

UNCTC and the Balance Between Border Security and Human Rights

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Recently, within the twenty-first century, border security has been a growing issue especially in relation with national security and international stability. Trade has increased across borders, consisting of materials, information and even people. This has caused states to prosper financially and discover more opportunities for growth, but it has also increased vulnerability with maintaining security. States have the ultimate responsibility to protect their borders, but when restrictive measures become too extreme, human rights come into play. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) as well as its Border Security and Management (BSM) program has a critical role in assisting nations in finding a balance between both border and human security. The UNCTC Border Security and Management program focuses on the threat of terrorism and international crime, while promoting human rights. The UNCTC uses international cooperation, security operations, and human rights-centered training to create a future of security that ensures the safety of states without undermining individual freedoms.

Border Management

Border management has been closely related to a state's sovereignty, but in our current post-9/11 world, it has become synonymous to the fight against terrorism. The attacks on September 11, 2001, have changed the way governments and international organizations view security. The United States, India, and Israel's borders in particular have become heavily militarized after the “War on Terror”, which created an emphasis on defense and geopolitical competition over cooperation and humanitarian rights¹. This led to more security around borders, increased surveillance technology and increased wariness toward migrants and refugees. It has

¹Karen A. Mingst and Heather Elko McKibben, *Essentials of International Relations*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2022), 222-223.

also raised ethical concerns and political tensions between protecting citizens and their rights when crossing borders.

Internationally, these concerns extend beyond terrorism and include smuggling of weapons, drugs, and people which creates instability and fear for entire regions. An example of this would be in West Africa, where weak border security and government corruption has increased the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons also known as “SALWs”². Because of this, the trade of SALWs has grown, unfortunately increasing violence and insecurity in states. Without effective border security and management, these regional threats can expand globally to add pressure to a state's already full capacity and threaten regional and international peace. Mingst and McKibben explain, global issues like terrorism and trafficking cannot be solved by any one nation alone; they require the cooperation of international institutions³. Because of these reasons, the UNCTC's Border Security and Management program was created to form a plan to integrate security measures with human rights security, in order for countries to have better cooperation internally and externally.

UNCTC

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) was established in 2001, during a time of fear due to the September 11th attacks, and was a subdivision within the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). Its goal is to acknowledge and refine international efforts to prevent and tackle terrorism in all forms. The Border Security and Management program's flagship initiatives, were designed to help member states strengthen border governance systems, prevent the movement of terrorists and criminal networks, and enhance international cooperation⁴. This program has an impact internationally because it provides a shared platform

² Toyin Cotties Adetiba. 2019. “A Threat to Regional Security.” *Journal of African Union Studies* 8 (1): 3-10.

³ Mingst, McKibben, *Essentials of International Relations*, 245-247

⁴ United Nations. 2020. *Border Security and Management | Office of Counter-Terrorism*. www.un.org. 2020, (1)

where states can come together to create security strategies while maintaining compliance to international law and rights.

Compared to unilateral or militarized approaches, the UNCTC's core principles surround the idea that terrorism and organized crime are international problems that require multilateral solutions. Its current and past projects have incorporated technology to their border management tools and training programs for law enforcement, particularly border security officials. The UNCTC is currently in the process of delivering these programs in phases to countries in the Middle East and North Africa, where security and border security is creating panic among its civilians. The UNCTC's authority under the UN gives it the ability to promote lawful processes and encourage states to adopt mandates that promote and protect human rights.

UNCTC BSM Program

The UNCTC's Border Security and Management program has many core goals: improving cooperation among border agencies, promoting technological integration with border security, and integrating human rights into training operations. Recently, its strategies consist of the use of biometric testing and updated document verification systems. It also includes fostering cooperation across institutions, and offering capacity-building programs tailored to each state's needs⁵. Although its most significant achievement has been the integration of human rights training programs into counterterrorism efforts.

The UNCTC requires that all counter-terrorism measures must respect human rights and the rule of law⁶. They provide five-day training modules for security and law enforcement officers with a focus on specific topics such as "Human Rights Compliant Detention Practices" and "Human Rights Compliant Interview Practices". These program initiatives aim to ensure that

⁵ UNCCT. 2019. *Human Rights| Office of Counter-Terrorism*. www.un.org. 2019, (1)

⁶ UNCCT, Office of Counter-Terrorism

law officials specifically working along borders understand their essential security requirements as well as their legal obligations that control their actions. Through these initiatives, the UNCTC influences state capacity and enforces the concept that respecting one's rights is not an obstacle to state and national security, it is a part of it, and also a fundamental aspect of cooperation.

