

WORKING PAPER

Security or Human Security? Civil-Military Relations in *Battlestar Galactica*¹

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Roslin: Do you plan to declare martial law? Take over the government?

Adama: Of course not.

Roslin: Then you do acknowledge my position as president...

Adama: Miss Roslin, my primary objective at the present time is to repair the *Galactica* and continue to fight.

Roslin: ... There are fifty thousand civilian refugees out there who don't stand a chance without your ship...

Adama: We're aware of the tactical situation, and I'm sure that you'll all be safe here on Ragnar after we leave.

Roslin: After you leave? Where are you going?

Adama: To find the enemy. We're at war, and that's my mission.

Roslin: That's insane.

Adama: You would rather that we run?

Roslin: Yes, absolutely. That is the only sane thing to do here, exactly that: run... the human race is about to be wiped out. We have fifty thousand people left, and that's it. Now, if we are even going to survive as a species, then we need to get the hell out of here and we need to start having babies.

Adama: Excuse me. (He leaves.)

This scene from the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* pilot - the first in which Commander Adama and President Roslin meet - is emblematic of three politically significant conversations underpinning the series. First, what is the appropriate role of the military with respect to the society it presumably exists to serve? Second, who decides? Third, what are the means by which that role is to be executed? In foreign policy circles, security studies scholarship and political blog comment threads, these conversations map broadly onto what Peter Feaver has called the "civil-military problematique;"² and cut across an emerging conceptual distinction between national and human security. And as we show, these real-world conversations – whether about US military affairs, the Egyptian revolution, or just

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² Feaver, 1996.

warring – are at times infused with *Battlestar Galactica* references, demonstrating the show’s relevance to deliberative discourse about the civil-military relationship.

This paper explores how those conversations play out over the course of the *Battlestar Galactica* TV series (hereafter BSG) and examines how the show’s messaging is positioned within and mediates real-world debates about both civil-military relations and human security. At first glance, BSG seems to be, at its heart, a story about soldiers and soldiering. The show has been called "military science fiction" and it takes place largely on board a military vessel. However in exploring the relationship between the civilian sector and the military in the show, we will argue that BSG is a strongly human-security (rather than national-security)-focused text, and becomes more-so as the series progresses. At the same time, BSG also complicates both the meaning of human security and the concept’s close association with the democratic control of the armed forces. This is evidenced by the various ways that the show’s lessons are drawn on and invoked in military and human rights circles. Yet we show that while the human-security-related messages of the show are not always as one-dimensional as they appear when invoked to service political arguments.

We structure the paper so as to elaborate on each of the three tensions exemplified by the initial conversation between Roslin and Adama in the pilot episode. First, we examine the *epistemological referent of “security” in the series*. At the start of the series, Commander Adama assumes a territorialized national security frame – he sees his role as defending the Colonies themselves by pursuing and engaging ‘the enemy’ – while Roslin argues the role of the military is to protect *civilians* and proposes a militarized humanitarianism on behalf of a diasporic human collective. Although the distinction between military and human security is a constant tension in the show, we argue that the series progresses in the direction of a human security frame, somewhat contingently defined. Yet we also demonstrate how the distinction itself is problematized by the nature of the political context – both in BSG and in foreign policy circles.

Second, we examine the *tension between civilian and military authority* as depicted in the series, and explore how it has both drawn from and been mapped onto changing political events on earth. An abiding thread of analysis in civil-military relations is what level of civilian control over the military and military influence over civilian society is appropriate in a given society. The series begins with the two on somewhat equal footing in their respective spheres – similar to what Huntington refers to as “objective civilian control” – but the show progresses toward greater civilian supremacy overall, as well as fusing the distinction between the two, trends more associated with Janowitz. The tensions portrayed in the show draw on and respond to currents of political concern about the civil-military gap in US society since the end of the Cold War, exacerbated by the war on terror; as a cultural artifact appealing to both civilian and military audiences, BSG in fact provides a common narrative and language to help bridge this gap while promoting a socio-normative position on civilian supremacy.

