

To what extent and in what ways is 'humanitarianism as securitisation' legitimate?

The terms of reference for International Security Studies discourse have expanded exponentially in the post-Cold War world. Arguably the transformation from a bipolar to a unipolar hegemonic paradigm is the key defining feature that academics and policy makers alike have sought to grapple with. This is represented by a clear shift away from the traditional strategic discourse that has been in place from the end of World War II until the end of the Cold War, specifically a very narrow conceptualisation of military power constrained by the balance of power maxim. Walt illustrates this well when he states that 'security studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use and control of military force' (1991: 212). In an increasingly interconnected globalised world though such a constrained view of security is no longer seen as appropriate, primarily as it is too western centric and state orientated in its approach. An indication of how different parts of the world think about security is illustrated by Ayoob, who points out that the less developed world, or global south, is primarily concerned with internal rather than external threats (1997).

In order to examine the question of the legitimacy of humanitarianism as securitisation this paper will begin by providing an overview of the understanding of humanitarianism as a concept before moving onto examine security and the securitisation process. The arguments illustrated will show that humanitarianism, which is also referred to as emancipation in the literature, has little practical reality in the world at the moment as a concept in its own right. However, by reconceptualising humanitarianism as a sector of security it can be seen as having a legitimate role to play within security studies (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998 and Watson 2011). The extent of the legitimisation will be provided via an assessment of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, with reference to the associated analysis of the response to the conflicts in Libya and Syria.

Humanitarianism is in many ways a nebulous term which lacks rigid conceptual boundaries and is able to be manipulated depending on the desired endgame of the external actor utilising the terminology (Chimni 2000). The supplementation of humanitarian concerns to the justification for the 2003 Iraq War illustrates this point well (Heinze 2006). Even R2P is not immune from challenges that it is open to manipulation for individual states political ends, with the on-going arguments regarding the intervention in Libya (Bydoon 2012 & Findlay 2011).

‘We should be wary of a situation where human security approaches might be co-opted by, or quarantined within a realist-cum-traditional framework, whose assumptions remain fundamentally intact, along with the policy and political structures they have supported’ (Burke 2001: 222).

Therefore, it can be said that for humanitarianism to have any utility its meaning needs to be tied down so that abuse from either state or non-state actors can be prevented (Watson 2011). Watson (2011) goes on to posit that in order to provide a meaningful context for humanitarianism then a reconceptualization is needed to place humanitarianism as a sector of securitisation, alongside the five sectors originally proposed by the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998: 27). Not only does this enable humanitarianism to gain structure for analytical debate but it also addresses some critical gaps present in securitisation theory (Watson 2011). This is not much of a surprise given that there are significant parallels between the evolution and characteristics of the humanitarianism and securitisation debates. Consider the strands of debate mentioned above and the parallels with and the arguments of Ole Waever that security’s conceptual fluidity encourages stakeholders to use it for specific self-serving purposes (1995).

It is important not to confuse humanitarianism with humanitarian intervention. This paper asserts that humanitarianism is the umbrella concept which is made up of humanitarian intervention, humanitarian assistance, R2P and human security. Though the lines of differentiation between intervention and assistance operations, traditional the preserve of civilian NGOs, are blurring due to the increased acceptance that when an issue breaches the criteria of exceptional measures, a military response is not only normal but also the only real option in terms of the logistics needed (Weiss and Campbell 1991). At the broader end of the scale is the developing concept of human security. The United Nations states that,

‘human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode into violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons - it is a concern with human life and dignity’ (UNDP 1994: 22).

Edward Luck raises challenges to whether human security only provides a way of enhancing thinking about non-traditional security, as opposed to the practical application as demonstrated by R2P, and as such whether it should be viewed separately (2008). Although this is counter argued by claims that despite some empirical differences it can be said that R2P and human security are the same

(Kerr 2013). However, it should be noted that whilst R2P involves a diplomatic process it is still ultimately a method to enable military action in a state's internal affairs. As the United Nations provides the ultimate guarantee of security within in the international system as it is the only legal legitimiser of actions, which is ironic as the United Nations is also the guarantor of the sovereign state. However, it should be realised that the United Nations, and the Security Council, has its primary reference object as the nation-state. Indeed, it is argued that the Security Council exists as a body only to ensure that the interests of the "major" powers are taken into account before any action is undertaken on behalf of the wider international community (Mayall 2000). Therefore, whether R2P remains statist and doesn't adequately embrace the development of a global civic society based on the premise of human security is open to debate.

