The second generation of human security: lessons from the UN and EU experience

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On 23 September 2009, the Human Security Network marked its tenth anniversary in New York with a ministerial declaration on peace and justice. However, the occasion could be seen more as a wake than a celebration. Despite notable successes such as the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel landmines, the International Criminal Court, and some measures to control the sale and distribution of conflict diamonds and small arms, the network first established at a meeting in May 1999 of the foreign ministers of twelve countries in Lysoen, Norway, is increasingly marginalized. Its impact has been blunted by loss of interest among its leading sponsors. Ministers rarely attend the meetings, sending ambassadorial delegates instead. As a result decision-making is deferred and the network is no longer the means of expression for a crusading political agenda; instead, it serves as a forum in which individual member states, each of which chairs the network for six months at a time, can air their pet projects.1 What is more, while widely used in UN reports through the 1990s and early 2000s, the term ‘human security’ has all but vanished from the reports of the UN Secretary-General and high-level panels, and from branch organization use. The UN, it appears, is moving away from the human security agenda—at least as explicitly named.

Canada, one of the principal initial proponents of the human security agenda, is also going through a period of withdrawal from both advocacy and use of the concept. A recently leaked internal email from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade outlined a series of shifts in the language of Canadian foreign policy. ‘Human security’ was among a group of terms blacklisted in government parlance. While this shift is linked to the ideological leanings of the current conservative government, it still marks a quite dramatic departure for a government that once championed the concept.

Are the gradual implosion of the Human Security Network and Canada’s retreat from the foreign policy agenda it pioneered symptoms of the failure of

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human security to establish itself as a principle of public policy? If so, is that failure to be blamed on the ambiguity of the original concept, or on poor institutionalization of human security as a policy paradigm? Further, how, in the light of this experience, do we reassess both the claims of human security to paradigm-shifting and emancipatory power, and those of critics who challenge its policy utility and lack of substance? This is not a straightforward exercise, for at the same moment that the first generation of human security (represented by the UN and Canada) appears to be in retreat, a second generation is emerging. This second generation is being driven by the EU, and also finds an echo in new security thinking and military doctrine about population-centred security in the United States. By moving away from the very broad, development-focused conceptualization envisioned and then discarded by the UN, and fostering a much tighter, crisis- or threshold-based conceptualization, it may well be that the second coming of human security achieves a far greater impact than its early forms.

This article sets out to analyse the empirical record and contrast the divergence of narratives on human security between the UN and the EU, as a means to identify the challenges of attempting to establish the concept as a new security paradigm. It begins by tracing the genealogy of human security policies within the UN and the EU, through examining the component institutions of each, rather than their membership. It seeks to advance reasons for the different trajectories human security is currently taking. Lessons from the failure of the concept within the UN system are applied to the EU case, and ways forward for the concept are proposed.

The United Nations and human security

The concept of human security has permeated much of the post-Cold War discourse on international peace and security—a discourse in which the UN has, of course, taken a central part. The UN has in many ways served as an incubator for the concept of human security, promoting the idea both at the macro-institutional level and within its constituent branches, and incorporating it into many aspects of its evolving post-Cold War mandate.

However, although the version of the concept introduced in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Development Report raised interest, it failed to find a solid and workable place in the UN system. While it continued to be discussed and in some cases used in some parts of the UN, by the time Kofi Annan presented his 2005 Secretary-General’s Report on UN reform the term had all but dropped from the principal UN agenda. Not only had human security lost its champion within the organization (Annan was no longer publicly using

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2 M. Kaldor and S. Beebe, The ultimate weapon is no-weapon (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).
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the term), but key member states had shifted their advocacy from human security to the responsibility to protect. We argue that this is because of three problems in the UN use of the concept: ambiguity surrounding both the concept and practices of development and of human security; the lack of a clear distinction between human rights and human security; and the potential conceptual overstretch of the UN’s use of human security.

In order to get a sense of how human security evolved within the UN system, it is useful to raise several milestones in the organization’s engagement with the concept.