Finally, we examine representations of the limits placed on the role of the military in security, and *the context and means by which it can carry out security measures*. The show is unflinchingly brutal at times, forcing the viewer to confront the notion that good people can do terrible things. Nonetheless, BSG presents and defends an argument that effective and legitimate military force can only be effective if wielded with due respect for the rule of law and human rights, and particularly if it acts on behalf of the people rather than turning against them. This narrative has significant resonance with current policy debates over the role of the military in human security, as evidenced by the eruption of BSG references in coverage of the military's role in Egypt's revolution. Moreover, the show embodies an important tension between civilians and military personnel in the war on terror on the extent to which the state and/or military have the nation's best interests at heart.

Ultimately, we argue that BSG both constitutes a validation of the human security framework and a critique of certain of its assumptions. Insofar as democratic control over the armed forces is a key feature of human security discourse, BSG seems to promote this normative framework. However it does so in a way that goes conceptually beyond standard frameworks in civil-military relations thinking. Moreover, BSG showcases some of the analytical and normative tensions in the notion of "human security," particularly questioning the referent of the "human" itself.

Security for Whom?

"I hope the Libyan military can find the courage to follow the Egyptian military's example and choose humanity instead of some contrived sense of patriotism." – *ET's Reflections*, February 22, 2011.

"Human security" is both an academic concept and a policy movement. In essence, it is a framework for thinking about security from the standpoint of individuals rather than territorial states.³ Whereas the practice and theory of national security tends to focus on how to use the defense establishment to protect the institutions of state from outside invasion, human security focuses on threats to individuals, rather than states, and from a wider range of threats including those emanating from their own governments. "In ethical terms, the security claims of other referents, including the state, draw whatever value they have from the claim that they address the needs and aspirations of the individuals that make them up."⁴

Originally part of the general reconstitution of security associated with the post-Cold War "new world order," human security has burgeoned into both an analytical framework and series of policy initiatives engaging vast transnational networks. In the academy, the concept of human security is reflected in both re-conceptualizations of security and the expansion of conventional security studies into new substantive areas.⁵ Politically, the

³ Newman, 2010.

⁴ MacFarlane and Khong, 2009, p. 2.

⁵ Paris, 2000.

concept is closely associated with the policy domains of transitional justice, humanitarian intervention, arms control, human rights and economic development.⁶ Empirically, it also encompasses humanitarian affairs, health, conflict prevention and environmental security.⁷ It has spawned a Trust Fund at the United Nations, a formal network of like-minded states, and a number of diplomatic initiatives and research institutes.⁸ Although the term itself fell out of favor in Canada when Harper came to power, and was never used much in the US, Martin and Owen argue that the foreign policy imperatives spawned by the era of human security agenda-setting remain largely in place and are increasing with the renewed focus on multilateralism, democracy-building, and economic development.⁹

Human security does not constitute a rejection of militaries and states, but rather tries to harness their power for the promotion of individual rights and freedoms. In this sense, it represents a more practical, policy-oriented approach to human rights work, one focused on security sector reform rather than naming and shaming human rights abuses. Yet as a framework for prioritizing policy initiatives, human security can stand in tension with national security. In considering the impacts of Wikileaks disclosures, for example, a national security frame would focus on the risks to US standing, soft power and personnel, whereas a human security framework would pay closer attention to the risks to civilian informants in war zones due to inadequate redaction, and to the overall effects on human rights advocacy.¹⁰

Very early in the BSG series, the tactical implications of and tensions between these two frameworks become very clear. With humanity nearly extinct and human institutions and governing structures uncertain, the context of the narrative presents a petridish for the reconstruction/reconstitution of social-political order. This is played out in a dance of ongoing negotiations between Adama and Roslin, one that illustrates, state-of-nature-like, many aspects of the putative “bargain” between government and armed forces in a fictional setting where it takes place from scratch and through trial and error. The show also demonstrates the ethical frameworks at play in debates over how the collective interest is to be defined – debates that map onto the distinction between human and state security, and actually problematizes the notion that civilian leaders can necessarily speak accurately for the people.

