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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Natalie Jester

Question: Who or what should be 'secure' in the global system?

Security is a natural place to start with this third and final section of the book as it is a unifying component in each of the global issues we face, and for that reason a central theme in IR. It is also a contested concept that has occupied minds for thousands of years. Exploring it is both an opportunity to unpack an important concept, but also to recall (and apply) several of the important themes from the first two sections of the book to keep momentum as we move forward. The central debate explored in this chapter is over whether security should be about protecting the state or the individual – or both. Extending that, another question emerges as to who, or what, should provide security. For example, should this power remain with states or should it be relocated in whole or in part to international organisations? Key questions such as these ensure that security takes centre stage in IR and also inspires larger theoretical discussions that run throughout the global issues explored in this section of the book.

Traditional approaches to security

Traditionally, the focus within security approaches has been upon conventional military threats to the continued existence of a state. This approach is captured well in Max Weber's definition, outlined in 1919, whereby the state is the apparatus 'that successfully lays claim to the monopoly on legitimate use of physical violence within a particular territory – and this idea of "territory" is an essential defining feature' (Weber 2004: 33). Reflecting this, the traditional conception of security emphasises the survival of the state through the maintenance of its current borders and sovereignty. It is helpful at this stage to recall that the principle of sovereignty in IR is most commonly argued to have originated in the Peace of Westphalia, which guaranteed the right of states to decide how to govern within their own borders – as explored across the first three chapters of the book. And, as explored across several chapters of the second section of the book, in the modern day the concept of state sovereignty is enshrined within the United Nations as a piece of international law. Whilst such principles are a material reality, they are filtered through human experience and shaped by power relations. For reasons such as this, sovereignty is not a straightforward concept and has come to mean slightly different things at different times as discourses have changed.

If we are to focus on borders as a security marker, we must then ask who enforces sovereignty. States want the ability to make decisions about the governance of their own lands without interference. But what happens when an external force interferes? The United Nations is perhaps the most obvious arbiter in this case. Whilst the UN can intervene to prevent one state becoming involved in another's affairs, the organisation has been criticised as lacking the abilities to hold states to account – especially the most powerful states in the system. The argument follows, then, that states exist within a system of anarchy whereby an external, over-arching power cannot be relied upon to enforce the rules. Further, the landscape of global security is shaped by the number

of states with significant power, how they perceive themselves and others, and how they interact with one another.

The concern with states, borders and militaries means that traditional security takes us back to realism. As has already been explored in chapter x, a debate exists within realism over how states can best achieve national security. Firstly, defensive realists make the case that states will seek security through stability. There is little desire to upset the status quo because this will simply result in actions taken against you by other states, which in turn prompts another set of actions, and so on – resulting in greater overall insecurity. This series of ripple effects means that expansion is not typically seen as a desirable or viable strategy. Secondly, offensive realists argue instead that the situation of anarchy results in uncertainty, which is especially problematic when you cannot be sure of the intentions of other actors. This means that states will seek security through the expansion of their power, upsetting whatever global or regional order exists at the time. As Mearsheimer (2001: 33), a key proponent of this approach explains, ‘states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system.’

States certainly do seek to ensure their own survival, but this can be done through means other than war, as it is not always in a state’s interest to engage in conflict. At this point it is useful to recall another theme outlined in chapter x, liberalism’s democratic peace theory, which directly relates to discussions about security. In order to go to war, states must commit to increased military spending, which will either come at the cost of other elements of the budget, like education and health, or via rises in taxation. War also requires people to fight and even if military personnel are not killed, they may return with physical injuries and/or mental health concerns – such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is, therefore, often a hard sell for the democracy to convince the public that war is in the best interest of the state. In addition, war poses a significant disruption to the economy, which compounds the above issues. Where democratic states disagree on a particular subject such as security, resources or territory, it is common for both parties to resolve the matter using the well-established tools of diplomacy.