Chapter 2 of the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, ‘New dimensions of human security’, is rightly seen as the first major articulation of the concept. This report did two notable, but not necessarily productive, things for the budding human security discourse of that time.

First, it defined the general characteristics of what human security should be and how it could bring together the emerging, but in many ways disparate, themes of the post-Cold War UN. Beyond this, however, the concept incorporated the actual activities that the UN, through its various branches, was already undertaking. As Keith Krause puts it: ‘Human security was a lens, a way of describing or framing what they were doing that allowed a number of disparate policy initiatives to be linked, and to be given greater coherence.’

Second, it proposed means of framing threats to human security with reference to the principles of freedom from fear and freedom from want, seen as distinct categories. Threats were defined in temporal terms: human security was said to involve both ‘safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life’. Thus it set out the broad–narrow dichotomy that has become the basis for much of the human security debate. Finally, it compartmentalized threats to human security into seven components: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.

What was important about this categorization is that it set the boundaries of the concept very broadly, in clear distinction from past reconceptualizations of security. Also, it forced future definitions of human security to justify any shift towards a narrower definition from this very broad starting point.

The theme of people as the referent of international peace and security is clearly at the heart of Kofi Annan’s *We the people*, written in 2000. The report makes a distinction between the two competing paradigms of freedom from want and freedom from fear, with chapters on each. In doing so it gave the first indication that the concept of human security had lost its way within the UN. It propa-

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gates a misguided dichotomy between broad and narrow, even using the fear and want terminology of the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, and then goes on to attribute the concept of human security only to the ‘narrow’ threats. This is a clear example of the policy consequence of conceptual ambiguity, as became particularly obvious with the formation of the Commission on Human Security (CHS) in 2001. Under the leadership of Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, the Commission was asked ‘to promote public understanding, engagement and support of human security and its underlying imperatives; to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation; and to propose a specific programme of action to address critical and pervasive threats to human security’.10

The resulting and much-anticipated report, Human security now, provides a detailed and well-researched articulation of a conception deeply rooted in the discourse and theory of international development. However, it argues that whereas development is focused on achieving equitable growth and sustainability, human security goes further to address the ‘conditions that menace survival, the continuation of daily life and the dignity of human beings’.11 This conceptualization also has a strong focus on the protection of freedom,12 and places significant value on personal empowerment.13 It is based on Sen’s work on development as freedom and, later, on human capabilities.

According to the CHS definition, the aim of human security is ‘to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment’.14 The concept of the ‘vital core’ occupies a central place as a ‘set of elementary rights and freedoms people enjoy’. What people consider to be ‘vital’—what they consider to be ‘of the essence of life’ and ‘crucially important’—varies across individuals and societies.15 This focuses human security not just on the individual, but on a specific aspect of individual survival.16 Second, the definition found in the report highlights both the critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) nature of the threats that should be included under the rubric of human security, but pairs these immediate harms with what the report calls ‘downside risks’—longer term endemic costs of human insecurity.

The Commission’s excessively broad definition of human security was widely criticized: one commentator characterized the report as a document written ‘by idealists and for idealists’.17 In contrast, the next major UN document on international peace and security—the report of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel

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16 As discussed below, this is far too broad an interpretation of what the vital core entails.
on Threats, Challenges and Change—focused on what it called a ‘comprehensive system of collective security’, rather than endorsing the concept of human security or moving beyond the confines of the traditional state-centric security paradigm.\(^{18}\)

In order to bring new threats, such as HIV/AIDS and global warming, into the security mandate of the UN, however, it broadened the concept of collective security to include a wider range of threats (comprehensive), without deepening it to apply to the individual. The referent of security remains the state, and security threats are therefore necessarily defined as harms that threaten its integrity.

In March 2005, Kofi Annan released a report in advance of the heads of state meeting for the five-year review of the Millennium Development Goals.\(^{19}\) *In larger freedom* makes a particularly interesting case-study, because it is a culmination of Annan’s evolving thinking both on what role the UN should play in the world and, more specifically, on which aspects of the goals set out in the sweeping High-level Panel report he believed were achievable.