⁶ The campaigns against landmines and child soldiers and for the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, all occurred under the “human security” mantle. See Hampson, 2002.

⁷ Carpenter, Dyugulu and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2010.

⁸ Krause, 2009.

⁹ Martin and Owen, 2010.

¹⁰ Indeed, the former frame is closely associated with neoconservative opprobrium against Julian Assange, calling for his prosecution under the Espionage Act (Thiessen, 2010). The latter objects to Wikileaks’ means but not necessarily to its ends, noting that done properly whistle-blowing can promote the cause of human security (Carpenter, 2010).

In the wake of the initial attacks, the *Galactica* immediately assumes a battle-readiness framework, whereas Roslin chooses a humanitarian posture focused on gathering civilian survivors. In short, she positions herself in immediate opposition to advocates of military necessity. In discussion with Apollo, Roslin introduces the notion of taking care of 'survivors': "As soon as the attack began the government ordered a full stop on all civilian vessels so now we've got hundreds of stranded ships in the solar system. Some are lost, some are damaged, some are losing power. We have enough space on this ship to accommodate up to 500 people..."

In the same scene, Roslin demands Apollo for the first time to admit that the war is lost. "The tactical situation is that we are losing, right, Captain?" After Apollo confirms, Roslin continues with the plan how to save as many people as possible adopting the refugee frame: "So we pick up as many people as we can we try to find a safe haven to pot down. Captain, I'd like you to look over the navigational charts for a likely place to hide from the Cylons." However, this move is not going to resonate with Adama's military plans. Roslin, acting as a political authority asks Adama for the assistance. She says: "Captain Apollo, please inform Commander Adama that we are currently involved in rescue operations and we require his assistance..." In the face of resistance from the military, Roslin reaffirms her goals (and her authority) by sending Sharon Valerii's raptor out to engage in civilian protection operations: "I want you to go out there and find as many survivors as you can and bring them back to this position. We will then form a convoy. We will guide them out of the combat zone and into safety."

Roslin's civilian protection framework immediately runs afoul of military concerns: she and Colonel Tigh discuss priorities. Tigh claims: "We are in the middle of repairing and rearming this ship. We can't afford to lose a single man off the line to start caring for refugees." Roslin: "We have 50,000 people out there. Some of them are hurt. Our priority has to be caring for refugees." Tigh: "My priority is preparing this ship for combat. In case you haven't heard, there's a war on." Roslin stands her ground: "...the war is over and we lost."¹¹

When Adama finally sits down with Roslin their discussion also centers (in decidedly gendered terms) on whether to adopt a war frame or a refugee frame for strategic thinking. Although no consensus is reached in this discussion (Adama insists: "You can run if you like; this ship will stand and it will fight") by the end of pilot episode Roslin's view wins out, with Adama stating to his officers that the civilians, "better start making babies" and then: "We're taking the civilians with us. We're leaving the solar system and we're not coming back." The refugee frame underpins Seasons 1 and 2 of the series, with the *Galactica's* military action largely reduced to what would be called civilian protection operations: defensive efforts to fend off attacks on the convoy.

¹¹ The issue is unresolved in this scene, though Tigh eventually offers some assistance, he claims it is only because Apollo is the commander's son.

Yet the tension between a "protection of civilians" logic and a "state/military security" logic reappears frequently in the show. The *Galactica* leadership must periodically choose between its commitment to sustaining civilians and sustaining military readiness. The political leadership must choose between upholding the rights of individuals and upholding its ability to govern effectively in the service of human survival. At times, as Mikkel argues in this volume, the crew must choose between losing potentially everything while upholding their ideals, or preserving the fleet while sacrificing their humanity.¹²

