Opinion

# A Monopoly on Responsibility?[1]

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## Introduction

Many social scientists are engrossed in studying insecurity and the various attempts to harness it. It is for this reason that much attention is paid to causes of insecurity and strategies to ameliorate the effects, which clearly focus on the human factor. Wars and conflicts are a prime example of man-made insecurity, because they revolve around social, political and economic processes; human beings cause, fight and suffer in wars. And since wars constitute a substantial source of insecurity worldwide, they are a social phenomenon that deserves, and receives, meticulous scholarly attention, as illustrated by the numerous varieties of security- and conflict-oriented studies taught at universities around the globe.

Especially over the past two decades, manifold new notions and theories have emerged within these academic disciplines, a considerable number of which focus on the precarious relationship between states and their inhabitants. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda is considered to be one of the turning points in security thinking.[2] In the wake of the mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, it became obvious that states cannot always simply be considered the sole providers of security; in this particular case the state was the very source of insecurity by actively calling upon civilians to participate in the atrocities. The concept of 'state security', as the prevailing Realist paradigm prescribed, became more and more contested by many in academic, political and policy-making circles.[3]

This acknowledgement of individual or human security apparently prevailing over state security raised an important question: if a certain state cannot or does not want to provide security to its citizens, who, then, must bear this responsibility?

Since negligence is not a morally accepted option, the answer to that question signalled the inevitable need, at least on paper, for foreign assistance to address the insecurity of individuals and communities under threat. But this assistance was also meant to control spill-over effects and the spread of conflict to other regions, while in an increasingly

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[1] This article for a considerable part draws on findings from Martijn Dekker's forthcoming PhD dissertation, "Occupational Hazards", VU University Amsterdam 2013.

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[2] M.J. Faber, 'Human Security from Below; Freedom from fear and lifeline operations', M. den Boer & J. de Wilde (eds.) *The viability of Human Security. From concept to practice.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2008, pp. 172; M. Kaldor, *Human Security,* pp. 22; W. Bruggeman, 'Failing Global Justice and Human Security', M. den Boer & J. de Wilde (eds.) *The viability of Human Security. From concept to practice.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2008, pp. 51.

[3] M. Kaldor, *Human Security,* p. 56.

interconnected and mutually dependable world, failed or oppressive states can no longer be considered to be just a 'local population's Hobbesian nightmare', to quote Milliken and Krause.[4] The weakness of domestic institutions in a fragile state may provide fertile ground for criminal and terrorist groups, which justifies the "high-profile attention [for failing states] in recent years from both the scholarly and policy-making communities."[5]

Despite the understandable competition that flares up when war breaks out, the concept of the 'Responsibility to Protect' has emerged, meaning that the international community aims to intervene in intra-state conflicts as a neutral arbiter in order to protect the civilian population. In this article I argue that foreign interventions cannot be neutral and should not be organised solely as top-down security operations. Instead, such interventions should be informed by local circumstances, based on what the local population needs and complement bottom-up security initiatives already underway.

In a war situation, human security starts 'from below', with the most elementary forms of self-protection: boarding up your house, seeking shelter with your family, relocating to a neighbourhood that is predominantly inhabited by people of your own ethnicity or religion, forming your own militia, et cetera. Although these acts are all aimed at improving one's own security, they do not occur in a vacuum and, as such, they obviously influence the behaviour of other people. Foreign intervention in such a situation thus requires difficult political choices and cannot be based on neutrality, since the intervention troops simply become one of the parties involved in the armed conflict and not some impartial force that can remain above the various warring factions.

The intricate dynamics between foreign and local actors in armed conflict, and the intentional as well as unintentional effects they may have, will be illustrated below through two case studies – Iraq and Bosnia, respectively. Although these two conflicts obviously differ considerably, we can draw some general conclusions regarding issues that have to be taken into consideration prior to commencing a foreign intervention for the sake of providing security to a local population. Before considering the hazards of foreign involvement in armed conflicts, however, it is important to reflect upon the changing nature of war in general and the international response to it, which materialised in the form of the internationally accepted conceptual framework termed the 'responsibility to protect'.