As in *We the people* five years earlier, *In larger freedom* divides threats to security into two categories, relating respectively to ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’. However, there is little use of the term ‘human security’ even in the section on violent threats. Instead, and in many ways remarkably, the High-level Panel report’s notion of ‘comprehensive collective security’ is used. This is echoed in the World Summit outcome document of 2005, which uses the same term but without specifying the threats that may fall under its purview. It also separates security from development, and includes the ‘responsibility to protect’ as the principle that should guide UN responses to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The principal consequence of this emphasis is to render sovereignty conditional on the adequate protection of citizens. This is relevant to the debate over human security, as it represents a tangible shift away from the state as the sole unit of international peace and security within the UN. This is a far cry from the concept as the central component of the 1994 Development Report.

What explains the failure of the concept to take hold within the UN?

The relationship between the UN and the concept of human security is a complex one. On the one hand, the organization responded to the widely felt inadequacies of the traditional security paradigm by naming and defining a fairly broad version of the concept in 1994. On the other hand, if the concept cannot take root within the welcoming environment of the UN system, as the recent revival of ‘comprehensive security’ implies, what hope does it have in other venues fixated on the national security paradigm? Understanding the state and future of human security within the UN is therefore critical for proponents of the concept.

In an interview on the role of human security within the UN, Lakhdar Brahimi, former special representative to Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti, and chair of the UN Panel on Peace-keeping, stated: ‘I don’t use the term human security because I don’t know exactly what I mean, and I worry that someone will come up and


\(^{19}\) Annan, *In larger freedom*. 
contradict me. This uncertainty is rooted in at least three problematic themes which emerge from the discourse on human security within the UN: the confusion between human security and development, the overlap between human security and human rights, and conceptual overstretch. Together, these ambiguities help to explain the reluctance of the Secretary-General, and many UN member states, to endorse the concept fully on an equal plane with the notion of collective security articulated in the Charter.

First, the principal ambiguity found in almost all UN treatments of human security is a lack of clear differentiation between human development and human security. Both in theory and in practice, the two are often used interchangeably, resulting in significant confusion regarding the added value offered by the human security discourse. Second, there has been almost no attempt within the UN system to articulate the difference, both in theory and in practice, between human security and human rights. This ambiguity is not fully addressed in either the UNDP or the CHS definition of the concept, and it is at least tangentially responsible for the Secretary-General adopting the narrow perspective in his 2000 report, and dropping it entirely by the 2004 and 2005 reports. Had these early reports provided a clear and workable definition, then the concept would have stood a far better chance of being used in the three major reports on the changing UN conception of security that were to follow. The third consistent problem with the use of human security within the UN system is what MacFarlane and Khong label ‘conceptual overstretch’. As has been shown above, the tendency to include every and all possible threats to the individual in various UN conceptualizations of human security has had the negative effect of discouraging its use. Three potential pitfalls of this approach offered by MacFarlane and Khong are that it can lead to false priorities and hopes, create causal confusion, can encourage military solutions to non-military problems and non-military solutions to military problems.

The European Union and human security

In 2008 the EU marked the fifth anniversary of the European Security Strategy (ESS) and a decade of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) by publishing an implementation report on the ESS. The report elaborated a ‘distinctive European approach to foreign and security policy’, citing as evidence EU interventions ranging from post-tsunami peacebuilding in Aceh to protecting refugees in Chad. For the first time the Council of the EU, which authored the document, also explicitly referred to human security as central to the EU’s particular strategic goals.