And BSG also complicates the association of "human security" with "human rights" or "humanitarianism" throughout. Roslin's commitment to the civilian population over the military extends to critiquing Adama for what might otherwise be considered humanitarian gestures vis a vis his own soldiers. Indeed, the notion that human security is "soft" while military security is "hard" is turned on its head as quite often Roslin ends up playing the Machiavellian to Adama's "soft-touch."¹³ Echoing debates over whether force protection should take precedence over avoiding civilian bloodshed, Roslin and Adama argue over whether to mount a costly rescue mission when Starbuck goes missing. "Clear your heads," Roslin chides, suggesting that the male officers are behaving emotionally rather than serving rationally as tools of the wider public interest.¹⁴

Nor does human security as presented in the show imply an unmitigated concern for the civil liberties of the domestic population. Information freedom, for example, is not part of the bargain: when the leadership discovers that Cylons appear human, Roslin wants this fact to be kept in secret in order to protect people from one another.¹⁵ Participation rights cannot be assumed: it takes former terrorist Tom Zarek to make the case that elections should be held: if the power is accumulated only in two figures, he argues, the usurpation of power is likely which, at the end of the day, means human insecurity.¹⁶ Ultimately, Roslin attempts to throw the election, guessing that the public interest may not be served by the popular will, a perspective vindicated by events in the storyline.¹⁷ Nor do a range of economic and social rights associated with some perspectives on 'human security' get much play in the series. Labor strikes are treated as mutinies. The right to abortion is curbed: Roslin, previously a pro-choice advocator, now admits that sometimes certain rights might be suspended if the

¹² Mikkel, 2011.

¹³ Season 1, Episode 6, "Litmus."

¹⁴ Season 1, Episode 5, "You Can't Go Home Again."

¹⁵ Season 1, Episode 2, "Water."

¹⁶ Season 1, Episode 2, "Bastille Day."

¹⁷ When Adama corrects the vote, Baltar becomes President and authorizes settlement on the planet known as New Caprica. The Cylons quickly occupy the planet, illustrating the dangers of democracy. It may be argued that Baltar, a populist leader, unwisely decided to found the colony and thus irreparably endangered the entire civilization. Tristan Tamplin wrote about that particular scene: "It was, quite literally, the faceless masses that elected him...In fact, democracy recognized our inalienable right to make horribly stupid decisions that predictably lead to very bad consequences" (Tamplin, 2008, p. 130).

survival of all is at stake: "... one of these rights now comes into a direct conflict with the survival of the species."¹⁸

In short, the boundaries of unacceptable political action center on bodily integrity rights violations against human beings by the state or enemy forces, rather than wider concerns over an expansive view of human rights now embraced by the NGO community. This corresponds roughly to a schism within the human security policy and research community over whether to prioritize the prevention of mass atrocities or the economic security of individuals.¹⁹ The normative framework of BSG therefore sides with a "freedom from fear" perspective championed by the Canadian government and the Human Security Report Project, and pays much less attention to the "freedom from want" view associated with Japan and with the United Nations Development Program.²⁰

Even in the specific area of civilian protection, "human security" – increasingly defined almost synonymously with national security as humanity becomes the referent point for the protection of "us" against the enemy – often occludes protecting *all* civilians. "Roslin's first decision as President is to abandon several sub-light civilian vessels to the Cylons in order to "make the jump" to safety with the rest of the faster than light (FTL) capable civilian fleet of starships. In the next episode, she authorizes the destruction of the Olympic Carrier with its civilian passengers due to the possibility that the nuclear-armed ship had been compromised by Cylons. The show makes clear that human security can come down to numbers: the referent point is the collective, not always the individual.²¹ And this scene certainly has analogues with US policy on 9/11, where Air Force pilots faced the possibility of shooting down United Flight 93.