Robert Cox holds a well formed notion that security is a contested concept (1981). However, security in its stipulative form is uncontested and it means the absence of threats, although there is no distinction between being safe and feeling safe. This is important to comprehend as an individual, group or state may be safe but feel insecure, and likewise be insecure but feel safe. Definition is further confused once the subjective nature of security is realised, and that the security of governments are not necessarily aligned with the security of the people that they represent (Amouyel 2006). Hence, the conceptualisation of security revolves around three key questions, as illustrated by Peter Hough (2008): Security for Whom? Security from What? Who provides Security? This means that the definition of security is fluid and able to be adapted to suit the individual perspective and the argument they are pursuing.

The core split is between traditional and non-traditional approaches. The traditional viewpoint, Realism, answers the 3 key questions, as the state, external threats from other states and the military, and it is observed that 'Realism has been a theory of the powerful, by the powerful, for the powerful' (Booth 2007: 158). This paper will make only limited reference, in terms of the origins of emancipation, to Realism as the notions of humanitarianism and securitisation are concerned with the evolving non-traditional approaches. These non-traditional approaches focus on broadening and deepening the concept of security to include diverse referent objects, threats and security providers.

Predominantly two key schools of thought exist within the non-traditional approaches, the Copenhagen School and the Welsh School. This paper contends that neither school is able to deal with the question satisfactorily on its own, however, with a reconceptualization and bringing together of the two schools then humanitarianism as securitisation can be seen as legitimate. Such a move is possible as both concepts of security stem from the origins of the broadening debate, in

which authors such as Ashley (1981) and Herz (1976) utilised the flexibility of Morgenthau's (1978) ideas to incorporate humanist, some might say Kantian, principles into realist thinking. This began the evolutionary process that led to discourse on the broadening and deepening nature of security away from the traditional military statist view and also the emancipatory ideals of a global society. Furthermore, despite the epistemological differences between the two schools of thought Ole Waever asserts that the two schools can be complimentary, which provides not only the scope for the legitimisation of humanitarianism as securitisation but also implies that such theorising would be a positive move (Floyd 2007a).

It should also be realised that there is disagreement within the schools. For example, the notion of deepening is often misconstrued within the security debate. Several commentators argue that it is the expansion of security to include referent objects other than the state. Indeed Roland Paris states 'By deepening, I mean that the field is now more willing to consider the security of individuals and groups, rather than focusing narrowly on external threats to states' (Paris 2001: 97). The other side of the argument develops on security as being a derivative idea that argues that deepening relates to uncovering the underlying political theories that are influencing and shaping the security debate (Booth 2005). Therefore, Paris's notion of deepening is actually part of the broadening sphere and illustrates the problem of language within security studies. Furthermore, this clearly sets broadening as a function of deepening, in that security can only be broadened within the constraints of the underlying political theory (Booth 2007).

In order to demonstrate that humanitarianism as securitisation is a legitimate concept we will focus first on the Copenhagen School and its approaches and views, before moving onto highlight the challenges posed by the Welsh School. Using the reconceptualization approach of Floyd (2007b) and Watson (2011) we will then illustrate that humanitarianism is applicable to the Copenhagen School. An analysis of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle will be used to highlight the arguments raised.

The Copenhagen School is at the heart of the modern security debate and is synonymous with the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever. They developed three conceptual tools to facilitate analysis of the study of security (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998). The first two concepts stem from the work of Buzan and are the sectors of security - military, political, economic, societal and environmental (Buzan 1991: 116-134) - and regional security complex (Buzan 1991: 186-229), while the last concept stems primarily from the work of Waever and is securitisation theory (Floyd 2007a). It is the later concept that needs further clarification at this point.

The key aspect of securitisation theory is that it is a speech act, which means that an issue becomes securitised when it is labelled as such. By labelling an issue in such a way the provider of security claims the right to use extraordinary measures to secure the referent object from the existential threat, which has the effect of moving the issue out of the realms of normal politics (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998: 26). Whilst there is significant consternation as to what constitutes a legitimate referent object it is the arguments that surround extraordinary measures that provoke the most controversy. For example, what developments warrant the implementation of extraordinary actions, what type of action should be taken, how it should be implemented and by whom (Watson 2011). As such concerns regarding the legitimacy of possible referent objects provide more of a sideshow, which is indicative of acceptance that the state, or even a regional societal group, should not have a privileged place (Watson 2011).

