

# Putting People First: The Growing Influence of 'Human Security'

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY KALDOR, PH.D.

**YJIA:** For those who aren't familiar with the concept, can you talk briefly about how you define "human security" and how it departs from traditional security paradigms?

Mary Kaldor: For me, "human security" has three components. The first I share with others, which is that human security is about the security of individuals and the communities in which they live, rather than the security of states and their borders. The second component is about the interrelatedness of security, about both protecting people from being killed in wars, killed in crime, robbed, or raped (which are usually considered within the traditional domain of security); and security in the case of hurricanes, earthquakes, famines, etc. In the literature on human security, there is quite a debate about this component of human security. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which pioneered the term 'human security' in its 1994 *Human Development Report*, sees it as being about development and stresses the importance of individuals being secure in economic and health terms. On the other hand, the Canadians—who were also key pioneers [of the concept]—see human security as a responsibility to protect. To them it is about ethnic cleansing, genocide, and other massive human rights violations, and the idea that we should protect people in those situations if

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they cannot defend themselves. I tend to share the Canadians' preoccupation with violence. There is a security gap in the world. People do live in real situations of extreme violence and insecurity, but we also have to recognize the economic/developmental aspect as well. The third component of human security is about the interrelationship between the internal and the external. We used to think of internal security as policing and external security as war, deterrence, and grand strategy. Human security is like a form of external policing. It is about dealing with Africa, the Balkans, Afghanistan, not via war, but by actually extending policing methods globally, even if you might need to use military forces to do so. Human security sees external security as much more like policing than war-fighting.

**YJIA: The European Union and Javier Solana, the former Secretary General of the European Union, in particular, seem to have taken a keen interest in human security. How is this interest manifesting itself, and what is the impetus behind it?**

MK: I think that the Canadians were the first, followed by the Japanese who also took human security up as a foreign policy paradigm. What is happening with the European Union is that it is rapidly developing a regional foreign and security policy, even though this is not always internationally evident. After Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac agreed at St. Malo in 1998<sup>1</sup> that there should be a common E.U. security and defense policy, under Solana, there have been about twenty E.U. security missions in the last five to ten years. Solana asked me to create a study group with other human security experts to think about what kind of capabilities the E.U. needed to develop. He was interested in making Europe's role in the world different from that of the traditional nation state so that the region's priorities are not about protecting borders but about providing security in the world. The E.U.'s thinking was very much influenced by the Balkans and Kosovo. The study group toyed with calling it 'humanitarian' instead of 'human' security. We felt that the focus of the E.U.'s foreign and security policy should be about the kind of operations most of its member countries are involved in, which over the past decade have not been classic war-fighting operations, but rather about stabilization and counterinsurgency. In the end, we came up with the term 'human security' to cover all this, and wrote first the 2004 Barcelona Report and then the 2007 Madrid Report to give the Europeans a human security strategic narrative. We specified how you do human security, how it is different from traditional security, and how to mainstream it. It has led to a lot of debate within the E.U. about the idea of human security. While I would say it has been widely accepted, it is still not the mainstream concept of European foreign and security policy, which I see still as one focused primarily on 'crisis management.'

**YJIA:** Since 2006 there have been some major shifts in U.S. military doctrine, specifically with the revised Counterinsurgency manual (COIN), the revised Stability Operations manual, and the McChrystal Report—the so-called Petraeus trilogy. Do you see influence of human security in this new doctrine? How has the U.S. military's own definition of security evolved in your view?

**MK:** I definitely think that the United States is moving in the human security direction. At least, I think that the actual experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have made U.S. soldiers on the ground realize that traditional war-fighting strategies are counterproductive. The new COIN manual talks about population security, which is very close to human security in my view. I think that both General Petraeus and General McChrystal have been quite interested in all of these human security ideas, with two big differences.

The first difference is that in COIN, and in political statements, the U.S. military still sees and talks about population security seen as a means to an end—the end being to defeat America's enemies. However, for human security proponents, human security *is* the end. There may be a need to defeat enemies to make people more secure, but people come first, and this has implications in both political and in practical terms. In political terms, if the United States is in a country like Afghanistan with the explicit objective to defeat Al Qaeda; if you tell the Afghan people this, the Afghans will feel secondary, and America's motives for being there are not totally convincing. I also think that this means-to-an-end approach of defeating enemies has the political consequence of elevating Al Qaeda into a respectable political enemy. In practical terms, as long as the military is in control and thinks about COIN in a war context, I think you will end up doing things that cause collateral damage no matter how hard you try to avoid civilian casualties. In a human security approach, COIN and stabilization operations would be civilian-led. Operating within a military framework can be hugely problematic for civilians. Civilians will feel that they are being used to identify enemies if they cooperate and share information with you. This is why anthropologists have refused to be involved in human terrain teams in Afghanistan, because they feel that instead of the military having the goal of making people safe, the goal is to exploit people for information that will be useful to the U.S. government.