Indeed, the military/government leadership often flirts with straying from a human security frame into a state security frame entirely. "Military necessity" or "raison d'etat" are periodically invoked as a rationale for ignoring popular concerns, and civilians are often portrayed as being unable to discern their own best interest. For example, when confronted with unrest over the shooting of some civilians, Adama ignores the popular demand for war crimes trials: "We're at war against an enemy with a vastly superior force. I will not sacrifice the few people we have left on the altar of public outrage."²² At the end of Season 2, Adama suggests to the (new elected) president Baltar that the first priority should be the security of the state. Baltar disagrees claiming that "our first priority is the people...safely established on New Caprica."²³ And Apollo is frequently in the position of reining in Roslin's more authoritarian tendencies: as late as Season 4, she is convinced that *raison d'etat* should be

¹⁸ Season Two, Episode Seventeen, "The Captain's Hand."

¹⁹ Hampson, 2002.

²⁰ King and Murray, 2001.

²¹ Blahuta, 2008.

²² Season 2, Episode 8, "Final Cut."

²³ Season 2, Episode 20, "Lay Down Your Burdens."

prioritized over the freedom of assembly, since the sowing of discord might be problematic from the state's security perspective.

Yet these tensions are generally resolved with a balance of power in favor of the people over the state, the state's interest over the military interest, with the military usurping state authority only when the protection of the civilian population appears to necessitate it: a sort of virtuous triangle with the people at the fulcrum, albeit applied in fits and starts with plenty of backtracking. Apollo quickly articulates a third position in the debate between "military" and "government" and decisively positions himself on the side of the people's right to participation, rather than allegiance to any particular order.²⁴ Ultimately Adama subverts Roslin's effort to throw the election in Season 2, supporting the people's right to democracy and upholding the rule of law. He does not prevent Baltar from establishing the colony on New Caprica, and eventually he returns to rescue those civilians who come under Cylon occupation there, despite the risk to his military assets: a vindication of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Adama considers a military take-over only at moments when he believes the civilian government has compromised the safety of the civilian population.

Indeed, the military often appears in the show to be more closely aligned with human security ideals than the civilian government, which often as not puts its own continuity first in the name of "the people." For example, when the fleet faces a hostage situation Roslin holds a strong position that there should be no deals with terrorist of any kind since it will weaken the position of the legal authority permanently.²⁵ Thus, she implies that civilian hostages should be sacrificed when the integrity/image of the state is in question. However, at the end of the day Adama resolves the situation without the need to sacrifice civilians, by tricking the terrorists.

Moreover, although civilians are sometimes sacrificed in the wider interest, a clear line is drawn between sacrifices that protecting the general civilian population from themselves or others, and violence against civilians to fuel the militarized state itself. While leaving some civilians to the Cylons in order to save others/the human collective is framed as consistent with human security, destroying civilians or undermining their freedoms in order to further state/military security alone is portrayed as criminal. Lest this nuance be lost on the audience, BSG descends in Season Two into a counter-factual engagement with an alternate military regime, the crew of the battleship *Pegasus* – whose war frame necessitates the abandonment and even slaughter of civilian refugees in order to procure resources to fight the Cylons – the fight framed as an end in itself. By contrast, the ends pursued by the *Galactica* are far more aligned with just war principles. As we discuss further below, these principles also extend to the means by which such ends are pursued.

²⁴ Seasons 1, Episode 2, "Bastille Day."

²⁵ Episode 2, "Water," Season One.

Secured on Whose Authority?

“If they taught civil-military relations in high school, lazy teachers could definitely get away with showing the entire first season of BSG.” NuclearFriedSteak

Democratic control over the armed forces is understood by many analysts as a key component of human security, and “security sector reform” is an important concern for the human security policy community.²⁶ But Peter Feaver reminds us that such control is not to be taken for granted in any society: the “civil-military problematique” is precisely how to maintain a military powerful enough to protect society but constrained enough not to threaten it.²⁷ As both Huntington and Janowitz note in their classic treatments of the issue, this is a particularly intractable problem for democracies.²⁸ To Huntington, the tension is manageable through the maintenance of an officer corps as a professional class, with a clear division of labor drawn between the military and civilian spheres. In contrast to Huntington’s institutionalist approach, Janowitz emphasizes strategies for bridging the culture gap between the civilians and the military. More recently, scholars such as Rebecca Schiff and Peter Feaver have analyzed the scope conditions under which either of these approaches prevents military intervention in domestic society, and the day-to-day social relations by which civilian supremacy is maintained.²⁹

In an important respect, as we show below, the master narrative in BSG appears to mirror the normative framework of most civ-mil thinking: that civilian control over the military is a good thing. But rather than occupying any specific position in the civ-mil debate, the narrative structure of BSG complicates questions about that balance and reflects in important ways the ongoing perception in the US foreign policy of a growing crisis in civil-military relations.

