Should We Think Before We Leap?

A Rejoinder

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INTERNATIONAL REGIMES may be transformed by design or by practice. Essential to the creation of any regime, whatever its primary origins, however, is the existence of some conceptualization or ideology that guides the design or legitimates the practice.

The transformation of international regimes in the 1990s has largely been of the latter type, transformation by practice. States have been reacting to events rather than designing new institutions – even though, since 1989, leaders have been particularly active in proclaiming 'new world orders', as if they had a design.

There is no better example than the current international intervention in Kosovo. The idea of 'human security as the basis for a new international order, which Astri Suhrke presents in the preceding article, is emerging through ad hoc response to the conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. What is occurring there is providing legitimation for a regime before that regime has been properly designed. In judging the adequacy of this concept of human security for an international politics, we can no longer divorce discussion from the consequences of the Kosovo operation. And despite the deep involvement of both Norway and Canada in that international response, they are neither its architects nor its driving force.

Kosovo

On 24 March 1999, NATO, acting without UN Security Council (UNSC) approval, unleashed a bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to 'prevent a humanitarian catastrophe'. The stated goal was diplomatic and political: to force the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, to accept the terms of the plan presented to Serbian and Albanian delegations at Rambouillet in February for the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo and for the establishment of substantial autonomy for the province. The actual goal was human security: these security forces were seen as a demonstrated threat to the security of the Albanian population in Kosovo; autonomy would reverse state repression in the province and end the violation of Albanian human rights. In a transitional period, both security and autonomy would be guaranteed by an international military force led by NATO.

The threat of bombing had been issued in June 1998, before the commencement of

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diplomatic negotiations to end the insurgency and counter-insurgency campaigns between the Kosovo Liberation Army and Yugoslav forces. The threat gained urgency, becoming a test of NATO credibility as the violence intensified in September and the prospect of winter threatened a major humanitarian crisis for the 250,000 persons displaced in the previous eight months of fighting. Although most of these displaced did return to their homes as a result of an October agreement between the US negotiator, Richard Holbrooke, and Slobodan Milosevic, fighting resumed and highly publicized massacres raised the stakes again.

Once the bombing began, the number of dead and injured – estimated at 2,000 soldiers and civilians in the 13 months from February 1998 to March 1994 – began to skyrocket. And as residents streamed out of the province, displaced into Montenegro and Serbia proper or taking refuge in Macedonia, Albania, and third countries, the goal of the campaign seemed to narrow from forcing compliance with the Rambouillet Accords, including insistence on a NATO-led international security force, to putting a stop to the 'ethnic cleansing', 'violence', and 'repression'. When the refugee toll surpassed the 100,000 that NATO and UNHCR planners had apparently considered the likely maximum and moved toward its eventual 750–800,000, the goal narrowed further, to reversing the refugee flow. And when the Yugoslav forces did withdraw and the international security force (KFOR) entered the province on 16 June, priority was placed on gathering as full evidence and documentation as possible for the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia of the atrocities committed: the thousands murdered, and complicity for the rapes, mass graves, and destruction of close to one-third of the villages and housing stock of the province.

On the civilian front, a UNSC Resolution had finally been obtained to create an international protectorate over Kosovo that would give its population time to learn the skills and organize the basis for an interim, 'substantially autonomous' self-governing province *within* the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Yugoslavia. The campaign thus ended by seeming to restore its initial goals, returning the province to the *status quo ante* 24 March.

In fact, the physical destruction of the province and of Yugoslavia, the growing exodus of non-Albanians from the province, the braindrain of Kosovo Albanians to third countries, the serious setback to democratization in Serbia, and the destruction of the social fabric of Kosovo belie this assessment. The campaign to protect human security had achieved one thing only: it had replaced Yugoslav security forces (military, paramilitary, and police) with NATO troops, transferring responsibility for the province to international organizations for a period unspecified by their mandate.