For advocates of human security approaches, it is tempting to overstate the significance of this inclusion, and see it as marking a formal shift in EU security policy. Effective multilateralism has been a guiding principle since the 2003

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Strategy and remains the anchor for the EU’s global role. In a hierarchy of leitmotifs, it would appear to trump human security. On the other hand, the mention of human security ranks as more than a throwaway line, or a case of ‘fetishizing’ the textual record of the ESDP.22

As well as making explicit references to human security, the report draws extensively, and in more detail than in previous texts, on human security ideas, affirming the importance of respect for human rights, and the gender dimension of security.23 This is particularly notable in view of the fact that the European Council had previously fought shy of declaring a firm commitment to human security. In the delicate environment of intergovernmental policy-making the Council felt that, as the servant of EU member states, it had to reflect their wishes on foreign policy issues rather than anticipate them. This was particularly true after 2003 when the schism over the Iraq war marked a setback to collective policy-making. However, although the implementation report appears to mark a high point in the institutionalization of human security within the EU, little attention was actually given to conceptualizing it as a core narrative.

A shift towards human security was first proposed in 2004 by a study group that reported to Javier Solana, the High Representative.24 The group was composed of distinguished practitioners and academics who were nonetheless not the ‘usual suspects’ in studies of EU integration, but something of a ginger group. Its Barcelona Report proposed a human security doctrine, a 15,000-strong human security response force and a new legal framework for intervention as the key components of a security role for the non-territorial, non-state EU.

The Barcelona Report defines human security as representing a departure from the state as the referent of security, and towards an emphasis on protecting individuals and communities. While the authors endorse the CHS’s broad conceptualization of human security as designed ‘to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment’, they fall short of prescribing such a broad mandate. Instead, they emphasize the depth of threat and put the focus of security clearly on the ‘needs of people in severe insecurity’.25

A follow-up report at Madrid three years later, entitled *A European way of security*,26 pursued this deepening agenda and elaborated the concept of human security in greater detail. It also suggested ways to institutionalize it within the context of the ESDP. While the concept and its operational implications were challenged in some EU capitals as ‘too warm and fuzzy’,27 other members, such as

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27 As the Madrid Report made clear, there were two contradictory sets of criticisms: one was about the concept of human security, which was seen either as too soft, or as a cloak for a new European militarism; the other was about its relevance to the EU, claiming that it was too ambitious.
Finland, which used its presidency of the EU in 2006 to commission the Madrid Report, continued bilaterally to press for a more explicit normative focus within the ESDP, and for the EU to implement commitments on human rights and gender. As well as lobbying for human security within the Political and Security Committee, Finland also undertook practical measures such as piloting human security training for civilian and military personnel on ESDP missions.28

The European Parliament has also thrown its weight behind the shift to human security. In 2008, two parties in the Parliament proposed an amendment to the Committee of Foreign Affairs’ Kuhne Report on the implementation of the ESS, to include an emphasis on the concept of human security, with the objective of initiating a ‘a robust political mandate enabling it to act effectively in crises’.29 The amendment was narrowly defeated by twelve votes, due to blocking motions by opposition parties, enabling proponents of human security to claim a milestone in greater acceptance of the principle, despite the actual result of the vote.

Yet despite attempts to define human security and embed it within EU practice, a gap has persisted between the doctrinal and the institutional development of the ESDP. For example, while new units (such as the EU’s civil–military cell), and joint planning capabilities were set up, cooperation between them remained hampered by a lack of new thinking about how to combine civilian and military perspectives. A similar trap is evident in the foreign policy provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, including the new External Action Service, where institutional arrangements are likely to prevail over getting the conceptual design right.30

In contrast to the tentative moves by the European Council, the European Commission’s stance has been to promote human security explicitly. The use of human security has been invoked most frequently in speeches by the Commissioner for External Relations (RELEX) Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who has used the concept to stake out a normative position which defines a broad view of security linking freedom from want and freedom from fear. In 2005 she stated: ‘The idea is to put people, their human rights and the threats that they face at the centre of our policies. The EU has moved in this direction and I am determined to push it further.’31 A year later she explained: ‘The philosophy underlying the EU’s approach to security, as outlined in the Security Strategy, is that security can best be attained through development, and development through security. Neither is possible without an adequate level of the other. That’s why we focus on the holistic concept of human security.’32 The concept has been used to inform policies on small arms and light weapons, non-proliferation, mine action and human trafficking. Yet most often it is synonymous with initiatives on human rights.33