## I. The Changing Face of War

In this day and age, inter-state wars have become relatively rare. In 2011, of the 37 active armed conflicts, 36 took place within states, while only one was an inter-state conflict.[6] This prevalence of intra-state or civil wars can roughly be traced back to the drastic changes in international politics that occurred in the early 1990s. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire, two prevailing ideas of what the post-Cold War political arena would be like emerged. One held that the new political reality would herald the coming of a Kantian[7] democratic peace, or "the end

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[4] J. Milliken & K. Krause, 'State Failure, Collapse, and Reconstruction', *Development and Change* 2002-33(5), p. 764.
[5] Ibid.
[6] L. Themnér & P. Wallensteen, 'Armed Conflict, 1946-2011', *Journal of Peace Research* 2012-49(4).
[7] I. Kant, *Zum Ewigen Frieden. Ein philosphischer Entwurf,* Stuttgart: Reklam 1976, p. 1795.

point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" as Fukuyama[8] famously wrote. Others, such as Snow[9] and Huntington[10], suggested that the bipolar world order coming to an end was the start of an increasingly chaotic and violent era.

In fact, a graphical representation[11] of the number of armed conflicts in the world, devised by the Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research, shows a slightly declining trend since the early 1990s.

Despite this trend, the occurrence of armed conflict as the ultimate manifestation of political struggle has remained, though some authors argue that the nature of conflicts did change. "New Wars" theory, advanced by Münkler[12] and most notably by Kaldor[13] became a principal theoretical paradigm to describe the dynamics of contemporary conflicts. According to New Wars theory, the novelty of modern-day conflicts, as compared to the more traditional inter-state wars that had been prevalent for the last few centuries[14], revolves around six main features.[15]

- Actors: wars are no longer being fought between states and their respective armies. Nowadays, there is always at least one non-state actor involved, and usually many of them – rebels, militants, terrorists, insurgents; these non-state actors can have many different names.

- Motives: in contrast to Von Clausewitz's definition of war as a "continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means"[16], contemporary wars are less about politics[17] than they are about improving financial or even social standing. Wars are increasingly becoming privatised and commercialised, through, for example, the involvement of private military companies and the steady power and influence of what is referred to as the military-industrial complex.[18] This motivational shift implies that some of the actors involved in wars have legitimate reasons for sustaining conflict, as opposed to ending it.

- Spatial context: while the occurrence of inter-state wars has declined, intra-state or civil wars have gained primacy. At the same time, failing or fragile states are considered a threat to global security. Paradoxically, wars are both more localised and globalised.

- Means: as technology advances, so does the available arsenal of weaponry. There is an increased use of highly specific pinpoint-targeting weapons systems through satellites

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[8] F. Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 1989-16, p.4.

[9] D. Snow, *Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1996.

[10] S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order,* London: Touchstone 1997.

[11] L. Themnér & P. Wallensteen, 'Armed Conflict, 1946-2011'.

[12] H. Münkler, *The New Wars,* Cambridge: Polity Press 2005.

[13] M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era,* Cambridge: Polity Press 2001.

[14] Examples of *traditional* wars, as opposed to *new* wars, are the so-called "cabinet wars" during the 17th and 18th centuries, the two *total* (or *world*) wars of the 20th century, and inter-state wars like the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and the first Gulf War.

[15] E. Newman, 'The New Wars' Debate', *Security Dialogue 2004*-35(2), pp. 173-189.

[16] C. von Clausewitz, *On War,* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth 1997.

[17] It must be noted, however, that politics continue to play an important role in armed conflict. The conflict currently taking place in Syria, for example, mainly revolves around a struggle for political power.

[18] I. Hossein-Zadeh, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006.

and unmanned drones. Simultaneously, however, rudimentary, rather indiscriminate weapons like improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers are used more and more, primarily by non-state actors.