To illustrate the democratic peace theory we can look at contrasting examples. Firstly, a brief comparison of an incident between two democratic states – Switzerland and Liechtenstein. One evening in 2007, 170 Swiss troops accidentally crossed the border into the neighbouring state of Liechtenstein – before realising their mistake and quickly returning to Switzerland. Although, this was technically an act of war on Switzerland’s behalf, the situation was quickly resolved with good humour on both sides, neither seeing the other as a threat to security. Secondly, the bombing of Libya in 2011 war provides a contrasting example – one that allows us to recall that, while democracies do not go to war with each other, the democratic peace thesis does not eliminate war with a non-democracy. Muammar Gaddafi came to power in Libya following a 1969 coup and quickly cemented his power as a dictator. In 2011, in the context of the Arab Spring pro-democracy movement that was sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East, the Gaddafi government viciously cracked down on anti-regime protests. As news of the atrocities spread, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1973 and a coalition including France, the UK, the US and Canada (among other democracies) undertook airstrikes and enforced no-fly zones.

While the examples above are helpful, they should not give an impression that the debate is simply one between the more optimistic account of liberalism with its democratic peace theory, and the more pessimistic debates within realism about how often states will go to war. Since the bulk of IR’s history as a discipline mirrored the twentieth century’s world wars and the Cold War it is perhaps

not surprising that these state-based formulations of security emerged as they did. Both realist and liberal theories of security are therefore not designed to neatly incorporate other elements and actors as their focus is built around the state and system levels. In the modern era, with a variety of non-state actors posing challenges to both domestic and international security, there is clearly a need to expand the realm of what we mean by security.

Moving beyond the state

Contemporary thinking on security does not do away with the focus upon the state entirely, but rather asks whether other actors might also help or harm security. It also allows us to consider critiques, such as those from Vitalis (2015), asserting that IR has historically been a white, western-centric discipline. And, as the ideas of sovereignty and the nation-state were European creations exported to the rest of the world, state-based national security understandings became dominant as that was the world predominantly white western theorists saw. But it was not necessarily helpful or correct in every context. Henderson (2015: 149), for example, makes a case that as African state systems have been established in a way that replicates the structures of their colonial past, foreign policy is conducted in a way that is 'accomplished through orienting the post-colonial state's foreign policy practices towards those that were acceptable to the major [global] powers'. This, he asserts, is why, there must be a greater focus upon civil wars and non-state actors as agents of insecurity in Africa rather than focusing on instances of state-on-state war across the continent.

The concept of 'new wars' is instructive here to unpack further by focusing on actors, goals, methods and finance. Firstly, states are not the only actors on the world stage. Instead, if we are to consider security in the most relevant, holistic terms, we must also think about non-state actors. To borrow the words of Kaldor (2013: 2) 'new wars are fought by varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors – regular armed forces, private security contractors, mercenaries, jihadists, warlords, paramilitaries, etc.'. In addition to posing a threat to security, non-state actors can also be security providers. For example, private military and security contractors (sometimes referred to as mercenaries) are not directly employed by a state but by a private company. Their use, sometimes subcontracted by states to provide security in war zones or post conflict situations (such as in Iraq post-2003), has become a controversial debate in recent years (Chisholm 2014) due to concerns over the legality of state use of private armies.

Secondly, the goals of war are changing. Whereas wars used to be fought in order to maintain territory or for ideological reasons relating to the maintenance (or propagation) of a particular style of government – such as fascism, communism or democracy – new wars are often fought on the basis of identities such as religious, ethnic or tribal identity. Indeed, the mobilisation of identity is the desired outcome within new wars and not simply a side effect. One example is the civil war in Sudan which raged in two phases between 1955–2005. It eventually resulted in the state splitting in two in 2011 along religious lines, with the Christian-majority South breaking away from Muslim-majority North to form the new state of South Sudan.

Thirdly, the focus upon military security and traditional 'battles' is becoming less common. Instead there is greater emphasis upon the political control of territory, including through the use of violence directed at citizens. This often occurs through some sort of population displacement aimed at those who are not signed up to the same ideology or have what is considered an undesirable identity. Boko Haram are one example of this. Their campaign of violence, bombings and kidnappings have displaced approximately 2.4 million people in north-eastern Nigeria and the surrounding region.