Criticisms

A major criticism of international counterterrorism measures is that they often prioritize national security at the expense of individual rights. Reece Jones, a political geographer, claims that after 9/11 states increasingly viewed borders as “enclosures of civilization”, reinforcing division between insiders and outsiders⁷. This division has fueled an increase of hate crimes, xenophobia, discrimination, which is leading to the disappearance of asylum options for refugees. Opposed to this, the UNCTC views borders as a space of cooperation and shared responsibility rather than barriers of exclusion.

Researcher Rohan Gunaratna has studied “strategic counter-terrorism” and supports the UNCTC’s long-term collaborative approach. Gunaratna argues that maintainable security is not dependent on violent responses but on understanding the background of extremists by implementing soft power concepts such as communication, education, and cross-border collaboration⁸. This follows the UNCTC’s focus on preventive measures which aids in reducing the need for extreme force. By fostering a space for global collaboration rather than geopolitical competition, the UNCTC helps states maintain security lawfully.

West Africa is a current example of this need for security. Toyin Adetiba studied regional security and its faults, which highlights the proliferation of weapons illegally, and weak

⁷ REECE JONES. 2011. “Border Security, 9/11 and the Enclosure of Civilisation.” *The Geographical Journal* 177 (3): 213–217.

⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, . 2017. “Strategic Counter-Terrorism: A Game Changer in Fighting Terrorism?” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9 (6): 1–5.

governance that allows terrorists and traffickers to exploit this vulnerability⁹. Recently the UNCTC's launched Phases I and II of their project which have been piloted in the MENA region; this includes the promotion of intergovernmental coordination. Their goal is to address not only border security but also instability within a country's government, and understanding its insecurity. These efforts to implement measures of effective border management requires addressing institutional weakness and human error, not solely physical security measures.

Conclusion

The UNCTC's Border Security and Management program addresses a growing topic in international relations: how to protect borders and individuals without interfering with humanitarian rights. Through training programs, biometrics, and cooperation, the UNCTC provides the framework needed to create national security integration with human rights. While there are still difficulties that remain, particularly in regions suffering corruption, political instability, and lack of resources, the program represents advancement in global counterterrorism strategy. As Mingst and McKibben note, international institutions play their most vital role when they transform collective interest into shared action¹⁰. The UNCTC's work illustrates that border security and human rights should not be viewed as opposing goals, but interdependent foundations for international order.

Annotated Bibliography

⁹ Adetiba. *Journal of African Union Studies* 8 (1): 8-15.

¹⁰ Mingst, McKibben, *Essentials of International Relations*, 226-231

Gunaratna, Rohan. 2017. "Strategic Counter-Terrorism: A Game Changer in Fighting Terrorism?" *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9 (6): 1–5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351525>

This journal article explains that organizations such as the UNCTC as well as local governments should move towards more long term approaches towards counter-terrorism instead of focusing on acting with immediate violence. Gunaratna claims that there has been neglect with maintaining security, and we should prioritize understanding the background of terrorist attacks and extremist ideologies. He also believes that soft power would be beneficial for balancing security with human rights, which differs from the current hard power operations that are being promoted by global leaders such as the United States. This article is extremely useful as Gunaratna found the idea of strategic counter-terrorism to be effective, particularly through a shift in focus from cooperation to collaboration; which would relate to the prioritization of human rights due to the decreased amount of violence. This source is also extremely credible because Rohan Gunaratna has done research on this topic for many years and it directly relates to national security concerns and how it connects to human rights.

JONES, REECE. 2011. "Border Security, 9/11 and the Enclosure of Civilisation." *The Geographical Journal* 177 (3): 213–17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41238040>

In this journal article "Border Security, 9/11 and the Enclosure of Civilisation.", Reece Jones discusses the War on Terror post 9/11 and how border security became reinforced across the world with the inclusion of more frontline military defenses. In particular, he argues that the United States, Israel and India have used the War on Terror to tighten their borders and protect themselves from outside threats. He also claims that these borders were not just physical but strategic as well, due to it creating allies and also enemies. This article is extremely useful regarding my research question, because it is a more modern approach to understanding how borders and allies are formed, especially regarding fear after national security concerns. Reece Jones is a reputable researcher who has specialised in border security and government policies. The article was also published in 2011 making it a semi-recent journal that still connects policies that are in place today.

Adetiba, Toyin Cotties. 2019. "A Threat to Regional Security." *Journal of African Union Studies* 8 (1): 93–113. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26890419>

In this journal article, "A Threat to Regional Security." Toyin Adetiba discusses how frequent and efficient criminals are in moving small arms and weapons between West African borders. Some of the topics that she believes is causing a lack of enforcement are issues such as

corruption and weakened or lack of authority/government intervention. Adetiba also argues that unions and institutions such as ECOWAS have made no major improvement with this crisis, which could partially be due to lack of resources and funding for the members of ECOWAS. Adetiba suggests that there should be strengthened military enforcement at borders and new laws regarding the proliferation and illegal trade of small arms and weapons. This article relates to my research question because of how SALW's can increase transnational threats, especially through trade with other countries, and the security threats involved with criminal arms trafficking. This journal article is peer reviewed and was published in April 2019, making it recent to current events that are still continuing to this day. This article is also useful as it is focused specifically in West Africa, where border control laws are currently being discussed, especially due to an increase in crime.