-   Impact, human suffering: "violence is primarily directed against unarmed and unprotected civilians rather than against other warring parties".[19] Nowadays, between 85 and 90 percent of war victims are non-combatants.[20] The targeting of civilians is further exacerbated by the use of mass rape and ethnic cleansing as means of warfare.

-   Political economy: with the emergence of the non-state actor as a key player, the state is also no longer the sole sponsor of wars. Self-financing warlords and militant groups are prime examples of this phenomenon but, also of note, many terrorist groups are (partly) funded by rich individuals who seek to gain advantage – which may be political but just well, again, financial – from these groups' attacks. As noted above, the emergence of a war economy has drastic consequences for the continuation of conflicts, due to the financial interests some actors may have. Continuous conflicts in the Congo, for example, have enabled warlords to take control of diamond mines and other natural resources. In addition, humanitarian aid is often seized and traded by various armed groups - ironically providing an extra source of income.

## II. The Responsibility to Protect

Even though a new paradigm like human security pays lip service to a more individual-oriented, bottom-up approach to providing security, I would argue that the concept is very much rooted in traditional – one could even say Realist – (international) security theories, in the sense that it essentially remains a top-down approach in which states are responsible for providing security or, in case they fail to do so, are replaced by other (coalitions of) states.

The relevant responsibilities and consequences, as well as the circumstances that could precede foreign interventions were comprehensively discussed in "The Responsibility to Protect" (R2P), a report in which the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) proposed "the idea that sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe – from mass murder and rape, from starvation - but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states."[21]

This responsibility was earlier articulated by John Rawls in his Law of Peoples (1999) "[Although] peoples are to observe the duty of non-intervention", their "right to independence and self-determination is no shield from (…) coercive intervention by other peoples in grave cases [or human rights violations]". Furthermore, they are obliged "to assist other peoples living under unfavourable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime."[22] So, when gross human rights violations occur, or in the case of intra-state conflicts, i.e. when the state is either oppressively

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[19] M. Kaldor, *Human Security,* Cambridge: Polity Press 2008, p. 23.
[20] M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, p. 100.
[21] International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre 2001, p. viii.
[22] J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1999, pp. 37-8.

authoritarian or fragile, the international community can – and must, so argue Rawls and others – decide to (militarily) intervene.

R2P, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005, can be considered the formalisation of humanitarian interventions. Its being embedded in international law is the culmination of many attempts to justify the inevitable breach of state sovereignty. When humanitarian interventions, such as the NATO bombing campaigns on Serbia in 1999 – which were labelled as a humanitarian intervention afterwards – are executed without the consent of, and permission from, the United Nations Security Council, they lack legitimacy, which is why the R2P doctrine provides a framework for legal and legitimate operations in cases of large-scale human rights violations. The framework consists of three pillars: prevention, reaction, and rebuilding. Although R2P does not rule out a foreign military intervention as a last resort, emphasis is placed on the first pillar, prevention. Dialogue, diplomacy and economic or political sanctions are amongst the instruments that can be used to force states to improve their human rights record.

Although the R2P is hailed as a step forwards by many, there is also a considerable number of critics. On the one hand there are those who argue that foreign interventions are merely a form of neo-colonialism[23] or a means to pursue geo-political goals, disguised as humanitarian missions.[24] The moral obligation evoked by local security issues provides Western states with an imperative to intervene in a conflict, in order to create a more desirable political reality[25]. The invasion of Iraq is often named as an example of such accusations, since the country's vast amount of oil and the desire to control those reserves were thought to be the real reasons for the US-led intervention, rather than the deposition of brutal dictator Saddam Hussein. If interventions are indeed going to be abused in such a way, having a convenient legal justification would not be desirable at all.