Fourthly, whilst wars were typically only financed by traditional state sources of income (taxation, government debt etc.), new wars have a much greater variety of funding sources. These include smuggling, diaspora donations, looting or kidnap and ransom. This necessitates a blurring of boundaries and, as a result, it may be necessary to consider organised crime and wider human rights violations within analyses of security. The Taliban and al Qaeda, for example, have raised funds through the opium trade (primarily derived from Afghanistan) and through credit card fraud schemes. This final point, when taken together with those above, shows that the nature of war is clearly no longer about state versus state conflict. It draws in a variety of actors and issues, often in complex permutations that cannot be easily resolved.

Elements of human security

Concepts such as new wars confirm that the traditional focus upon states, as opposed to human beings, has painted only a partial picture of security. This has led to criticism at several levels. Feminists, for example, point to the issue of rape as a weapon of war – which is not taken with the gravity it should be. Instead it is invariably seen as a regrettable, yet expected, wartime issue sometimes faced by women. Postcolonial theorists argue further that history is vital in understanding the imperial violence enacted by western states upon colonial subjects, which sustains unequal power relations between states and peoples even to this day. Critiques such as these have been gathering steam in recent decades and have transcended academia to become a persistent theme debated in the public sphere.

In 1994, the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR 1994) drew a line under the issue and argued that too much emphasis had been placed upon conflicts between states, weapons of mass destruction, and foreign policy. The UNHDR helpfully lists the threats to human security under seven categories:

1. economic security
2. food security
3. health security
4. environmental security
5. personal security
6. community security
7. political security

It argues that these concerns are universal and that they often compound upon each other leaving some people in dire situations. These threats encompass a wide range of dimensions and consider both deliberate acts designed to provoke instability and acts of nature such as earthquakes. Yet, it should also be noted that the latter also covers climatic events which could also be indirectly attributed to human beings – such as floods or droughts caused (or exacerbated) by climate change.

Personal security is taken to be the most important element of human security and the Report lists the following as threats: Threat from: the state (physical torture); other states (war); other groups of people (ethnic tension); individuals or gangs against other individuals or gangs (crime, street violence); threats directed at women (rape, domestic violence) or children based on their vulnerability and dependence (child abuse); threats to self (suicide, drug use). At each level, from local government to state parliaments to international organisations such as the United Nations,

women are under-represented and shut out from decision making indirectly or deliberately. Thus, issues affecting women especially are often omitted from security discussions because those making policy decisions view them as personal problems, or isolated incidents, and are therefore not treated with urgency. Feminists argue that such examples signify a patriarchal system that functions at a local, national and global level and underpins acts of violence of many different kinds (Enloe 2001). Rape, for example, can be connected to wider systems of misogyny that can be drivers of war and conflict, as well as being used as a weapon against local populations, as noted above.

Political security relates to freedom from human rights abuses and focuses especially upon people's ability to express their political beliefs freely. To illustrate this we can use the example of Augusto Pinochet who ruled Chile from 1973–1990 after taking power in a military coup. Tens of thousands of people considered dangerous to the regime were tortured, sexually assaulted, disappeared or killed. Many contemporary examples can also be drawn such as the ongoing situation in Hong Kong where China is outlawing dissent and suppressing local protests against Beijing's rule.

Community security emphasises the support and identity gained from group identity – for example the family or an ethnic group. Insecurity arises in this category when threats occur due to membership of a particular group. For example, the Rohingya are an ethnic and religious group of approximately one million people. They became stateless when they underwent a genocide in Myanmar starting in 2016 that resulted in them being forced to flee into neighbouring states. Issues such as these, of groups and individuals being forced from their home, will be explored further in chapter x.

Economic security is concerned with absolute poverty – the inability to maintain a basic standard of living which in turn endangers the life of the individual concerned and their family. Poverty is a pervasive issue in our world, and it is present within richer and poorer states. Related to economic security is food security whereby people should have access to food that they can grow or buy themselves, or obtain from government programmes. Food insecurity can be made by human conditions, but it can also result from environmental issues, whereby crops might be destroyed by flooding or insects. This causes food insecurity for rural people, especially in developing states, who are less likely to have access to other food sources. Both of these interrelated issues are explored in chapter x.