This practical concern about civilian control also has something to do with the [legal] rules of engagement, which is the second major difference between the current U.S. doctrine and human security. If you are still approaching stabilization operations like those in Afghanistan and Iraq as wars against enemies, you are operating under international humanitarian law. If, on the other hand, you are operating according to human security, you are

actually operating under civil law. [In fighting the Irish Republican Army (IRA),] the British in Northern Ireland were acting under civil law, so their primary goal was to support law and order, and the rules were much, much tighter about when you could engage in the use of force. [The conflict in] Northern Ireland is actually a really interesting example [for understanding] human security. In the beginning, the British were treating the conflict like a counterinsurgency, and later shifted to a counter-terror policing approach. This is unlike the U.S. military, which has shifted from a counter-terror to a counterinsurgency strategy. The British did the opposite in Northern Ireland. At first, counterinsurgency meant defeating the IRA, but the British had to shift from a military campaign when the IRA became politically stronger and violence and human rights violations increased as a result of the original British operations. So they transitioned to a counter-terror approach, which meant policing and intelligence. The British realized that counterinsurgency was not working, that you could not fight a war on British territory, and that it was better to treat the IRA as criminals rather than political prisoners. The British military then started operating together with the police and according to the police rules, in support of local police forces rather than taking the lead. Settlement and peace took another 25 years, but the violence was kept down dramatically. This is a good example of the tremendous time commitment and complications involved in these kinds of human security operations.

**YJIA: How would the U.S. intervention look different in Afghanistan right now if the United States and its NATO allies were operating more closely in accordance with human security principles? What kind of strategic and tactical differences would we see?**

MK: General McChrystal's policy is moving in the right direction. The key difference from a human security approach is first of all the policy of drone attacks, which is a disaster. Al Qaeda is a hydra-headed animal, and the drone bombings and civilian casualties just give these young men another reason to sign on. With these airstrikes, the U.S. military says they will not undertake them where civilians are at risk, but there have still been very high civilian casualties. Overall the civilian effort in Afghanistan has been puny. Instead of the McChrystal report, it should have been the Holbrooke report. It should have included something about agriculture and the drug trade. In terms of the balance between civil and military aims, there are a lot of politics involved, and bits of the armed forces are incredibly resistant to increasing civilian control—there always has to be a compromise.

**YJIA: How has the growing dominance of terrorism on the global security landscape impacted the mainstreaming of human security principles?**

MK: I do not think that terrorism per se has been a setback to human security. The real setback was the Bush Administration's reaction to terrorism. The fact that the Bush administration treated 9/11 as Pearl Harbor and decided that we needed to treat these attacks as a "war on terror" has been a huge setback for human security. It has also been a huge setback for Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa, which are all much more insecure now than they were before 2001. How America thinks has a huge influence on everyone else. One interesting aspect to all of this is the idea of liberal interventionism that Blair was so keen on, the idea that we do have the right to intervene to bring about human rights. This is a very human security inspired idea. What he couldn't understand is that you cannot violate human rights to bring about human rights, you cannot have *wars* for human rights. Because Blair and Bush used a humanitarian justification for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, this has become a huge setback for the way in which military intervention can effectively be used for humane purposes. Look at the polarized debate about Afghanistan: on one side, we are there to defeat terror; and on the other side, we must withdraw. The middle position is that we are there to help make Afghans feel safe, and this position has been squeezed out of the picture. This was a disaster for human security. [Nevertheless], the whole "war on terror" experience has generated learning within the U.S. military that may lead to positive shifts.

**YJIA: What would human security have to say about the current U.S. debate around whether or not to try terrorists in military or criminal courts?**

MK: The usual debate involves the question of whether terrorists should be treated as political prisoners or as criminals. When [the British] adopted a criminal policy in Ireland, the IRA was very upset. They did not like being treated as common criminals—that was what the hunger strikes were about. They wanted to have the higher status of political prisoners. If there is a reason to negotiate with people, you need them to be political prisoners. In the case of the Christmas Day suicide bomber, the argument is not utterly irrelevant. No one is talking about negotiating with Al Qaeda, so I don't see why [terrorists] should be tried in a military court and given the status of a prisoner of war. They should be tried in a regular criminal court.

**YJIA: What do you say to those who argue that human security is too nebulous and all-encompassing to be a meaningful paradigm for organizing security policy?**

MK: This is exactly when I would say that human security should be primarily about violence as opposed to some of the more expansive definitions [of human security] out there. Nowadays, we have to recognize that, for

example, when young men join armed groups, they do so because they are unemployed with few prospects. When they go to *madrassas*, they often do so because other schools are unavailable. Human security should be primarily about the security of the individual and not the state. Traditional security is still of primary importance, but that said, it needs to take into account related economic factors.

**YJIA: President Obama’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech arguably seemed to endorse a great number of key human security principles, such as the primacy of individual civilian protection and human rights in conflict, multilateralism, and the intersection between poverty and human insecurity. What are your thoughts on the speech, and do you believe the Obama administration shows signs of pursuing a more human security-oriented foreign policy?**

MK: Yes, I think it was a great speech. My main difficulty with the speech, which again is sticking on this point related to Afghanistan, is that I am very doubtful about the notion of “just war.” We can talk about the “just use of force,” but war involves the idea that you are going to war against an enemy and a clash of two sides, and once again Obama made point of ‘defeating’ Al Qaeda. Most of it I agreed with, but there is a difference between “holy war” and “just war.” If you are going to use force, you have to follow certain rules, rules of *jus en bello*, which are less strong than the laws of human rights that apply outside the context of war. When it comes to moments when there is a difference between the laws of war and human rights law, I want to be on the side of human rights. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Saint Malo was the site of an Anglo–French summit in 1998, which led to a significant agreement regarding European defense policy.