A second group of critics consider formalisation of humanitarian interventions to be a step back. They argue that since force majeure – the last resort – is no longer a valid ground for immediate intervention in humanitarian crises due to formalisation of the rules and regulations, and due to the fact that the United Nations have become the official and sole arbiter on whether or not an intervention is considered legitimate, it will prove impossible to adequately respond to urgent situations, partly because of the "inevitable features of the way the UN does its collective business: compromise, inertia and avoidance of difficult issues."[26]

What is furthermore interesting about the R2P framework is that, despite the emphasis on human security, and the tendency ultimately to let this responsibility prevail over a respect for state sovereignty, the general idea remains that the state is responsible for its citizens' security. When a state fails to provide human security and, after unsuccessful dialogue and sanctions, an intervention is initiated, the idea is to reach out directly to the people in need. This is to be accomplished either by assisting the state's own (developing)

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[23] A. Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003.

[24] N. Chomsky, 'Humanitarian Intervention', *Boston Review* December 1993/January 1994, http://bostonreview.net/BR18.6/chomsky.html (accessed 23 July 2012).

[25] D. Chandler, 'Human Security: The Dog That Didn't Bark', *Security Dialogue 2008*-39(4), pp. 427-438.

[26] A. Roberts, 'Humanitarian War: Military Intervention and Human Rights', *International Affairs* 1993-69(3), p. 443.

security institutions or by completely replacing them, as did the UN mandated International Force for East Timor (INTERFET).

Whether foreign forces are to assist the state's own weak institutions or to completely replace them, the intervention in both situations aims at a restoration of a centralised security apparatus, mimicking the conventional situation in which the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the provision of human security. This is exactly why foreign interventions have proven to be rather difficult to successfully execute[27]: restoring stability and a centralised security apparatus in a failing state requires an enormous amount of manpower and the available means are often insufficient to do all that is needed. If we look at Iraq, for example, we can see that a sectarian war raged in 2006, in which approximately 3000 Iraqi civilians, 175 Iraqi security forces, and 60 US troops were killed each month, despite the presence of more than 140,000 US troops alone.[28]

What complicates foreign interventions even further is the chaos that characterises intra-state wars. The situation on the ground, what we can call the *security fabric,* in such instances, is typically an anarchical and rather combustible patchwork of militias, rebel groups, warlords and other irregular armed forces, with ad hoc and fleeting alliances. In order to refrain from having to deal with this intricate hotchpotch of local actors as much as possible, external forces will need to resort to generalisations.

Therefore, traditionally, three categories of people are distinguished in war situations: perpetrators, victims and (innocent) bystanders. This is, however, a grave oversimplification of human behaviour in such situations, since it neglects the *agency* of all people involved, most notably the apparent 'victims' and bystanders. Despite the financial gains or improvement in social status some actors seem preoccupied with, seeking physical security for oneself and one's relatives and friends remains the first and foremost priority in a violent conflict. That is why the behaviour of the actors must be viewed from a human security perspective; human security starts and ends with individual human beings.

Despite the popularity of the so-called "hearts and minds campaigns", local people are not only the subject and on the receiving end of such operations but are also actively engaged in trying to win the hearts and minds of the foreigners. Cooperation with the foreign troops can be beneficial, and not only with regard to increasing sales figures on the bazaar; a friendly relationship can also improve the foreigners' willingness to provide protection[29]. In addition to soft forms of cooperation, locally organised groups may also consider it an advantage to (temporarily) ally with foreign troops to fight a rival group, which is then dubbed a common enemy, or they may consider the foreigners to be a threat to their security and refuse to lay down their weapons.

Most human security scholars still hang on to the idea of the state as the main security provider, even while presenting their theory as a shift away from neo-realist security thinking and thus a departure from traditional state security. This has led to local

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[27] M. Dekker & M.J. Faber, 'Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Foreign Protectors', G. Molier & E. Nieuwenhuys (eds.), *Reconstruction after Violent Conflicts,* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2009, pp. 149-178.
[28] J.A. Baker III, et al. *The Iraq Study Group Report,* New York: Vintage Books 2006.
[29] M. Dekker & M.J. Faber, *Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Foreign Protectors.*

initiatives being either neglected or considered counterproductive to the main aim of restoring or bolstering a central state apparatus and the associated monopoly on the use of force. This state-centric propensity is exemplified by the policy-oriented and problem-solving tendencies inherent in human security thought, which accepts the state-centric concept virtually 'uncritically', working with existing political and institutional settings, as well as prevailing power relations. It constitutes an important shortcoming, since tackling the root problems of insecurity often requires out-of-the-box thinking and fundamental, societal transformations.[30]