Environmental security can be threatened globally and locally. As of 2020, the Amazon rainforest has been reduced to 80% of its 1970s area, due to factors including illegal logging and encroaching agriculture. Animals and plants are destroyed making this a problem for the local ecosystem, but the rainforest also absorbs two billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year, meaning that its loss also causes worldwide problems for mitigating climate change. Environmental insecurity also threatens health security. These debates are explored fully in chapters x and x.

It should be obvious by now that formulating security at the human level is significantly more expansive than traditional approaches. Human security perspectives are better placed to account for the violence and suffering that impacts people's day-to-day lives and detect when these issues become international. Human security, however, is not without its detractors. Paris (2004), among others, has argued that the concept of human security is too broad, making it harder to assign responsibility for particular policy areas. The very question of who, or what, should be tasked to solve security problems – especially as the term becomes ever-more complex – has become a key debate within IR.

Protecting people

Momentarily going back to traditional conceptions of security, these set out that states experience insecurity when borders are breached and their sovereignty jeopardised. The solution provided in this case would often be to petition the United Nations for a collective security response and/or directly defend themselves in a war. Human security, however, is much broader and its emergence has coincided with a series of developments over when and how action should take place. Consequently, when insecurity occurs and the subject under threat is not a state, it is much less obvious what the solution might look like and who is responsible for providing it. Furthermore, it can be difficult to apportion blame, especially when these threats interact with one another: how, for example, might we hold a subject accountable for global warming that causes food insecurity? As a result, human security and the categories therein, as outlined in the previous section, are perhaps best described as a diagnostic tool but not always a treatment. Yet, at a certain point, an argument can be made that the threat to life is so great in some cases that there is a need for an intervention of some kind.

Humanitarian intervention of different forms to protect individuals has been practiced and debated for decades at the international level. Typically it has been regarded with scepticism due to conflicts over how and why certain principles are applied by states. For example, the over-arching reason given by the United States for the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (the first 'war' in the War on Terror) was a standard national security case. It centred on militarily removing the Taliban regime who were harbouring al-Qaeda – a so-called 'regime change'. Yet, an additional emphasis in the narrative for war focused on the need to 'liberate' or 'save' women from oppression under the Taliban regime. As Abu-Lughod (2002) notes, this presumes a helplessness that many women did not necessarily attach to themselves. This representation is underpinned by Said's Orientalism, which refers to the assumptions made by western states about the nature of eastern states as exotic, or in this case barbaric. As a result, it can be argued that when states use such apparently moral justifications for interventions it is not only problematic conceptually, but it can also obscure other more strategic (and presumably questionable) reasons for invasion such as implementing foreign policy doctrines of democratisation, or a desire to control natural resources. Critical approaches therefore highlight well the controversy over intervention. They suggest that use of certain language sometimes enables states with ulterior motives to make a case for interfering in the sovereign affairs of another state that may not otherwise be justifiable to the international community (Shepherd 2006).

The 'Responsibility to Protect' is, in part, an attempt to reset this debate by setting out clear written terms for intervention. As already covered in chapter x, it was adopted in 2005 as a principle of the United Nations, aiming to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Responsibility to Protect has three pillars:

- 1) states have a responsibility to avoid this kind of mass suffering
- 2) the international community should encourage states to fulfil this responsibility
- 3) if the state fails to protect its people or actively perpetrates violence, it is the duty of the international community to intervene.

One way such an intervention occurs is through approval by the United Nations Security Council, typically conducted by a group of states working together to rally the necessary consensus and ensure no veto is cast by one of the permanent members (P5). The idea of such intervention is, perhaps obviously, to avoid large-scale loss of life and prevent serious harm, which are admirable aims. The United Nations adopted this principle in part upon reflecting on shortcomings over the responses to the 1990s genocides in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. Beyond the immediate human suffering, the ripple effects of events like these last for many years, negatively impacting a wide range of areas from domestic security to community relations to democratic processes.