We have already stated that perceptions of security can differ depending on the referent object and this is the driving factor behind the development of securitisation theory. As Peter Hough points out this has substantive real world significance as securitisation of a range of issues forces governments to prioritise which issues are part of the security nexus, and which present the most immediate threat (2008). This prioritisation process is an essential part of securitisation, as Balzacq posits security is not an objective condition but rather a process that takes place through 'sustained strategic practice aimed at convincing a target audience to accept, based on what it knows about the world, the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it' (2005: 173).

However, there are three critical gaps in securitisation theory that prevent it from being able to deal with humanitarianism as a legitimate concept (Watson 2011). Firstly, that it only allows for the state or societal referent objects, to the exclusion of the individual (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998). Scope for manoeuvre is provided in the realisation that 'attempts have been made to construct all of humankind as a security referent...although this does not mean it will not become more attractive in the future as international circumstances change' (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998: 36). The second problem with securitisation theory is that it relies on democratic forms of governance (Wilkinson 2007). In the modern globalised world it should be immediately clear that any theory that only allows for a Westphalian view of the world is constrained, however, there have been arguments that there is greater compatibility with non-democratic forms of governance than is initially clear (Vuori 2008). The final gap in securitisation theory comes from the reliance of having a clear and sharp distinction between normal and emergency measures (Rasmussen 2001). Considering the Copenhagen School raise the idea of institutionalism within securitisation there is

inherent acceptance within the theory that there are issues of security which do not meet the level required for exceptionality (Stritzel 2007).

The issues that surround the constitution of exceptional measures attract significant debate and provide for some of the most stringent challenges to securitisation theory, and as we are primarily concerned with securitisation in this paper we will now focus on this area. The criticism is on multiple levels which range from whether an issue is exceptional or not, to criticism about the speed and breath of implementation once a decision for action has been taken (Watson 2011). For example, in Syria there has been increasing pressure for a US led intervention in the light of possible chemical weapons usage by both the government and rebel forces (BBC 2013, Corera 2013 and Tattersall 2013). Conversely the two years it has taken to get to this stage is seen as too long and an earlier intervention is seen as being able to have averted such catastrophes (Findlay 2011). Meanwhile proponents argue that it is only the presence of chemical weapons that has raised the issue from normal to exceptional. How such a conflict which has seen massive casualties and widespread displacement can be considered normal is addressed by the increasing institutionalisation of threat (Watson 2011). Threats that would be considered to be humanitarian make up a substantial part of this institutionalisation, which is highlighted by the plethora of bureaucratic agencies that exist to respond to such threats. The basic premise of the concept is that if an institution exists to tackle a problem then the problem becomes unexceptional and thus remains in the normal political sphere (Watson 2011). The overall effect of the process is to achieve a much higher standard for the emergency measures threshold to be breached (Watson 2011). Furthermore, that this is the case should not be a surprise as Abrahamsen highlights the process for the securitisation of a given issue is 'gradual and incremental and an issue can move along a continuum of risk/fear without ever reaching the stage of "existential threat" where it merits "emergency action"' (2005: 71).

The controversy of what is an exceptional measure demanding action due to proximity of threat is addressed, in humanitarian, terms by R2P principle (ICISS 2001). R2P is an important development within the sphere of humanitarianism as securitisation, not because it provides for clearer analysis and helps to reinforce the interconnectivity of the two concepts but rather as it forces us to look at what makes up the concept of humanitarianism. This paper contends that there are, and correctly so, explicit differences between humanitarian intervention and humanitarian assistance due to the issue of consent (Finnemore 2004). Humanitarian intervention in its most simplistic form is concerned with 'the use of force to prevent the abuse of human rights' (Wheeler 2000: 1-2). Mary Kaldor goes further and attributes the legitimacy for the use of force as being military intervention

by a state (2007). It should be immediately clear that once more we find ourselves theorising about the narrow conception of security and the use of military force within in a state-centric Westphalian paradigm. If we look at the example of Libya it is apparent that the intervention undertaken was non-consensual and that the actors involved are militaries of sovereign nation states. Humanitarian assistance is in the vast majority of cases is a consensual act, whereby one state requests assistance from other states, such as the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the response by Canada and the United States (Watson 2011). However, this is still largely concerned with the actions of states and hence does not represent the general broadening theme being argued by humanitarianism as securitisation proponents.

In this model then R2P is effectively an amalgamation of the intervention and assistance strands of humanitarian actions. This means that R2P is a legitimiser for states to take action in other states. In short it still represents a narrow concept of security but with the shift in language that represents the transition of sovereignty from territorial based recognition to a more conditional form based on the responsibility to protect (Chatham House 2011, Evans 2008 and ICISS 2001). Advocates contend that expanding sovereignty in this manner raises human rights an equal footing and makes traditional objections on the basis of non-interference redundant (Evans & Sahnoun 2002). Furthermore, it allows for a bridging of the gap between the narrow humanitarian strands to the wider all-encompassing concept that is human security (Evans 2006, King and Murray 2001, Paris 2001 and Chandler 2008).