Civilian Supremacy. The question of who is in charge of the military as it relates to the civilian population is raised early on and remains an important ongoing tension in the series. Roslin and Adama’s first interaction occurs prior to their face-to-face meeting, and involves her disputing his authority when Adama takes command of the fleet. When she receives a communiqué from Adama stating he has “taken command of the fleet,” and ordering her vessel to join the fleet for a “regrouping and counter-attack,” she tells Apollo to contact Adama and ask for his assistance with rescue operations. Apollo warns “I’m not sure he’s

²⁶ For example, see Krause, 2007; Ngoma, 2006.

²⁷ Feaver, 1996.

²⁸ Huntington, 1951; Janowitz, 1960.

²⁹ Schiff (2009) argues for example that factors such as the social composition of the officer corps and the mechanism for recruitment matter considerably as cultural determinants of the civil-military balance. See also Feaver, 2003.

going to respond very well to that request.” Roslin answers: “Then tell him this comes directly from the President of the Colonies... and it's not a request.” When Adama receives her communiqué his first words are: “Is this a frakkin’ joke?” He contacts Apollo and orders him to abort rescue operations; Apollo stands his ground, citing direct orders from the President. Adama responds in disbelief: “You mean the Secretary of Education? We're in the middle of a war and you want to take orders from a school teacher?”

Roslin begins this encounter by using tools of statecraft to assert her authority over Adama. When he arrives to meet with her, she forces him to wait while she completes a conversation with her assistant over how quickly the *Galactica* will be available to assist civilian ships. Before even addressing Adama, she invokes the assumption that the *Galactica's* protection is hers to grant or withhold from civilian ships depending on their behavior in her ongoing discussion with Billy over the treatment of prisoners. Upon Billy’s exit, she cuts to the chase: “You planning to stage a military coup?”

Adama also knows how to act as if he is in command. He waits patiently for her attention. But he addresses Roslin as “Miss Roslin” instead of “Madame President.” He dismisses her inquiry about civilian control by directing attention to tactics. He implies that a military coup has never entered his mind; yet he behaves as if such a coup were unnecessary, as he is already in command of the fleet. He openly refuses to follow her directives. When he has heard enough, he simply walks out.

Ultimately, this tension is resolved when Adama comes around to Roslin’s view, announcing that the *Galactica* will lead the civilian fleet away from the Colonies and in search of the mythical Earth. As they work out the particulars of this arrangement, Roslin argues: “If this civilization is going to function it’s going to need a government, a civilian government run by the president of the colonies.” In order to prevent tensions in the future (and in recognition that they share the secret that there is no Earth), they agree to split power: Roslin will be in charge of the civilian fleet, Adama will decide how to run the military. In important ways, this balance reflects Huntington’s theory of “objective control” over the military: in return for complete civilian supremacy in the political realm (when and where to go to war), the military would be given substantial lee-way at the operational level (how to wage the war).

Throughout the early part of the series, however, this division of labor is rarely clear-cut, as Adama and Roslin continue to disagree on security issues. Like two squabbling parents, they sometimes work things out through deliberation, or by ceding one or the others’ authority over a particular realm. But they also periodically attempt to subvert one another’s power, each believing they are acting in the “fleet”’s best interest. At the end of Season One, Roslin urges the fleet against Adama’s wishes on what he sees as a dangerously visionary mission toward the legendary planet of Kobol, and he removes her from power for