The 2011 Libyan civil war was the first time the UN Security Council authorised a foreign military intervention by explicitly referencing the Responsibility to Protect. In 2011 as part of the cascading events of the Arab Spring, mass resistance against Muammar Gaddafi's regime had reached a critical point in Libya. There were credible fears that the sitting government would turn the full extent of its military on the people, resulting in bloodshed. International airstrikes on military facilities and equipment, and tactical support, contributed to the downfall of the government. Importantly, no foreign ground troops were placed in Libya due to the lack of political will for such a measure – and it should be noted that one state risking its own lives for those of another state for purely humanitarian motives is always beset with a strong risk-averse logic. Although Libya remains in a precarious situation due to endemic political disputes, the extent of death and human suffering was substantially mitigated by the intervention.

In practice, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine is mentioned much more frequently than it is employed. Overriding sovereignty is deeply controversial due to the continuing state-centric nature of the global system. When certain cases are discussed, there is often disagreement as to whether the threshold for the threat to life is significant enough to compel states to consider intervention. This is no small matter considering the political and financial costs of taking intervention measures – all of which are borne by states as the United Nations does not have any direct security means of its own, drawing all such funding and personnel from voluntary state contributions. Further complications arise when such action may involve a state that is allied to one of the P5 nations. An example of this is multiple Russian vetoes at the Security Council regarding various international actions on Syria which neutered any large-scale intervention in its civil war. This despite its being one of the most substantial generators of human security concerns in recent times with several hundred thousand deaths and several million displaced. Yet, such obstacles are not always insurmountable, and as mentioned before, consensus was formed over an intervention in Libya. This demonstrates that the expectations to use such measures as the Responsibility to Protect may be gaining normative power.

The Responsibility to Protect is also sometimes extended into peacekeeping. The argument is that it is not enough for foreign forces to simply arrive, prevent loss of life, and then leave. Often particular structures that enabled the violence in the first place will remain, and therefore present a need for post-conflict interventions. As a result, it is considered more sensible to place peacekeepers on the ground in order to prevent violence from reoccurring in the short and medium term, perhaps until solutions to the underlying problems can be found. This practice can, however, be problematic, as these forces themselves sometimes commit acts of violence against local populations. There are multi-dimensional power structures in place in peacekeeping situations, with peacekeepers both highly likely to be male and paid significantly more than local populations, bearing in mind that the places they are sent to have often seen their economy negatively impacted by conflict. For example, UN peacekeepers arrived in Haiti in 2004 with a mandate to tackle political instability and organised crime; this remit was extended in 2010 following a severe earthquake. During this time, many

peacekeepers paid local women and girls – some as young as 11 – to sleep with them, exposing some to sexually transmitted disease, and fathering many children who they then abandoned. The Responsibility to Protect, then, and debate around intervention, is complex. In contrast with traditional approaches that seek to ensure the continued existence of the state, human security makes the case for a significantly broader conceptualisation of security.

Case study one: The Gulf War

Tensions had been building in the Gulf throughout the 1980s, exacerbated by the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988). Several nearby Arab states backed Iraq, in the hopes of weakening the Revolutionary government of Iran, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait who lent Iraq large sums of money. Iraq-Kuwait relations deteriorated after the Iran-Iraq war, with debt being a key reason: Iraq argued that other states had benefitted from a weakened Iranian regime and that debt should be forgiven because Iraq could not repay it. Unsurprisingly, Kuwait did not agree. During this period there was also a global oil glut, with supply outweighing demand, driving down the oil price. As a result, the oil cartel OPEC (the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) restricted production quotas to increase prices, straining the finances of oil-producing states like Iraq and Kuwait. With Iraq already in a precarious financial position, this was seen by their government as a serious problem. Iraq accused Kuwait of producing more oil than permitted under OPEC rules – pushing down prices for everyone – and once again the two states were at loggerheads. The Kuwaiti decision to continue selling oil above its OPEC-ordered quota was taken as an act of aggression by Iraq, which had also staked a claim to Kuwaiti territory, though this was not taken seriously internationally.

Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, crossing the border with tanks, aircraft and approximately 100,000 troops. The decision to move the military across the Iraqi border and subsume one state into another violated Kuwaiti sovereignty because Iraq was not recognised as having authority over Kuwait. While the global system is said to be one of anarchy, in which no global body ensures obedience to the rules, the UN Security Council demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait immediately. Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, refused. In late November, the United Nations authorised the use of military action resulting in a multi-state offensive, led by the United States. Iraq was driven out of Kuwait in what was known as Operation Desert Storm. In order to ensure that Iraq did not attempt to encroach on Kuwaiti territory again, the United Nations established a demilitarised zone between the two states under Resolution 667 (1991). The UN mandate was expanded after Iraqi incursions onto Kuwaiti territory between 1991 and 1993 and an infantry battalion and no fly zones were installed to prevent this occurring again.

Liberals often use this example as a case in point of international law and multilateralism working precisely as they were designed to. The United Nations system of collective security has seldom (perhaps never) worked so well as in this case – perhaps because the aggression was so obvious and allowing it to go unchecked (not using military force) risked undermining the system itself. This was especially pertinent as ideas of a 'New World Order', to quote US president George H.W. Bush (1989–1993), had begun to replace images of Cold War bipolarity around this time. In a world that was rapidly growing together with globalisation and increasing democratisation, violations of this kind should not, and in this case did not, go unpunished. This was especially pertinent as advances in technology around the same time had made it possible for news reporters to present images live anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day. The media presence within these spaces was both a showcase to the injustices against Kuwaitis (who had lost their sovereignty) and simultaneously a driver of public support for subsequent intervention in overseas conflict to repair the damage and

restore order. This has been labelled 'the CNN effect' which has in itself become hotly debated by scholars.

Realists would not accept the judgement of liberals that this intervention was a success of the collective security model. At first glance it appears true that there was an injustice and the United Nations system worked to redress it. However, the key issue for realists was that this episode did not directly involve any major powers' national security and was thereby uncontroversial and relatively simple to authorise. Neither Iraq or Kuwait are permanent members of the Security Council so no veto was possible, and although Iraq was previously aligned with the United States (due to their shared opposition to Iran) it was not such a major alliance that would preclude the United States taking action in the way that they did.

If we contrast the Security Council's lack of response to a similar instance in 2014 when Russia invaded and annexed part of Ukraine (Crimea), the realist critique becomes evident in that security really does lie with the powerful states who take actions as they deem necessary in the hope they will get away with it. Gaining control of Kuwaiti territory and oil reserves might add up to a realist inspired strategy – principally via a reading of offensive realism – as an attempt to ensure the survival of the Iraqi state. By this logic Iraq could be seen to have had dwindling financial reserves due to its past war with Iran and the subsequent oil price slump, which would make it difficult to maintain living standards and defend its borders. However, Saddam Hussein miscalculated his relative power and influence and suffered inevitable backlash via military attack – which a defensive realist would have cautioned was the likely outcome. To the contrary, in the later example Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, calculated correctly that Russia would not suffer the same fate as Iraq as any effort to remove Russia from Crimea at the United Nations could simply be vetoed – making it dead on arrival if so tabled.

Due to insights and contrasting interpretations such as this – many of which can be drawn far beyond the events themselves – the Gulf War is often used in IR as a pertinent example of the utility of IR's theoretical toolkit in unpacking core issues of how security is interpreted, both at the state and system levels.

Case Study Two: Gun violence in the United States

On the morning of 14 December 2012, Adam Lanza shot and killed his mother Nancy, a teacher, before packing an assault rifle, two handguns and a shotgun, and driving to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown Connecticut. Lanza shot his way into the school and killed 20 children and six adults, before turning the gun on himself. This was not the first mass shooting to happen in the United States, but its victims are, so far, among the youngest. In total, fewer than 4000 people have been killed across all recorded terrorist incidents in the United States. In comparison, there are tens of thousands of deaths as a result of shootings each *year*, even including children as the example above shows. A statistic like this raises the question as to why terrorism is one of the most hotly contested security issues in the United States and often dominates political debates, yet it kills far fewer people than gun violence. When we grapple with this question, we can ask whether American gun laws and controls should then be considered a security issue, given that guns kill more people than terrorists.

