the very real environmental, political, food, health, economic and community security threats faced by people around the world. Following the 1994 UNDP Report various middle powers including Canada, Norway and Japan adopted human

[8] Alexander Gilder, 'UN Peace Operations and the Role of the Local in (Re)Building the Rule of Law', *Utrecht Law Review*, vol. 17, pp 70-86.

[9] See Alexander Gilder, 'Human security and the stabilization mandate of MINUSCA', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 28, 2021, pp 200-231; Alexander Gilder, 'International law and human security in a kaleidoscopic world', *Indian Journal of International Law*, vol. 58, 2021, pp 111-137.

[10] NATO's 'Human Security Approach and Guiding Principles' (14 October 2022) is available here: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_208515.htm?selectedLocale=en accessed 8 April 2024.

[11] UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p.24.

[12] Amitav Acharya, 'Human Security' in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds), *The Globalisation of World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th ed, 2014) pp 448–462, p. 449.

security approaches in their foreign policies.[13] In 2001 the Commission on Human Security was created by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and published its *Human Security Now* Report two years later.[14] The Commission defined human security as:

> to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms— freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.[15]

Human security has two key elements: (1) it aims to shift the referent object of security from the state to the individual giving the individual intrinsic value and placing the interests of the individual ahead of the state; (2) it gives rise to a broader view on what can cause insecurity and that many threats are interconnected and reinforcing. Burke has suggested that "human security implies a radical shift from the abstract imagery of the nation state, and its interests, to the visceral distress of the human."[16] It is with this image in mind that human security can be used as a framework for organisations to become more focused on human need.

Human security's distinct feature is its provision of a bottom-up and localised perspective and set of priorities to address insecurity. Such a perspective that also addresses the context and nexus of conflict is core to the purpose of UN peace operations in the field.[17] Nevertheless, human security has not been embraced by all as it has been described as utopian, unrealistic, or simply does not account for existing international law.[18] Why then did the concept gain so much traction in the 2000s? The core reason is likely that debate over security had for a long time followed one, state-based narrative. Human security represented an interesting, radical challenge to that narrative which caused much academic debate of how to realign the international system toward the individual. While we can identify key features of human security, using the concept of human security is more difficult. Kaldor, Martin and Sechlow have argued that human security adds value in a number of ways.[19] First, it provides *coherence* by giving clarity on shared goals and principles. Second, it allows for greater *effectiveness* as the concept can give focus to the activities of an organisation and provide a framework for standardisation. Lastly, human security can increase the *visibility* of an organisation's actions. That

[13] Tom Farer, 'Human Security: Defining the Elephant and Imagining Its Tasks', *Asian Journal of International Law*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp 43–55, p.46.
[14] Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now* (New York 2003)
[15] Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now* (New York 2003) p.4.
[16] Anthony Burke, 'Caught between National and Human Security: Knowledge and Power in Post-crisis Asia', *Pacifica Review*, vol.13, no.3, 2001, pp 215-239, p.226.
[17] Robert Hanlon and Kenneth Christie, *Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: An Introduction to Human Security* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) p.27.
[18] Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin and Sabine Selchow, 'Human Security: a new strategic narrative for Europe', *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.2, pp 273-288 p.281; Hisashi Owada, 'Human Security and International Law' In: Ulrich Fastenrath, Rudolf Geiger, Daniel-Erasmus Khan, Andreas Paulus, Sabine von Schorlemer, and Christoph Vedder (eds), *From Bilateralism to Community Interest: Essays in Honour of Bruno Simma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp 505-520, p.505.
[19] Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin and Sabine Selchow, 'Human Security: a new strategic narrative for Europe', *International Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2007, pp 273-288, p.287.

is to say, if human security language became the norm in the UN then individuals, international partners, and other organisations would have a clear methodology for addressing security issues.

It is a reality that the activities of UN peace operations have expanded over the last couple of decades to become inextricably linked to wider security concerns. For instance, recent UN missions in the Central African Republic and Mali have had an unequivocal focus on the reconstruction of the host state, peacebuilding activities to achieve national reconciliation, and a protection strategy very much focused on the individual.[20] Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the mandating and practice of UN peace operations would benefit from a framework which guides interactions with communities and individuals to provide *coherence*, *effectiveness*, and *visibility*. Similarly, NATO has needed to adapt to new operating environments and plan for operations that may have a serious impact on civilian population centres, perhaps within NATO member states and partner nations. This has incentivised NATO to plan for more interlinked and holistic approaches to human security to ensure the impact of conflict on civilians is mitigated where possible.

It would be beneficial for the UN and NATO to have a coherent, codified strategy which lays out how the organisation will identify and address security threats. In so doing, the strategy would then allow the UN to be more effective and allow the Security Council to construct new mandates which tackle modern security challenges that go beyond physical threats. The North Atlantic Council would similarly be able to limit the civilian harm caused by the organisation's military operations in a coordinated manner that accounts for a range of threats such as environmental, economic and more. When such a strategy is implemented the language and methods of a bottom-up human security approach are communicated to a range of actors and become visible. In addition, with operations increasingly interacting with and affecting the daily lives of local people the UN and NATO must recognise the need to engage with other actors in a bottom-up manner.