“suborning mutiny and sedition aboard the *Galactica*.”³⁰ For a period, Roslin is incarcerated and martial law is declared, but she ultimately escapes with a portion of the fleet, forcing Adama to ultimately follow her and re-acknowledge her presidency in order to keep the fleet (nation) together.³¹

Political and military blogs erupted with discussion about civ-mil relations in the show and in real life at the end of Season One, when Adama seized control from Roslin. Dean Esmay’s discussion and condemnation of Adama’s “coup” at *Dean’s World* was cited on the *Unofficial Battlestar Galactica* blog.³² At Airlock Alpha, Scott Nance puts Adama’s actions in the context of US political institutions:

“Imagine General Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the top uniformed military officer in America, walking into the Oval Office and telling President Bush that he was terminating Bush’s presidency effective immediately. Only a short time later, another member of the Joint Chiefs, say Air Force chief General John Jumper, declares martial law... We don’t yet know too much about the intricacies and traditions of Colonial government, but here in the good ol’ U.S. of A. (and in other mature democracies around the world), we have something called “civilian control of the military.”³³

Casey Tompkins of *Gantry Launchpad* countered this view, arguing that “that wasn’t a coup... not if you want to maintain parallels with our current society.”³⁴ Tompkins proceeded to use the events of BSG as a primer on US constitutional law, pointing out that officers swear allegiance to the constitution, not the President, and that in this case Adama chose to remove the President because he believed her actions undermined the Articles of Colonization. The Gantry’s post generated a heated debate in comments thread, in which commenters blended literary criticism with political theory to engage contemporary issues in the debate over civilian supremacy.

³⁰ Woody Goulart and Wesley Joe argue that in this context, Adama was justified in deposing Roslin on human security grounds: “Roslin’s political skills, including her power to appeal to broadly held religious beliefs, can compromise Adam’s command authority to an extent that could ultimately jeopardize the military’s capacity to protect the human community.” Goulart and Joe, 2008, p. 187.

³¹Dualla’s invocation of the Adama’s promise to preserve “the family” and the need to protect children who are “separated from their parents” is crucial in shifting his frame of reference: though he had viewed Roslin’s breakaway group as departing from “the fleet,” he now realizes that he bears responsibility for separating the *Galactica* from the civilian leadership.

³² Unofficial BSG Blog, “Hey You, Defend that Coup!” at *Unofficial BSG Blog*, posted July 26, 2005, online at http://www.battlestarblog.com/2005/07/hey_you_defend_.html. Accessed February 28, 2011.

³³ Scott Shane, “Commander Adama is Un-American” at *Alpha Airlock*, posted August 2, 2005. Available online at <http://airlockalpha.com/node/132>.

³⁴ Casey Tompkins, “In Defense of a Coup” at *Gantry Launchpad*, posted July 24, 2005. Available online at <http://www.thegantry.net/archives/000232.html>. Accessed February 18, 2011.

The only way an officer gets away with that kind of flagrantly dangerous behavior is if there is an IMMEDIATE and UNQUESTIONABLE threat... Presidents can be religious wackos – nothing says they can't. – Dean Esmay, at July 24, 2005 9:39 a.m.

The oaths aren't relevant, military protocols aren't relevant, and the chain of command is not relevant. The relevant stuff is the impeachment and disability clause... The most Adama could so was question the president's capacity and ask his people to disregard her orders. – Alan, at July 28, 2005, 12:34 a.m.

While it is not entirely clear which interpretation is correct, this anecdote illustrates how BSG has become a flashpoint for deliberative debate – between civilians and military personnel - about the meaning of civilian supremacy as applied to actual political institutions.