Rather than dwell on the domestic side of this issue, something within the remit of the American legal and political systems, we can look to IR for some answers and analysis. For example, applying the Responsibility to Protect, the United States has arguably failed to take responsibility for widespread suffering and loss of life (pillar 1) and has not protected its citizens (pillar 3). This means that, if we read the Responsibility to Protect literally and seek to apply it evenly, the international community might be in a position to intervene in the United States. However unlikely it is that another state would bring such an issue to the United Nations, adopting a human security framework does suggest that their endemic gun violence is a security problem. In order to break this issue down, gun violence in the United States occurs within several domains of human security. Under human security definitions, perhaps most obviously, guns pose a threat to personal security which emphasises bodily threats. We might argue that gun violence comes under the concern for children, based upon their vulnerability, as so many incidences occur in schools. Moving beyond schools, in situations of domestic violence, women are more likely to be killed by a gun than by any other method, and gun ownership increases the likelihood of murder in this situation. In many cases, the men who obtained these guns did so legally, which raises questions as to whether existing American law is sufficient to ensure human protection.

Human security also contains a provision for the security of the community. Outside of the school context, threats to community also include the disproportionate harm caused to Black people by police shootings. In 2014, for example, a 12-year-old Black boy named Tamir Rice was killed by police in a playground. At this time, Rice was holding a toy gun; he was shot by police as soon as they exited their vehicle, with no time taken to obtain further information. Ohio, the state in which Rice was killed, is an open-carry state in which citizens are permitted to have guns on display in public.

From 2013, the US has seen widespread protests and demonstrations under the *Black Lives Matter* banner which seeks to raise awareness of the extent of police killings of Black citizens. Here, the state is seen to be responsible for harm to its people due to the acceptability of guns as law enforcement tool and how this escalates all police encounters. This disproportionately impacts some communities who often fall under unequal suspicion, or profiling, and thus have a higher level of encounters with police. When adding the undercurrents of racism often evident in policing and justice in the United States, the precarious nature of life for some groups within American society certainly reaches territory marked out by human security debates.

The examples above help us think about how it is that some issues have historically been perceived as security problems while others have not. For example, why is it common in IR to perceive as a greater problem tanks crossing borders than large-scale loss of life due to guns in the United States, especially amongst schoolchildren and Black civilians? After yet another school shooting in 2018, Wayne Lapierre, head of the powerful lobbying group the National Rifle Association (NRA), addressed the calls for gun regulation and said,

they care more about control, and more of it. Their goal is to eliminate the second amendment and our firearms freedoms so they can eradicate all individual freedoms ... They hate the NRA, they hate the second amendment, they hate individual freedom.

Lapierre is not the first to represent attempts to restrict the sale of guns as an assault upon freedom and he will likely will not be the last. Helping to unpack this, constructivists argue that interpretation is what really matters when we are thinking about security because this shapes what we decide to do about problems that arise. Two constructivist concepts are useful here: articulation and interpellation (Weldes 1996). Articulation is the process through which ideas about different

subjects (like ‘the NRA’ or ‘Americans’), objects, and ideas are linked together. In this case, the concepts of freedom and gun ownership are linked together. Interpellation is the way in which people are ‘called into’ particular identities. Here, this is accomplished through Lapierre’s use of the term ‘our’, which assumes that there is an ‘us’ of some kind. Insights such as these help to open up the theoretical space for a more nuanced debate on the issue.

Conclusion

Traditionally, IR emphasised the security of the state. More recently, other approaches – such as that of ‘new wars’ have sought to bring in non-state actors, but often this still leaves a focus on states as the entity being secured. Repeated episodes of human suffering have caused academics and practitioners to take stock of these ideas, asking whether human suffering might be more important. When attempting to draw up an internationally recognised framework to answer such problems, such as Responsibility to Protect, there comes embedded within such initiatives an unavoidable challenge to sovereignty. This is controversial considering that sovereignty is the bedrock of the global system. Yet, it also indicates the gradual evolution of how sovereignty works, inspired in part by debates around the changing definitions of security that have been explored in this chapter. Security may still be about bombs and borders, but it can also be about bodies too.

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