How human security is utilised, 'all depends on what human security is understood to be: a political agenda for governments, a rallying cry that forges *ad hoc* or sustained coalitions of states on single issues, a common concern that brings together single-issue civil society groups under a uniting umbrella, an academic problem, or a new research category.'[21] Human security is described as a concept by most literature. Therefore, human security is a collection of interrelated ideas and can be a guide to interpretation. Specifically, as an *agenda-setting* concept, it determines what are the most relevant issues and brings to the forefront neglected problems that have previously not been included in national and international security debates or have been on the periphery. Barbara von Tigerstrom has said that human security is 'a concept that is designed to be used in a variety of ways, including in the interpretation and development of legal norms.'[22] Furthermore, Gerd Oberleitner claims that 'a human security approach to international law *can* reinforce and strengthen attempts to bring international law into line with the requirements of today's world.'[23] By using human security as an

[20] It has been noted elsewhere that UN peace operations would benefit from a human security analysis due to their focus on, the reduction of inter-communal violence, clearing of landmines, collection of small arms, provision of medical aid and food, reconstruction, negotiating settlements and capacity-building activities. See Ronald Inglehart, Pippa Norris, 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Understanding Human Security' (HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series, October 2011) p.6.

[21] Gerd Oberleitner, 'Porcupines in Love: The Intricate Convergence of Human Rights and Human Security', *European Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 6, 2005, pp 588–606, 592-3.

[22] Barbara von Tigerstrom, *Human Security and International Law* (Oxford: Hart, 2007) p. 42.

[23] Gerd Oberleitner, 'Human Security: A Challenge to International Law?', *Global Governance*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2005, 185, 186 (emphasis added).

agenda-setting concept international actors will be able to react to the needs of individuals and provide effective responses.

Shireen Daft has advanced the argument that human security provides a 'synthesised overarching framework' for international law to offer a consistently human-centred approach.[24] In this sense, the core principles of human security can be utilised to guide our interpretation of existing international law, assist with the development of new international law, organise discussion on security issues, and be a point of reference when addressing security threats.[25] Human security can also set the agenda by bringing neglected issues to the forefront and allow affected peoples to identify where assistance is needed.[26] Therefore, the concept of human security can be a valuable tool to reorientate international law, and importantly the work of the UN, NATO and others toward a human-centric notion of security. With the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security the Security Council is in a unique position to articulate threats to international peace and security, advance what it deems to be an important agenda, and coordinate a human security approach.[27] In a time where non-state actors are calling for action on various global issues it is arguable that Security Council should engage with a broader notion of security that is responsive to the needs of individuals.

UN peace operations have a critical effect on all areas of a society to which they are deployed operating under a legal mandate but implementing a range of activities. UN peacekeepers engage with communities daily and are mandated to support elections, address sexual violence, support refugees and internally displaced persons with reintegration in local communities, and undertake a range of projects aimed at improving local services and rebuilding the capacity of local, regional, and national government bodies to carry out necessary functions of the state. The Commission on Human Security placed special emphasis on conflict situations and the need to adopt a bottom-up approach which allows individuals to identify their security needs. Therefore, peace operations are well placed to operationalise human security by taking a bottom-up approach.

Human security has been argued to provide better ideas for conflict prevention "because it is more realistic and nuanced in terms of its interdisciplinary approach."[28] As conflict is "a permanent feature" of human security it is a concept that is well-suited to being utilised as a framework with which to govern and shape our thinking on peace operations.[29] A human security framework could be based on five principles – (1) existing rights and norms, (2) a focus on the vital core identified in a bottom-up manner, (3) a concern for vulnerability and building resilience, (4) preventative protection, and (5) the empowerment of people to act on their own behalf and implement solutions to security threats.[30]

Human security does, on the face of it, seem to hold many prospects for peace operations. For instance, as mentioned previously, UN peace operations have increasingly had a concern for the protection of civilians, vulnerable groups, and the capacity-building needed to ensure peace. But there

[24] Shireen Daft, *The Relationship Between Human Security Discourse and International Law: A Principled Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) pp. 33, 3.
[25] Barbara von Tigerstrom, *Human Security and International Law* (Oxford: Hart, 2007) p.90.
[26] Ibid. p.47.
[27] Shireen Daft, *The Relationship Between Human Security Discourse and International Law: A Principled Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 71.
[28] Robert Hanlon and Kenneth Christie, Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: An Introduction to Human Security (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p.11.
[29] Ibid. p.11.
[30] See Alexander Gilder, Stabilization and Human Security in UN Peace Operations (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), Chapter 4.