The Commission’s definition of human security located it differently from that of the UN, combining physical protection and material security, and siting it firmly within a crisis management as well as a conflict resolution policy frame. While the Commission committed itself to tackling the ‘root causes’ of conflict and vulnerability, the emphasis was less on underdevelopment per se and more on the integration of a development perspective into the EU’s foreign policy toolkit. Thus human security was an explicitly ‘political objective’ which found expression in several ways. It could be used, first, to combine short- and long-term policy responses; second, to blur distinctions between foreign and security policy, and between development, humanitarian and crisis management agendas; and third, to integrate commitments to agendas such as gender equality and human rights. Human security was not only a tool to mobilize the EU’s foreign policy to tackle underdevelopment and insecurity, but also a means by which to enforce cooperation between rival EU policy streams.

Internal pressure on the EU to articulate and justify its foreign policy ambitions, and to supply a narrative for the ESDP, became the strongest driver of a human security agenda. The spread and intensity of EU external intervention between 2003 and 2008 have seen European armies in African states, a naval force patrolling the coast of Somalia, EU monitors attempting to restrain Russian troops in the Caucasus, and more than 2,000 European lawyers, judges and administrators taking over large parts of the running of a new Balkan state in Kosovo. The cumulative budget for ESDP missions has passed the billion-euro mark. Such quantitative gains allow the EU to make the case that it is becoming more active in ensuring global security; but its increased presence has also led to calls for better explanations of how it sees this actoriness developing. A strategic narrative is sometimes seen as a technical exercise in improving operational coherence, sometimes as the keystone of a new European civilian–military culture. It involves more than just telling a convincing story about European foreign policy. It constitutes a rationale of why, when and where the EU acts autonomously, and it should serve to mobilize public and political will and resources. For some, it is a proxy for the (missing) grand narrative of the current European project itself. The perpetual ambiguity of the EU project in which the eventual intended outcome of integration remains unclear, demands a strategic narrative as a necessary staging post in defining the future of the polity.

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Lessons for the second generation of human security

The primary lesson of the UN experience with human security is that institutionalization cannot compensate for poor conceptualization. A broad human security perspective may appear useful in mandating a role in global security governance in the face of a blizzard of simultaneous threats. It may provide a narrative thread which justifies policies of intervention and the deployment of multiple tools of intrusion from military force to democracy promotion. A proliferation of human security programmes within different policy and institutional settings may appear to underwrite a commitment to a new approach to security. Even the patronage of powerful leaders—whether Kofi Annan in the UN, or Benita Ferrero-Waldner and even (tacitly) Javier Solana in the EU—is no guarantee of permanence or penetration. If institutionalization is not paired with a clear conceptualization, notably lacking in the UN case, then the concept quickly loses any meaning at all. Within the UN, human security became too many things to too many people. With breadth came fragmentation as security was diffused across a horizontally defined terrain, both literally and metaphorically. In emphasizing the horizontal spread of human security, and defining it as a response to threats, much detail has been lost.

A comparison of the UN and EU experiences suggests that the EU may be well positioned to implement and champion a human security agenda. So far, the EU has successfully positioned the concept as a viable strategic narrative for a supranational foreign policy: it has influential sponsors and is widely, if not unanimously, accepted across the membership. However, lessons from both experiences suggest that there is an inverse correlation between embedding the concept institutionalized and achieving a meaningful shift in the rhetoric and practice of security. Questions remain. How are human rights protected within a human security approach, and how are the two different? How does integrating human development change the way ‘hard security’ tools, including military force, are deployed? How do we take account of how individuals perceive and receive security rather than worrying exclusively about supply-side factors?

By ‘drilling down’ into the concept, the EU has the potential to introduce real change to the way security is practised: to work for the vulnerable, to change power relations by holding states and elites to account, and to address significant flaws in current peacebuilding models, particularly concerning legitimacy and the relationship between external and local forces. Such questions have been raised but have failed to dominate the human security debate during its initial phases, particularly within the UN. Instead, ‘runaway’ security has emerged, in which an increasing range of threats has come to define a form of uncurbed and unquestioning security. One particular consequence has been to raise valid charges about widespread securitization and a sense that human security is in Foucauldian terms biopower—another form of control over individuals, rather than control by individuals.