Solutions for human insecurity are devised in the hallways and conference rooms of cosmopolitan institutions like the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union and others, like NATO. Although the R2P doctrine is an admirable attempt to update the prevailing Westphalian sovereignty paradigm to a 21st-century universalistic moral obligation to protect every human being on the planet in spite of (arbitrary) state borders, it remains rather doubtful whether a cosmopolitan approach would be an effective answer to elusive phenomena like new wars and international terrorism.

Foreign interventions in intra-state conflicts are fraught with difficulties. Calling upon the R2P concept when people and communities are under grave threat may seem like a worthy enterprise but it wrongly suggests that foreign powers, in whatever coalition, can simply intervene as neutral arbiters in the contemporary chaotic civil wars to end the hostilities and restore order. To illustrate this, I have selected two wars in which intervention played a decisive role. I will specifically focus on the role of initiatives instigated by local actors.

## III. Cases

### III.1 Iraq

The seemingly chaotic violence that erupted in post-Saddam Iraq in 2004, approximately one year after the US-led invasion, is a clear example of how the actions of local individuals and communities – *human security from below* – can drastically influence the overall security situation. After the rather traditional war in which the US troops fought the Iraqi army or what was left of it, a 'new war' erupted, in which most of the guerrilla-style fighting was done by non-state actors. Since the hundreds of thousands of foreign troops were not able to quell the ongoing cycle of violence, this situation illustrates how the agency of individuals in war situations must not be underestimated and should therefore be the point of departure for security analyses. Ultimately it leads to the implicit conclusion that foreign forces who are caught up in an armed conflict are obliged to unambiguously position themselves in the intricate constellation of armed groups and make the difficult choice of taking sides with one or more local communities. Indeed, impartiality is impossible.

Despite the numerous clashes between Iraqi 'insurgents' and foreign forces, actors that represent human security from below in some parts of Iraq – mostly tribes and clans – evidently also cooperated with US and UK troops (the representatives of human security from above) in a shared effort to fight a common enemy: al-Qaeda. When the US troops decided to side with the Sunni tribes that had fought al-Qaeda earlier, they followed the

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[30] E. Newman, 'Critical Human Security Studies', *Review of International Studies* 2010-36(1), pp. 77-94.

famous adage of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."[31] It is, however, not only opportunism that leads to (temporary) cooperation. Sometimes the dramatic consequences of war have created such a change in reality on the ground, that competition, or even resistance, has become futile, since the interests of all those involved no longer differ very much, which realisation results in a certain stability. It is obviously rather doubtful whether this temporary cooperation, characterised by the absence of violence, will lead to a sustainable post-conflict environment, since it is based on mono-ethnic neighbourhoods and regions as well as bolstered by the presence of a foreign intervention force.

In his book "The Sherriff of Ramadi", former Navy SEAL Dick Couch writes about the cooperation between US soldiers and local forces, and how this proved vital in the fight against al-Qaeda in the Anbar province. It was only after the mutual recognition of having a common enemy that an alliance was forged between the SEAL's commander and a local tribe leader, Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha – who is the 'sheriff' in this story. When they started fighting side by side, al-Qaeda could be defeated.[32] On their own, both the locally stationed US contingent and the so-called Awakening Councils controlled by the sheikh could probably not have changed the situation on the ground in any significant way, but their interaction created momentum for change and turned out to be the decisive factor in 'stabilising' the situation in Iraq, at least for the time being.

