A Critical Examination of Responsibility to Protect from Hermeneutics of Suspicion of Critical Approaches

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Abstract:

The post-cold war reality gave emergence to epistemological churnings in security studies. These new churnings in security studies challenged the discipline's dominant paradigm, which considered the 'state' as the sole representative of the people within its territory. This intellectual challenge against the national-security paradigm resulted in the expansion of disciplinary boundaries of security studies as the referent object of security shifted from 'state' to 'human'. This shift in security studies created new norms and debates in other disciplines, such as international law and I.R. studies. The emergence of 'human security' in security studies gave to a new emerging norm, ' Responsibility to protect' (R2P), which is a hotly debated topic in international law and I.R. R2P agitates against the old model of Westphalian sovereignty and presents a new model of sovereignty as responsibility. This new model of sovereignty makes the sovereign accountable to its population and asserts that it is responsible for protecting its population from grave crimes. If the sovereign is unwilling or unable to protect its people from egregious crimes, it loses its sovereignty, and the international community takes the responsibility to protect people from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.

In this paper, we argue that though 'responsibility to protect' comes with a celebratory purpose of human protection, it requires a nuanced critical appraisal taking third-world's lived experiences of colonialism and 'civilizing missions' of the past. We argue that in its present form, R2P brings the perils of imperialism in the name of human protection, the rule of law, and peacebuilding in non-western geographies. Therefore, we suggest bringing an inclusive idea of R2P and human security, taking cultural and social contributions of every culture and thereby obviating the very apparent Christian epistemic privilege in R2P and human security discourses and mitigating the pathologies of the hegemonic liberal peace model.

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1.   Introduction

The end of the Cold war was a historical moment that has shaped several realities of our time. These new realities have manifested themselves in several academic discourses of various disciplines. In fact, these new academic discourses also helped in shaping the new realities. In security studies, we have witnessed a 'paradigm shift' and a massive epistemological expansion in this period. These shifts in security studies affected several bedrock assumptions of international law and international relations disciplines as well. The dominant paradigm of state-centric security discourse of the 20th Century[1] was critically questioned, and this process opened the avenues for several other divergent paradigms of security discourse to emerge. These new paradigms of the security discourse changed the meaning and construction of security and its referent objects. Several historical phenomena, such as the fall of the Soviet Union, the humanitarian crises of Rwanda and Kosovo, were testimonies of the failures of the dominant state-security discourse in which the State was considered the sole representative of the people.[2] The State- centric security failed to achieve the primary objective of protecting people from grave crimes and human insecurities within a state's boundaries. Moreover, the end of the cold war significantly reduced the fear of large-scale wars among states. The change in the nature of threats demanded that the domain of security studies should be expanded to make it more inclusive by transcending the dominant national security paradigm. This expansion of the epistemological domain of security studies has changed its referent objects of security and brought ecological, economic, and human security within its ontological realm.[3]

Human Development Report, 1994 unveiled the concept of 'human security'.[4] This new idea of security has changed the referent object of security from the State to the people. It puts 'human' at the center of the security discourse and shapes the discourse in a people-centric way. A people-centric human security underscored the pitfalls of the national

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[1]   Giorgio Shani, *Makoto Sato & Mustapha Kamal Pasha, Protecting Human Security in a Post 9/11 World: Critical and Global Insights* (Palgrave Macmillan 2007) 1.

[2]   Benno Teschke, The Myth of 1648 Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations (Verso 2003) 245.

[3]   Frankfurt School, Constructivist School, and Critical Security Studies were the primary protagonists of this epistemological expansion of the security studies. Barry Buzan, Emma Rothschild, and other constructivist and critical scholars challenged the dominant national security paradigm of security studies. See, Barry Buzan, People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations (1983). Emma Rothschild, 'What is Security' (1995) 124 Daedalus 53.

[4]   The 'people-centered' human security concerns itself with the living conditions of the people in a society, their freedom to exercise choices, and their accessibility to market and other opportunities available at <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf> accessed July 31, 2022.