Whatever one's views on cause and effect of this conflict and of the springtime destruction, there can be no doubt that this highly acclaimed military operation did little to further human security in Kosovo. To judge from the reaction of governments worldwide, its occasionally proclaimed goal of deterrence, to demonstrate a new international commitment to the rights of individuals within states against repressive policies of governments, appears to have encouraged the opposite: defensive positioning by any government considering itself at risk of such intervention, up to and including consideration of nuclear weapons as a deterrent in so asymmetric a contest as NATO's war against Yugoslavia was intended to be. And to all those who questioned NATO's priorities – why it would intervene with such massive force and exalted legitimation in a situation where the death toll and repression before the campaign, however egregious it clearly was, paled by comparison with numerous other cases in vastly greater need of intervention in support of humanitarian and human rights conventions – the answer was not encouraging: *This was Europe.* The commitment to use military force in support of a human security regime might in fact be less than before 24 March 1999, when its untested character at least held out the possibility that it would apply where needed, not where geopolitical interests dictated. NATO appeared to have increased the perception of insecurity among leaders who might be vulnerable to intervention, generating a security dilemma that might result in higher military expenditures rather than the cuts necessary for developmental goals – while it paradoxically increased the security of potential tyrants and repressive governments that knew that NATO was *less* likely to act in the future.

The primary question raised by Operation Allied Force and its termination by the deployment of KFOR and UNMIK (the United Nations Mission to Kosovo), thus, is how much damage has been done to the concept of human security as a vision for foreign policy. 'Taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory or governments', did this intervention really protect the people of Kosovo? Is their security independent of territory or government?

Troubling Lessons

The lessons of Kosovo, as of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia before it, should be troubling to advocates of the new human security agenda. In each case, governments did not choose to intervene *until* there was violence to stop. In the case of Kosovo especially, there had been no absence of warning and no absence of opportunity to act to prevent the violence altogether.

Whether one takes the warnings of 1981, when this stage of conflict over this territory erupted in Albanian demonstrations for a separate republic ('secession from Serbia') and short-lived martial law; the warnings of 1987, when the Serb minority in Kosovo succeeded in gaining the attention of Communist Party leaders to their grievances of discrimination at the hands of Albanian majority rule in the province and provided Slobodan Milosevic the issue to propel himself into the Serbian party presidency; the warnings of 1989, when autonomy was reduced, martial law resumed, and the Albanian boycott of all Serbian and Yugoslav institutions began; the warnings of 1991–97, when Albanian demands for self-determination and referendum repeated the triggers that led to war in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the warnings of 1997, when the chaos following the collapse of the pyramid schemes in Albania provided a bonanza of weapons to the Kosovo Liberation Army operating in northern Albania and ratcheted the terrorist campaign of 1996 aimed at provoking a repressive Yugoslav response into an armed insurgency; or the warnings of 1998, when the inability of both sides to talk to each other and the mounting war between them required intervention – there were more than enough opportunities to achieve far more in the direction of peace than did Operation Allied Force.

But as this brief synopsis of opportunities suggests, this was not a humanitarian crisis or a simple case of a repressive government against an endangered minority: it was a serious conflict over political control of the territory of Kosovo. Humanitarianism does not provide an answer to this question any more than the uncertain future of Kosovo now provides one for its population. The exodus of Serbs and other minorities may create a *fait accompli,* if the international community is willing to break its one consistent principle in southeast Europe since 1991 – that there be no change of sovereign borders – and to allow that change throughout the region; but in itself neither the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces, nor the international security presence and international interim administration, will address the actual conflict.

Most disturbing of all, if the cases of former Yugoslavia have a wider applicability, is the suggestion that a humanitarian-based legitimation for intervention requires that individuals and peoples represent themselves as victims in order to get international attention. If that attention is for a political cause, where leaders might be willing to sacrifice their own population for what they consider to be a higher purpose (be that independence, national survival, or personal wealth), the international value on human life and freedom from physical threat can become the basis for its opposite.

Even where there is plenty of victimization, there is usually more than one category of victims in a conflict. Those who gain attention and support are likely to be those who have political assets to win that attention – not those who are necessarily the more deserving at any one moment. Seeking attention also redirects locals from the political struggle at home, where a compromise might emerge, into an international campaign to gain support against domestic opponents. And abandoning the status of victim, even to take on the responsibilities of governance, is not easy – for the people themselves, or for the international presence that must let go.