Indeed, the sizeable increase in US army manpower stationed in Iraq - the famous US "Surge", which was considered a human security operation by initiator General Petraeus - was relatively successful in bringing more security not just because of the increase in manpower. Said to be inspired by the events in Ramadi, Petraeus also took the lead in one other decisive development: strongly encouraging improved interaction with local security initiatives. "We got down at the people level and are staying,"[33] Petraeus said in a 2007 interview. "Once the people know we are going to be around, then all kinds of things start to happen."[34]

Another reason for the relative calm in the wake of the Surge is related to the changed composition of cities and regions. Although Petraeus indicated that many locals in different neighbourhoods in Baghdad were increasingly helpful in gathering intelligence, it should be emphasised that most of these neighbourhoods had already been ethnically cleansed to a considerable extent after a bloody cycle of violence (Cockburn 2006, Kukis 2006, Parker and Hamdani 2006). As it thus turned out, with most of bloodshed already over and the conflicts within neighbourhoods already fought, the aims and aspirations of both the human security providers from above and those from below did not differ that much anymore, since the quarters had already been cleansed from internal enemies and were thus considered relatively stable and secure. In other words, as soon as the actors from both levels agreed upon what should be done to maintain security, the foreign troops found their short-term strategy of bringing stability became successful; the absence of violence was the first priority, even if mono-ethnic neighbourhoods were far

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[31] M. Dekker & M.J. Faber, *Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Foreign Protectors.*
[32] D. Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi,* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press 2008.
[33] *NYPost, 20 March 2007,*
http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_it_working_AmCGSLY7bSnolGv
84xcyWI
(accessed 29 September 2012).
[34] Ibid.

from an ideal situation, since it will be extremely difficult for original inhabitants to return to their homes.

Another telling example of this observation was related by Gian P. Gentile, a lieutenant colonel in the US army and commanding officer of a reconnaissance squadron in Ameriyah, a neighbourhood that has seen a lot of violence. Gentile writes that he was ordered to pacify the neighbourhood in 2006.[35] Operation Together Forward II, as the operation was named, was geared towards providing human security and to putting an end to the ongoing cycle of violence in order to enable the Iraqi government to develop its own capabilities to deal with the situation.

The first task for Gentile was to clamp down on militants that were operating, as well as hiding, in the area. When, after a considerable time, it indeed became quiet and stable in the neighbourhood and the number of killings decreased, Gentile found out that it was not only his patrols that were making the situation more secure. The number of murdered Shi'ites mostly decreased dramatically because there were hardly any Shi'ites left in the neighbourhood.[36] The Sunnis that remained were as keen on maintaining stability as the US troops were, so there was no longer any reason for resistance; the initiatives by the actors from below themselves had gruesomely but decisively changed the situation in the neighbourhood in what can be referred to as a zero sum game.

## III.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina

In December 1995, three years after a bloody war broke out in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a peace agreement was signed in the US city of Dayton. Although the Dayton agreement seemingly reflects the post-war realities on the ground and the ambitions of sub-state communities by confirming the existence of three separate nations in the country – *Bosniaks* (or Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats – the question was how to take into account the fact that these communities were not spread evenly across the Bosnian territory and certainly not neatly within clearly distinguishable borders. Indeed, nowadays ethnicity plays an essential role in all decision-making processes, even at the municipal level. Although this fragmentation – based on people's tendency to feel more secure within their own (ethnic) community – continues to lead to problems, the Bosnian government aims to establish and strengthen a sense of national identity over time, outweighing the sub-national identities.

The current fragmentation of Bosnian society dates back to the years following the break-up of Yugoslavia. In the various wars that broke out all over the Balkans in the early nineties, the pan-Yugoslav identity of people gave way to national identities – (Catholic) Croats, (Muslim) Bosnians, (Orthodox) Serbs, and others. These nationalities were, however, not confined to specific territories and for a considerable part spread out over other states in the former Yugoslavia. It led to the phenomenon of, for example, Bosnian Serbs and Croat *Bosniaks* – sizable minorities of such combined identities in, mostly, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. With nationalism rising these minorities were considered severe threats to the unity and security of the newly independent states. Although the wars were not religious conflicts, the religions of the various sub-communities did become an important characteristic in defining them.