is an overwhelming focus of UN peace operations on protecting individuals from *physical* harm. Likewise, NATO has followed similar principles on the protection of civilians and not accounted for a wider range of threats. Human security goes beyond physical protection and necessitates a concern for harms rooted in, for example, environmental, health, or economic causes. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) did provide support during an Ebola outbreak but more could have been done in this regard.[31] The Security Council declared the Ebola outbreak in 2014 a threat to international peace and security and took a major leadership role during the crisis.[32] That being said, UN peace operations operating in affected areas did not have their mandates modified to include the new concern for health security. Under a conceptual framework for human security, the protection of health security would have become a key concern for the UN missions in response to local needs in areas hit by the Ebola virus. Going further, if UN peace operations adopted the conceptual framework there would not need to be a global pandemic to result in UN attention on health threats. Instead, UN missions in the field would actively work on improving access to health services with other partners if that need is identified by a local population.

Value can be added to UN, NATO and other peace operations by orientating practice toward initiatives like informing decision-making with local views on security needs, building resilience to a range of vulnerabilities, and allowing for dialogue *within* communities as well as the empowerment of local people to engage on national and international levels. Under the conceptual framework, peace operations would need to explicitly identify and plan initiatives that build resilience and prioritise empowerment at the local level to ensure communities can resolve conflict peacefully and engage with national reconciliation. While the UN implements some wider empowerment-related strategies, either on its own or in partnership with host governments, they do not feature as focal points of missions. With human security in its infancy in NATO operations, there is a prime opportunity for NATO to be a leader in this field and develop sophisticated mechanisms for the detection of human security threats and military and civil responses. Empowerment is fundamental for the international actor to gain a local-level understanding of the conflict and interlinkages between security threats and a conceptual framework for human security would assist international organisations in achieving meaningful empowerment.

Shedding Light on the Place of Human Security in Peace Operations

This special issue contributes to the important discussion on what impact peace operations can have on human security and the role they can play in operationalising the concept to improve (in)security. All articles offer unique perspectives on peace operations under a collective banner of human security.

First, Kenneth Christie and Robert Hanlon offer a deeper understanding of the unique approach and value added by a human security approach. They explain how human security can be a lens to (re)examine security and importantly make key linkages to how the UN advances its peacebuilding goals through peacekeeping and good offices. The authors advance an approach termed 'human security diplomacy' that can facilitate middle powers, such as Canada, in influencing human security and peacebuilding practices.

[31] Sara E Davies and Simon Rushton, 'Public health emergencies: a new peacekeeping mission? Insights from UNMIL's role in the Liberia Ebola outbreak', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, pp 419-435.
[32] UN Security Council, Resolution 2177 (18 September 2014) UN Doc S/RES/2177.

Second, Brendan Howe looks to offer suggestions on how to better operationalise human security in the UN's peace operations. He first examines how human security has evolved alongside the UN's promotion of global governance. Then the article then discusses the rising influence of human security on peacekeeping and discusses how the UN can be more people-centred including through bottom-up processes, regionalisation, commissions, and holistic policymaking.

Then the special issue's authors delve into security practices or peace operation practice with a human security lens. This makes the special issue starkly unique in its approach as most literature on human security focuses on how to conceptualise the concept, what is to be included or excluded from a definition of human security, and how to measure and use human security. But little research has examined human security alongside the practice of international organisations or states in a similar manner to the articles included in this special issue. Therefore, the special issue takes large strides in showing how human security can be used as an analytical framework or a set of guiding principles to understand or influence the activities of peace operations.

Louise Ridden assesses unarmed civilian protection as a method of moving security away from the domain of states and centering security on the civilian's experiential knowledge of armed conflict. By making civilians and the communities in which they live a focal point of conflict analysis, Ridden argues the complexity of armed conflict and civilian perspectives that build this point of view help realise the human security agenda.

Mateja Peter and Ruoxi Wang take a country-specific example and dig into China's approach to human security in the UN peacekeeping context. Drawing out the examples of mediation, physical protection including the use of force, and capacity building the authors show how China contests all three of these areas of activity due to China's state-centric an developmental approach. China avoids aspects of human security it disagrees with but continues to contribute to UN peacekeeping, and importantly aspects of PoC, albeit focusing on government-level engagement and avoiding the robust use of force.

Tom Buitelaar advances a novel human security approach to accountability based on extensive data of MINUSCA. This approach has wider applicability beyond MINUSCA and UN peacekeeping as a unique way of assessing accountability activities and anti-impunity efforts in the international community. In the current case, Buitelaar can demonstrate how MINUSCA helped legitimise the actions of the UN and improved community and victim engagement albeit within a statist system that often left much to be desired by communities.

In what is both a theoretical and uniquely practical special issue on human security, this group of researchers have shown how human security can be a lens through which to provide a novel analysis of peace operations and related concepts or activities. As an exercise of understanding how organisations and states conceive security, engage with other actors, and ultimately seek to improve the well-being and livelihoods of individuals in (post)conflict situations, this special issue illustrates how human security remains a useful tool for interdisciplinary research on peace and conflict.