United Nations. 2020. "Border Security and Management | Office of Counter-Terrorism."

Www.un.org. 2020.

<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/cct/border-security-and-management>

In this article from the United Nations Border Security and Management program we learn about what this program does under the Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNCTC). The goal of the UN BSM is to monitor and control the movement of terrorist and criminal organizations between borders and Foreign Terrorist Fighters. Their aim is to increase cooperation across institutions and encourage the use of technology to control travel documents and border screening processes. They also encourage the unification of border control systems and tailored technical assistance on border security and management "good practices". Though, this progress can only be put into effect through state commitment, and not all states are willing to progress. This source directly relates to my research topic as it discusses how states are influenced by the UNCTC's efforts for border security stem from a national security perspective. This also includes how border security and management can provide insight on terrorist movements across state borders and measures that can be initiated to protect a state, such as sharing information and technologies. This article was published by the office of the UNCTC making this a credible source due to its well respected role in international security. It also includes some of their most recent achievements within their program which can provide more research especially regarding security threats within other countries such as West Africa and Central Asia.

UNCCT. 2019. "Human Rights | Office of Counter-Terrorism." Wwww.un.org.2019.

<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/cct/human-rights>

In this article published by the UN's Office of Counter-Terrorism, we learn about how following the rule of law is essential in providing security on the state's end when interacting with terrorist and security threats. The UN claims that all counter-terrorism measures must respect human rights and fundamental freedoms when intervening. This includes implementing

proper training for security officers and 5 day training modules for law enforcement, especially border security officials. A training curriculum was also established, which includes modules such as “The Use of Force within Human Rights Constraints” and “Human Rights Compliant Detention Practices” so that specifically people working along borders can maintain a respectful demeanor that will not interfere with one's rights. The UN has also created projects that help support victims of terrorism and mandates that promote and protect human rights. In relation to my research question, this article shows specifically what countries do during screening processes and surveillance between international borders and how there are mandates in place in many states that ensure that one's rights won't be violated. This article is credible as it comes from the UNCCT and has influential power in creating and establishing international norms. Along with this, the article is up to date in the progress of the UN's phases of their project, which includes deliverance of these trainings to countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mingst, Karen A. and McKibben, Heather Elko. “Essentials of International Relations” 9th ed. New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2022.

In “Essentials of International Relations”, Mingst and McKibben provide an overview of political theories, institutions and how different actors shape global politics. They explain the role of international organizations such as the United Nations in maintaining global security and promoting human rights through cooperation across states. The textbook helps us to understand how the The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) operates at the international level regarding security and respecting states sovereignty. This text allows us to better understand the principles of liberal institutionalism and how institutions encourage cooperation. This directly relates to how the UNCTC balances national security with human rights in their border security programs.

Border Security and Human Rights: Baltimore Connection

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Continuation

Though the UNCTC's work highlights the international significance of balancing border security with human rights, these topics are not limited to the international scale or foreign states. The interactions between terrorism, trafficking, and border control shape communities within the United States, in many instances which may be unnoticed. Some of the same obstacles that the UNCTC addresses, particularly the trade of weapons, human trafficking networks, and unjust treatment of marginalized populations¹ have direct effects in American cities. Being able to understand how these global issues transpire locally allows a clear picture as to why international cooperation and human rights based approaches matter. In order to understand this international scale, it is essential to analyze local communities and cities, such as Baltimore, Maryland. Though it is not directly situated on a border, Baltimore has experienced detrimental effects of global security collapse and international crime, showcasing how connected global and local security are.

Introduction into Baltimore

International debates between border security, humanitarian rights, and counterterrorism are often seen as foreign or international issues and are disconnected to life in American cities. But the issues addressed by the UNCTC, including trade of small arms and light weapons , trafficking networks and law enforcement exercises form the experiences of local communities. Baltimore is an example of how these global dynamics can reshape local conditions. The city's up and down battles with gun violence, migrant instability, and human trafficking reveal the problems connected to weak border security can be seen in urban communities. Examining Baltimore's connection to the UNCTC's work illustrated how international relations connect to local politics, and how global security should not be separated from regional experiences.