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[35] G. Gentile, 'A Soldier in Iraq', *International Herald Tribune,* 28 September 2007, New York.
[36] Ibid.

Especially in Eastern Bosnia, what is now called the *Republika Srpska*, a pan-Bosnian identity is still far from developed. This part of Bosnia is populated by Serbs but despite the vicious ethnic cleansing campaign the Bosnian Serbs initiated to get rid of *Bosniaks* living in Eastern Bosnia, there are still several dozens of mostly *Bosniak* villages situated in the region, many of which still bear the scars of the war – Srebrenica being the infamous worst case, after a genocide took place there in July 1995 in which more than eight thousand men and boys from the town and surrounding villages lost their lives. The fact that this genocide took place despite the presence of a battalion of Dutch UN troops is a tragic illustration of a mismatch between *human security from above* and that from *below,* despite a tacit agreement between Dutchbat and the local militias about a prospective form of cooperation.

The shared characteristic of the majority of Srebrenica's inhabitants in 1995 was that they were Muslims living in a part of Bosnia mostly inhabited by Serbs, which was also the very reason they were attacked by the Bosnian Serb army. The *Bosniak* security community's members, in particular their militias, were temporarily successful in defending areas under their control but in 1993 they were seriously threatened with annihilation. The Bosnian national government decided to rebrand the various militias as an official division of the national army, trying to transform the conflict into a more traditional war between standing armies, but this attempt at providing human security from above ended up failing.[37] The locals and their militias were mostly left to fend for themselves.

At the end of February 1993 the Bosnian Serb forces were still closing in on the city and, despite emergency aid droppings, the situation in the enclave was deteriorating. On 11 March a small UN convoy managed to reach Srebrenica with General Philippe Morillon, then commander of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), amongst them, in order to inspect the developing humanitarian disaster in the enclave. The local *Bosniaks* themselves, who feared they would soon fall prey to the Bosnian Serb troops and felt abandoned by their own government and the international community at large, then tried to force the United Nations to protect them against the Bosnian Serbs. The *Bosniak* population basically took Morillon hostage and pressured him to promise the gathered crowd of refugees: "From now on you are under protection of the international community."[38]

The UN then strengthened the self-established security zone by creating a so-called *safe area* with borders marked by UN observation posts. When subsequently three Dutch battalions took their turn in the safe area from January 1994 until July 1995, succeeding a Canadian unit, the refugee community hoped the Dutch would stay put and protect the people, since the safe area was largely demilitarised, at the request of both the Serbs and the UN, and the local militias, led by Naser Oric, would be unable to fight off the Bosnian Serbs by themselves if the safe area were to be attacked.[39]

A month after already having conquered one of the Dutch battalion's observation posts, on 3 June 1995, the Serbs launched a full-on attack against the enclave. The *Bosniak* fighters tried to fight back but the Dutch troops refrained from helping them and engaging in a battle with the Serbs, even though their mandate allowed them to respond

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[37] M. Dekker & M.J. Faber, *Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Foreign Protectors.*
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

to such a blatant breach of international agreements. When Serbian general Mladic entered Srebrenica on 11 July the UN safe area had officially come to an end. In the following days, the Serb troops, actively assisted by the Dutch troops, started deporting the thousands of refugees that were huddled together in and around the Dutchbat compound in Potocari.[40] Before deporting them, however, the Serb troops separated the men and boys from the women and young children. The latter group were by and large transported to a location close to *Bosniak*-controlled territory but virtually all of the men and boys were taken to various locations in the vicinity of Srebrenica where they were executed and dumped in mass graves.