Ultimately, the UN track record reveals that tackling the linkages between different types of harm—between violence, deprivation, natural disaster and
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criminality—while an important aspect of a human security approach, may alone be insufficient to give the concept a cutting edge in providing sufficiently novel or smart policy solutions.

If the concept is ultimately to fare better within the EU than it has within the UN, the EU must, first, establish a clear conceptualization of human security and, second, articulate a specific political narrative for how human security will be used, in order to make plain how it is to be implemented in policy terms.

Clear conceptualization

In applying the lessons of the UN to the EU, the fragmentation of security risks producing the opposite of what the EU seeks to achieve in terms of coherence between different policy streams and policy-making processes. If human security means broadening the EU agenda to include issues such as fishing rights, as has recently been suggested, then the concept will quickly fade to irrelevance.37 At the same time, if the concept is used to focus the EU agenda only on conflict zones, it will leave out a vast range of non-violent harms which affect large numbers of people.

There are two possible examples for the EU to draw on in redressing the creeping fuzziness that has infected the UN discourse. First, a potential focus is suggested by the Barcelona and Madrid Reports, both of which reject the choices between broad and narrow, and hard and soft security, arguing for a combination approach rooted in what they call ‘crisis scenarios’. Definitional depth is added by framing the concept in terms of a set of interlinked and mutually reinforcing principles—which also serve as an operational framework—and, moreover, by insisting that a new range of tactical/institutional capabilities, ranging from personnel to planning, training and legal instruments, are integral to a human security approach. Thus, in the EU case, there are ways in which human security could be given a more concrete dimension, through training civilian and military personnel, through the introduction of human security audits by the European Parliament, and in new types of mission mandates.

A second way forward to conceptual depth and rigour might be found in a threshold-based definition of human security. Rather than viewing human security as a list of threats, all of which must at all times be considered security issues, the concept could instead be viewed in terms of a threshold, so that any threat in any location passing this threshold could become a security threat. All issues in all places would not have to be addressed; only those that become severe enough to warrant the ‘security’ label would be treated as such. This definition limits the inclusion of threats by their severity rather than their cause. Only the worst threats in any region, whatever their cause, are prioritized with the label of security. All others remain within their constituent disciplines and institutional structures, such as development, environmental regulation, or the legal protection of human rights.38

38 For details of the threshold definition, see Owen, ‘Human security’.
This articulation of human security specifically addresses the three problems that hampered the espousal of human security within the UN. It recognizes that human security is a precondition for human development, but not vice versa. People must first be secure from critical and pervasive threats to their vital core, whatever the cause, before the mechanisms of development can take root. Second, human rights abuses are only one category of potential human security threats, and most should be dealt with outside the security mandate. Some, however, in some locations, simply must be prioritized with the security label. Third, a threshold approach deals with conceptual overstretch by not allowing all threats in all places under every potential category of security to be prioritized. While there are infinite possible harms that could threaten an individual, there are only a certain number that critically and pervasively threaten the vital core of large numbers of people. It is these that academics must seek to understand, and that the international community must address with the resources appropriate to a security threat.

Clarity of intent

Defined in this way, human security offers an alternative to traditional national security narratives; but a second requirement is that the concept has to be accompanied by a political narrative which states its objectives more clearly: what is human security used for? Human security must be seen as both a goal and a means, both a strategic framework and a tactical doctrine; but in order to use it responsibly, advocates must be entirely clear on how the concept will be translated into practical action, and why it presents a better alternative to traditional approaches.

As yet, this clarity is far from evident in the EU case. The conclusion of the Barcelona Report was that the EU should promote human security on the basis of a triple rationale of morality, legality and enlightened self-interest. However, the self-interest argument is liable to create additional confusion in the light of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: is the EU protecting the streets of Madrid and London or engaged in a cosmopolitan project to treat foreigners in Kabul and Baghdad as if they were EU citizens? The answer is that it should and can do both; but the EU needs to link this juxtaposition of motive to a convincing human security account.