¹ United Nations. 2020. *Border Security and Management* | Office of Counter-Terrorism. www.un.org, 2020, (1)

Illegal Trade

International apprehension about border security goes beyond terrorisms and includes trafficking of weapons, individuals, and drugs; all which are issues that affect cities such as Baltimore. Inconsistent border governance allows SALW to travel through global and domestic trafficking networks, eventually reaching American cities far from where they were originally smuggled. Baltimore's struggle with gun violence is tied to the system where firearms reach cities through illegal trade. This trade concept sometimes starts outside of the United States or travels across multiple different U.S states without being noticed. In result, Baltimore becomes a well known destination of global weapon movement, despite it not being a border city. Crifasi, Buggs, Choksy and Webster analyze the impact of Maryland's Firearm Safety Act (FSA) and its influence on how firearms are circulated. It is claimed that because of FSA, there has been less movement of SALW illegally, with a striking 82% fewer smuggled guns being recovered². This explains the UNCTC's emphasis on international cooperation and border management, because Baltimore is not the only American city affected by this illegal trade. When borders become more secure and regulated, American cities like Baltimore will experience lessened effects of illegal trafficking.

Migration

Migration security is a global issue that is local to Baltimore due to its historical background as a city sought after by immigrants. Critics of modern border management argue that heightened security post 9/11 has created repercussions for local immigrant communities across the United States, including Baltimore. Policies that have expanded surveillance security, restricted visa requirements, and heightened detention exercises that were previously instilled to prevent terrorism, have now allowed an atmosphere of fear and warriness among migrants and

² Crifasi et al., "Initial Impact of Maryland's Firearm Safety Act," *RSF Journal* 3, no. 5 (2017): 128,

asylum seekers. In Baltimore, immigrant families experience this fear through workplace raids, deportation threats and the anxiety that everyday interactions could lead to removal of their home and family, even though Baltimore as a city is openly supportive of their immigrant residents. Stephen Lee goes into detail about psychological trauma and the effect to one's dignity when separating migrant children from their parents³. These border policies shape the relations between immigrant communities and public institutions, sometimes making these residences weary to seek services, report crime, or cooperate with law enforcement. The UNCTC's human rights centered approach is contrary to this, as it emphasizes the idea that security can be achieved without threatening the safety of migrants⁴. This aligns with Baltimore's continued efforts to build trust within its communities.

Trafficking

Human trafficking conveys the connection between international border security failure and local repercussions. Baltimore's location alongside the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and the Beltway makes it a significant location for trafficking networks. Its proximity to the Chesapeake Bay, railway networks and major cities such as Washington, DC and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania also add quick transportation as a factor. Nazli Avdan explores this idea more, as he analyzes trafficking indicators through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It was seen that tighter entry restrictions often connected with higher trafficking risks, which he claims as the "vicious effect"⁵. The weakness that enables criminal groups to travel across borders and traffickers to exploit victims. The UNCTC seeks to reinforce border screening, cooperation, and human-rights centered law enforcement practices in cities, providing a fight against trafficking at

³ S. Lee, "Family Separation as Slow Death," *Columbia Law Review* 119, no. 8 (2019)

⁴ UNCTC. 2019. *Human Rights| Office of Counter-Terrorism*. www.un.org 2019, (1)

⁵ Human Trafficking and Migration Control Policy: Vicious or Virtuous Cycle?, Nazli Avdan, *Journal of Public Policy* 32, no. 3 (2012): 171–205

the source. Baltimore's ability to protect vulnerable populations can be connected to the effectiveness of intergovernmental structures.

MONSE

A local actor that specializes in these challenges would be the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement also known as MONSE. MONSE does not enforce border security and is not internationally affiliated, but its mission is directly shaped by the global issues that are addressed by the UNCTC. Their office initiates violence-intervention missions, collaborates with the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, and aids in trauma focused responses to crime; all which relate to issues originating beyond US borders⁶. MONSE's efforts to reduce gun violence is directly related to the flow of illegal firearms. Along with this, its cooperation with at-risk youth and survivors of exploitation indicated the local impact of trafficking networks. Although MONSE operates locally, it is supported by a security environment shaped by international norms and cooperation.

Conclusion

Baltimore reveals several important insights about the connectedness of international relations. As Mingst and McKibben claim, global problems will not be solved by any singular nation, and international institutions are necessary for flipping shared interests into collective action⁷. Baltimore's recurring issues with gun violence, trafficking and migrant fear demonstrates the city's reliance on effective global governance even if the residents do not connect with those international institutions directly. Observing how Baltimore operates shows that terrorism and human rights are not confined to international borders, they can be seen in our daily lives.

⁶ City of Baltimore, *Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement* (2024)

⁷ Karen A. Mingst and Heather Elko McKibben, *Essentials of International Relations*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2022), 226-231.

Internationally when border governance fails, Baltimore experiences increased crime rates, causing instability; whereas when international institutions increase human-rights centered training, local law enforcement will then adopt similar practices. When security for migrants becomes participated globally, fear will no longer be instilled in local immigrant communities. Baltimore shows that global security concerns can harm communities, but the work of institutions like the UNCTC should not go unnoticed, as it is essential to improving the safety, security, and health of local populations.

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