R2P achieves this by defining the parameters of its scope by reference to four crimes – genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The link between normal and emergency measures comes in how transgression of these crimes is met. R2P provides for a sliding scale of coercive action which takes the form of three pillars – the protection responsibility of the state, international assistance for capacity building and the timely and decisive response (Carnegie Council 2012). It is only the final pillar that calls for a traditional humanitarian intervention utilising military force and, furthermore, that before any deployment of coercive military force is undertaken it has to satisfy five criteria – just cause, right intention, final resort, proportional means and reasonable prospect (Chatham House 2011). Consequently, R2P is seen as the result of a progressive process and only resorts to the use of coercive military action when other avenues have expired (Chatham House 2011).

R2P clearly demonstrates that it provides a framework for differentiating between normal and emergency measures and how to attribute a response to them. Libya provides for a good basis for analysis. All the stages described above were implemented and the sliding scale of action followed

through. Firstly, Libya had the opportunity to address the humanitarian concerns without the involvement of the international community. When no such action was forthcoming UNSCR 1970 was passed and the authority to utilise non-military coercion put in place (UNSCR 2011a). The United Nations Security Council only authorised the escalation to the last resort of coercive military force in UNSCR 1973 to ensure that the civilians within Libya were adequately protected once it was clear that UNSCR1970 was not an adequate measure (UNSCR 2011b).

Despite the apparent success of R2P, and its universal adoption at the World Summit in 2005, it has not been without its critics. The lack of action in Syria led to many proponents of alternative, or traditional, security paradigms to highlight that Libya was an exception to the rule as it fell outside any sphere of influence. Indeed a stronger case for R2P can be made in the case of Syria than Libya, although the argument that an intervention in Syria would be in support of peaceful protestors is no longer valid as the conflict has moved on and the actual situation on the ground now resembles Libya with a full scale revolt in progress (Findlay 2011). Realists claim that the old logic holds true as Syria is within Russia's sphere of influence and as a result the Security Council is paralysed, just as in the case of Kosovo (Mayall 2000). However, the issue in Syria is substantially confused by the presence of jihadist elements among the rebels which makes the situation substantially different to Libya (Thompson 2013).

A significant reason behind the critique of R2P stems from the assumption that humanitarianism is able to be neutral and that it can exist in a vacuum outside the normal international system and not have a cause and effect dynamic. Any form of intervention, whether intended to be neutral or not and whether involving NGOs or military force, has the effect of creating a situation which will influence the status quo to the benefit of one actor over another (Jett 2000). Somalia provides a prime example and is often viewed as being a short term humanitarian success but a long-term political-military failure (Weiss 1997). Furthermore, in Rwanda refugee camps became bases for combat operations for rebels thanks to the safe haven provided by the United Nations (Furley 1998 and Jett 2000).

There are primary reasons for the lack of neutrality in interventions or assistance. Humanitarian aid, or indeed any form of assistance to a conflict or tragedy zone, requires a sense of order for it to be delivered. This means that at the most rudimentary level a form of state-building is taking place and thus the process becomes subject to developmental considerations and problems (Clarke and Herbst 1997). Furthermore, aid is a source of conflict itself as power can be derived from its delivery, or withholding of delivery, as it effectively becomes a market (Reno 1999). It needs to be realised that

‘providing aid to some, or even to all, will always alter the balance of power because the ability of some warring factions to produce a military-resolution is strengthened’ (Jett 2000: 113).

In the course of this paper we have identified what is meant by humanitarianism and securitisation as individual concepts, before looking at the reconceptualization that has taken place that allows humanitarianism as securitisation to be legitimate. Furthermore, the R2P example has illustrated some of the practical effects of the reconceptualization process, especially with the developments in R2P that promote the use of regional security mechanisms (Chatham House 2011). Even in the much challenged case of Syria the process is shown to be upheld as once the nature and immediacy of the threat were deemed to have moved from the normal to extraordinary then action was forthcoming. Indeed the only difference between the two is the speed at which the decision to intervene was reached, and as such the consternation surrounding the lack of action in Syria is not in regards as to whether the action should take place but why it has taken so long. Therefore, it can be asserted that humanitarianism as securitisation is legitimate though the full extent of the concepts scope is yet to be fully realised.

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