The history of the 'UN safe areas' that were established in Bosnia Herzegovina to protect the *Bosniak* population from the Bosnian Serbs shows the precarious relationship between *human security from above* – Dutchbat – and *from below*, and how ignoring the latter can have horrendous consequences. Ultimately, insufficiently equipped, mandated and motivated UN troops –inadequate provision of human security from above – combined with the substantial disarmament of local fighters, which took away the already limited ability of the *Bosniak* militias to provide human security from below, had disastrous consequences for thousands of men and boys. Moreover, the only safe place in Potocari was the UN compound. During the war all parties, including the Serbs, considered these compounds sanctuaries. In the end, however, the Dutch themselves assisted the Serbs with the deportation of the Muslims, in particular by ordering the Muslim men and boys to leave the UN-compound and handing them over to the Serbs.

## *Concluding Remarks*

The aforementioned cases clearly show the advantage of hindsight. It must therefore be emphasised that making a thorough analysis of the situation on the ground while the conflict is still raging remains an arduous task. Still, I believe that these examples of particular incidents in Iraq and Bosnia illustrate that *human security from below*, the agency of the people who are subjected to war situations, is not only an important element of any analysis of a given security situation but should in fact be the point of departure.

In Iraq it was clear that the foreign troops were most definitely not the only actors in control, shaping the circumstances. At the very least their influence was overestimated, and when violence eventually decreased in certain areas this was often due to the fact that most of the struggles between the competing communities had already been fought. However gruesome the consequences may have been, the various communities had accomplished a certain sense of *human security from below*, indeed by cleansing their respective *security zones* from those who did not fit in the *security community*. The fact that the US troops eventually managed to pacify hitherto volatile areas and provide human security from above by maintaining a stable and non-violent status quo was thus mostly possible because actors from below had already acted decisively.

In Srebrenica the influence of the foreign troops was crucial, since they were supposed to protect a vulnerable group of people who were threatened with annihilation. By partly demilitarising the enclave – as was agreed in an official treaty between the Bosniak general Halilovic and the Serb general Mladic, in the presence of UNPROFOR – the Dutch troops did not deny the local *Bosniak* fighters the chance to defend themselves and their community completely – small weapons were not confiscated – but obviously the

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[40] M.J. Faber, *Srebrenica. De genocide die niet werd voorkomen.* Kampen: Uitgevery Ten Have 2002.

*Bosniaks* were outmanned and outgunned by the Bosnian Serb troops that were closing in on the enclave.

From the moment that Srebrenica was declared a "safe area" and *human security from below* was evidently not a viable option since the local fighters were unable to keep the area safe on their own – nor were they asked to, in fact – providing *human security from above* should have become the main priority of the Dutch battalion, either alone or in collaboration with the poorly armed *Bosniak* fighters. In case of a Serb attack on the enclave, which would be a violation of agreements and UN resolutions, the required security operation could only have worked either by matching the promise of providing security with the proper means, or, in case this was not achieved, by allowing the refugees, and in particular the Muslim men and boys as the most vulnerable group, to enter and remain on the UN compound, which was their last resort. Neither of these options was considered and this refusal to provide human security from above provided the Serbian regular and irregular fighters with the opportunity to commit genocide.

In war situations, security is the main priority. Ultimately, if security is improved, it does not matter whether it came from above or from below. It is for this reason that initiatives on both levels – *from above* and *from below* – must always be taken into consideration and must be complementary in order to effectively provide *human security*. International organisations like the UN, NATO and the AU do not have a monopoly on protection, nor do they have the sole responsibility for it, since they are not the only party that is able to provide protection. This leads to the evident observation that neutrality is not an option when it comes to engaging in an armed conflict and that such an engagement requires tough political choices. Since foreign interventions do not take place in a vacuum but interact with intricate dynamics on the ground, they may well exacerbate and prolong the violence, and as such they may only be initiated after it is made thoroughly clear what would be the desired outcome and even then as a last resort, despite the perceived moral obligation of ending the horror of armed conflict, which horrors have become even more visible thanks to advanced technologies.

Any operations undertaken under the banner of the Responsibility to Protect should always be tailored to the needs of the local population and, importantly, be complementary to local initiatives to improve security. Security demands a shared commitment of all actors involved.