

Safe Areas as a Response to Humanitarian Crises?

Date: 7-8 October 2016

Venue: Freie Universität Berlin, [Binger Str. 40, 14195 Berlin](#)

Conveners: Daniel Jacob (Berlin) & Stefan Recchia (Cambridge)

Summary and preliminary program:

The purpose of humanitarian safe areas is to provide refuge to civilians threatened by war. Safe areas do not purport to end a war or solve the underlying political conflict. Instead, their more limited goal is to create islands of temporary protection close to or even within the territory where fighting takes place. Different forms of safe areas have been established in several wars since the early 20th century. Their recent historical record, however, has been mixed. In the 1990s, safe areas were established most prominently in Northern Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Rwanda. The safe areas in Northern Iraq and Rwanda were able to provide basic levels of protection; but according to critics, they served primarily the interests of neighbouring states such as Turkey or the broader geopolitical interests of major Western powers. As to the UN safe areas established in Bosnia, they failed dramatically and were unable to protect civilian populations there against Bosnian Serb attacks. To the present day, the fall of Srebrenica and the ensuing massacre remain emblematic of the UN's failure to fulfil its humanitarian promise.

The failure of humanitarian safe areas during the 1990s seemed so indisputable that for several years thereafter, there was hardly any debate about them. More recently, however, policymakers have again begun to actively debate the possibility of establishing safe areas, such as during the humanitarian crises in Darfur in 2004-2005 and Libya in 2011. The idea has gained additional prominence in light of current debates about establishing a safe area in northern Syria – although the fact that the most ardent proponent of such a safe area inside Syria is the Turkish government, hardly a disinterested party, raises difficult normative questions of its own. Several de facto safe areas have also been established in the context of African peace operations in recent years, such as in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

At the same time, in spite of this renewed interest in humanitarian safe areas at the level of policy, there has been hardly any scholarly debate about related challenges and no systematic analysis of the ethical and legal implications. The conference, which is sponsored by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, is intended to begin filling this gap. Our planned main output is a special journal issue.

Friday, 7th October 2016

- 12.00-12.30 **Introduction**
Daniel JACOB (Freie Universität Berlin)
Stefano RECCHIA (University of Cambridge)
- 12.30-14.00 *Lunch*
- 14.00-15.15 **The Emergence of Safe Areas and the Role of Historical Contingency**
Author: Phil [ORCHARD](#) (University of Queensland)
Comment: Lars [BROZUS](#) (SWP, German Institute for International and Security Affairs)
- 15.15-15.30 *Coffee break*
- 15.30-16.45 **Safe Areas: the Legal Framework**
Author: Emanuela-Chiara [GILLARD](#) (University of Oxford)
Comment: Robin [GEISS](#) (University of Glasgow)
- 16.45-17.00 *Coffee break*
- 17.00-18.15 **Not Safe Areas: Exploring Alternative Modes of Civilian Protection in African Wars**
Author: Paul D. [WILLIAMS](#) (George Washington University)
Comment: Gregor [WALTER-DROP](#) (Freie Universität Berlin)
- 18:15-19:15 **Policy talk**
Pilar SARCIADA (International Committee of the Red Cross)
- 20:00 *Dinner at “[Alter Krug Dahlem](#)”*

Saturday, 8th October 2016

- 09.30-10.45 **The RtoP & The Moral Case for Safe Areas**
Author: Daniel [JACOB](#) (Freie Universität Berlin)
Comment: Luise MÜLLER (Freie Universität Berlin)
- 10.45-11.00 *Coffee break*
- 11.00-12.15 **The trouble with humanitarian safe areas**
Author: Stefano [RECCHIA](#) (University of Cambridge)
Comment: Bernd [LADWIG](#) (Freie Universität Berlin)
- 12.15-13.30 *Lunch*
- 13.30-14.45 **Displacement, asylum and intervention: safe areas as a response to refugee crises?**
Author: Jennifer [WELSH](#) & Rutger BIRNIE (European University Institute Florence)
Comment: Cord [SCHMELZLE](#) (Freie Universität Berlin)