A Foucauldian Genealogy of Post-Cold War US Foreign Policy: Challenging the Norms of State Sovereignty with the Pursuit of Universal Human Rights

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While President Obama has repeatedly stressed a decisive break from the foreign policy of his predecessor, there exists a disconnect between rhetoric and reality as his administration has radicalised counterterrorism practices, evidenced in the dronification of US (inter)national security. My dissertation project, as a Foucauldian genealogy – a diagnostic endeavour – opens up a 'history of the present' of US post-Cold War foreign policy and security practices. The end of the Cold War precipitated the entrance of a moralised concern with a transnational scope into conceptions of global relations; a transformation in the perception of the international order situated in liberal discourses of cosmopolitan peace and universal human rights. I aim to critique the fabrication of a vision of international order shaped around the universal 'human' – constituted by a framework of rights that is then considered secure and peaceful – as something which renders the Other insecure, barbarous, and subject to violent intervention. My specific contribution, situated within a niche of critical security studies which regards security as a liberal technique of government, redresses the largely ahistorical nature of previous work in the field, entailing an interrogation of the discursive universalisation of human rights, and the related problematisation of the established norms of state sovereignty. My dissertation is organised conceptually: following an initial exposition of the theoretical framework, the chapters focus upon shifting conceptions of American exceptionalism, (human) rights as security, state sovereignty (specifically failure and roguery), and humanising warfare/necessary violence, all in terms of US international relations. In investigating these key discourses, I aim to investigate critically how human rights, conceived as synonymous with American (liberal) values, have come to legitimise US foreign policy, security discourse, and military intervention – whether deploying boots (on the ground) or bombs.

The logic of the liberal subject living in expansive peaceful cohabitation has deep historical roots, however it is not until the 1990s that what Brad Evans describes as a 'global imaginary of threat' – correlating liberalism with peace and security – could be applied to human as species[1]. What if this universalised human rights framework, rather than promoting equality and a balance of security and freedom, in fact augments a global hegemony and the selective withdrawal of rights? Are the violent acts carried out in their name aberrations within exceptional circumstances, or constitutive of liberal order-building? In my analysis, I unearth the plural and heterogeneous force relations and influences of power functioning in the discursive production of accepted, standard discourses and behaviours, against which international actors are evaluated and subject to corrective measures. Contesting the 'truths' perpetuated by the disciplinary knowledges that (re)produce International Relations theory and practice, I posit an interpretation of the appeal to the defence of a particular, universal(ised) conception of human rights in the American use of force as symptomatic of a globalised biopolitics; the liberal democratic state has command over lives and bodies beyond its own borders. A central question of my research refers to the dominant discourses of perpetual liberal peace despite the persistent recourse to war: life is continually referenced in the justification of force in pursuit of international order and stability. The so-called 'failed' or 'rogue' states subject to regime change, and the individual bodies targeted by signature drone strikes – invasions of sovereign space – are the violent sacrifice in the US project of a global, unified, liberal security, sustained by the boundary between 'us', the cosmopolitan realm of perpetual peace, and the insecure, illegitimate 'them'.

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[1] Brad Evans, *Liberal Terror* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) p.61