The Necessity of Government

The primary dilemma of a foreign policy originating in humanitarianism, buttressed by a 'rights-based' approach protected by international conventions that permit intervention is its dependence on functioning governments. Humanitarianism has its origins in war – that is, in *exceptional* circumstances when people cannot provide for themselves, or a government does not exist to provide for them. But rights can only be guaranteed and protected by governments. Intervention to bypass governments, to condemn them, or to compel their leaders to act in ways they do not accept may work temporarily – but these are not rights. There can be no choice between the security of states and the security of persons. It is – above all pragmatically, in terms of actual results rather than rhetoric – a false dichotomy. A foreign policy aimed at one without directly taking into account the other will fail.

For evidence we need look no further than Western policies toward the former Yugoslavia, or the consequence of sanctions on the current Yugoslavia. The only choice that does exist is selectivity – to intervene in Kosovo and stay a long time; and not to intervene in Sudan, Sierra Leone or Ethiopia/Eritrea, while abandoning Rwanda and Somalia in a very short time.

Human Security as a Retreat?

Suhrke touches on these points only briefly, but in analyzing the origins of the new human security agenda, she comes to the heart of the matter. The question is whether her interesting concept of vulnerability can compensate.

The new human security regime, while portrayed as an advance made possible by the end of the Cold War, is – as Suhrke shows well – a *retreat* from the more ambitious human goals of the 1960s and 1970s. It is a foreign policy addressed not to the end of the Cold War, but to the end of developmentalism and the victory of neoliberal approaches to economic growth. It accepts the defeat of social and economic rights, of equity as a principle of development, and of distributive questions. Rather than aiding the development of new economic approaches to rising unemployment, regional and sectoral inequalities, and cuts in budgetary expenditures, it aims to hold governments accountable for discrimination of civil and cultural rights. By supporting a single economic agenda, it promotes the channeling of discontent away from social and economic interests that can be accommodated within one state, to regionalist and ethno-nationalist movements that seek independence and, as territorial movements, tend toward violence. Then, when governments resist such movements, the agenda demands that governments respect minority rights – when the 'minority' does not have individual rights in mind at all, and such majority respect for rights requires budgetary expenditures (e.g. for schools) at a time when donors and creditors are requiring their reduction. By accepting the priority of private enterprise, moreover, the agenda has little it can say in those conflicts where private commercial interests keep monies flowing to leaders who cause enormous hardship and violence to their populations in their contest to control territories rich in minerals, ores, diamonds, and other raw materials sought after by foreign investors.

It is true that 'security is a condition in which other things become possible'.[1] No development can occur without security: but, as Suhrke reminds us, the reverse also applies. Demobilization of soldiers requires jobs; an end to child soldiering requires jobs for their parents and schools for them. If there had been jobs in the first place, there might have been far fewer recruits or rebels. The student rebellion in Kosovo in 1981 began not as a secessionist movement, but as a demonstration against the lack of jobs for university graduates and the belief that the political status of a republic, separate from Serbia, would improve their *economic conditions*. As the least developed region in the country, but the largest recipient of federal aid, it had the injury of maldevelopment and the insult of resentment from the wealthier regions that *their* tax dollars were being wasted by Albanian politicians in Kosovo. Political power seemed to promise economic improvement. Likewise for Serbs: the extensive autonomy for its provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina critically inhibited possibilities for economic improvement in Serbia proper, according to the economic reforms and development strategy required by the IMF programs in 1982–85 and 1987–90. Both wanted political changes for economic interest.

A human security agenda of rights and compensations, of safety nets and debt relief, requires expenditures – by governments. A foreign policy based on human security cannot escape the developmental issues, or substitute for developmental inequities. But by demanding conceptual clarification, as Suhrke does, it might just be possible to return to the primary causes of violence and insecurity. As a citizen of former Yugoslavia exclaimed to me, after she had calculated that the costs of international intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first three years *after* the Dayton Accords would have been the equivalent of handing to each Bosnian $100,000, 'just imagine what those entrepreneurial Bosnians would have done with that!' What might have happened if the costs of Operation Allied Force had been spent on development in Yugoslavia, including Kosovo province, instead?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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[1] Emma Rothschild, 'What is Human Security?', at a meeting of the Common Security Forum in South Africa, cited in the introduction to the Program on Peace and International Cooperation of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.