The concern is that, rather than delivering greater precision, the EU’s use of human security perpetuates ambiguity over both motives and methods. As used in the implementation report, the concept suggests a readiness to deploy robust (including military) measures combined with an agenda of material freedom, dignity and empowerment underpinned by political action. Yet it does not commit member states to any specific action. Compared with responsibility to protect (R2P), a human security agenda can be regarded as carrying no specific

39 A human security doctrine for Europe, p. 4.
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obligations and codifying no particular responsibilities. Without additional quali-
fication or specifications, the EU’s human security desire is more ‘normative than
positivist, more ideal than pragmatic’.41

The EU’s articulation suggests that human security is one of several guiding
themes, along with other procedural norms such as effective multilateralism or
good governance. As a concept, it informs everything but, at the same time, has no
regulatory power or operational traction, merely serving to pad out a pantheon of
worthy aims. Regarded like this, it appears to be a contingency concept, a conve-
nient discursive tool through which the EU inscribes for itself a role in global
security governance, at a moment when it is most propitious to do so. This is quite
different from ‘realising its potential to contribute to a global peace’,42 through
adopting human security as a framework which mobilizes but also regulates a
distinctive European foreign policy identity, and it risks directing the progressive
project of CFSP/ESDP down a dead end. This contingency resembles the turn
towards human or population security within new US military doctrine, which
sees it as a novel tactic that better enables American forces to defeat their enemies,
rather than as a fundamental reshaping of military doctrine.43

The issue of motives in a narrative of human security is related to the crisis
of interventionism and the globalization of western peace ideals. Legitimacy is
no longer necessarily guaranteed by a norm of effective multilateralism, by states
acting together. Multilateral engagement in Afghanistan has not of itself delivered
a functional legitimacy, beyond a procedural or formal sanctioning of interven-
tion. A state-building agenda which once looked more ethical in Afghanistan than
regime change in Iraq is being undermined on all sides: by a democratically weak
government, by declining local support for international actions and by squab-
bling among allies over burden-sharing.

To escape the policy trap which has snapped around state-building, to clarify
intent, re-establish trust and rebuild effectiveness, a human security narrative
has to make explicit how it can deliver a ‘post-liberal peace’ which privileges the
protection of individuals over national or bloc security as the ultimate goal of
security policy,44 and how it can do this via a new methodology of intervention,
which also privileges the capacity of people to decide their own future.

Vigorous debates about the development of ‘new’ peacebuilding capabilities,
such as the EU’s autonomous military capacity, miss an important and obvious
point: even without the use of force, all intervention disrupts sovereignty,
including that of individual rights; it imposes new forms of control and raises
questions of accountability. Whether it uses soldiers or lawyers, a human security
narrative of intervention must ultimately explain and justify this imposition, in

EU documents showcasing the gender and human rights aspects of ESDP carries the disclaimer that it does not
commit either EU institutions or member states: Mainstreaming human rights and gender into the European Security
and Defence Policy (Brussels: Council Secretariat, 2008).
42 A European way of security, p. 1.
43 Kaldor and Beebe, The ultimate weapon is no-weapon.
44 O. Richmond ‘Liberal peace transitions: a rethink is urgent’, www.openDemocracy.net, 19 Nov. 2009; S.
terms which not only suit the intervener but are credible to those on the receiving end.

Second-generation human security has to be more than an end state. It should be seen as a self-limiting and regulatory methodology, a set of checks and balances against the abuse and misuse of its own narrative of security provision, and a refocusing of the goals of security in favour of individual need.

If human security can be used in ways which challenge traditional security narratives of states, elite power and coercion to reframe security not just as a list of threats or wishes but as a whole new approach to how we address fear in foreign policy, then it will retain its critical edge, even as it is swept up into mainstream discourse. It will also go some way to meeting the requirements of a new paradigm of global security.