Goulart and Joe have argued that the series as a whole favors the notion of civilian rule over military rule. Citing political psychology research that suggests voluntary compliance is easier when rule is perceived as legitimate, they examine representations of the Season One failed military coup through this light: "Battlestar Galactica presents a strong version of the alternative view that military governments have a limited capacity to govern and are sometimes less functional than regimes that enjoy democratically grounded legitimacy... When Colonel Tigh declares martial law, civilian opposition tests the regime's capacity to govern... in contrast, even as a deposed head of state, Roslin's democratic legitimacy enables her to obtain voluntary compliance from military troops."³⁵

Indeed, although the series remains closely focused on the military scene aboard *Galactica*, the show rarely suggests that military rule is preferable to democracy, even in existential crises.³⁶ This narrative ill-reflects the historical record, but very well reflects both general assumptions underlying civ-mil debates in US foreign policy, and a general transnational norm of civilian supremacy on Planet Earth, into which both states and militaries are socialized globally.³⁷ So salient is this set of political discourses that it is rarely challenged fully despite the fact that it is fairly easy to imagine a very different kind of political system in the context of a genocidal existential threat. For example, even those who point this out often reify assumptions about the existence and normative value of democracy. Blogger Nima Yousefi writes skeptically:

"Am I to believe that after [being wiped out in a nuclear holocaust] the last 40,000 survivors of the human race would keep whining about their justice system or questioning the decisions of their military or spiritual leaders? Really?... After the American Revolution we elected General George Washington president. After World War II we elected General Dwight D. Eisenhower

³⁵ Goulart and Joe, 2008, p. 189

³⁶ An exception that proves the rule might be Starbuck's speech at Admiral Cain's funeral.

³⁷ Farrell, 2008; Atkinson, 2006.

president. After having their race nearly exterminated... the people of Battlestar Galactica would have crowned Admiral Bill Adama frakking emperor of the universe."³⁸

In this quotation, the existence of elections is taken for granted. And indeed not only is the normative value of democracy championed throughout the show as in transnational culture, civilian supremacy is increasingly privileged as the series progresses. This is clear in Adama's shift from openly dismissing Roslin as "a schoolteacher" to developing a partnership of equals, and eventually the ability to follow her. Indeed, Apollo's eventual defection from the military to join the civilian government elite is framed as his decisive coming-to-manhood ritual, signaling a gendered shift in the balance of power and valuation between the military and civilian spheres, as well as a blurring of the civil-military divide.³⁹ Ultimately, the military itself is disbanded in favor of a purely civilian social structure as the humans begin life as settlers on Earth.

Until the last episode, however, it is noteworthy that the military, not the civilian police, remains privileged as the provider of human security, and civilian protection remains subject to the constraints of strategic thinking rather than associated with a human-rights-advocacy-based "soft security" sector, as we discuss in the next section. Yet in contrast to the *Pegasus*, where civilian needs are entirely subordinated to military rule, the *Galactica* military is portrayed as an enlightened tool kept in check by civilian authority and serving in turn as a check on civilian authoritarianism, one with the best interests of humanity at heart, particularly in comparison to other elements of the would-be security sector.

The ying and yan of the civil-military balance is credited by commentators with preserving a semblance of attention to human security by the military. For example, a writer at the Unofficial Battlestar Galactica Blog wrote: "The mediating factor is the Colonial fleet. The *Pegasus* has been able to go it alone and concentrate on maximizing their military impact. The *Galactica*... is responsible for the lives of over 47,000 civilians. This naturally

³⁸ See Nima Yousef, "I Don't Believe Battlestar Galactica" at *Equinox of Insanity*, posted April 19, 2008. Online at <http://equinox-of-insanity.com/2008/04/i-dont-believe-battlestar-galactica/>. Accessed February 28, 2011. A more complex discussion of a similar point occurs in a comments thread I posted for feedback on this paper. See Chuchundra, Murc and CapnMidnight at Charli Carpenter, "Battlestar Blegging," at *Lawyers, Guns and Money*. Available online <http://www.lawyersgunsmoneyblog.com/2011/02/battlestar-blegging>; accessed February 29, 2011.

³⁹ Although BSG has been argued to portray an progressive or "gender-blind" set of gender relations (Goulart and Joe, 2008; Kirkland, 2008; Lewitz, 2009; Buzan, 2010), it might be argued that the civil-military divide on the show is gendered in a fairly conventional narrative: the *Galactica* crew is associated with archetypes of militarized masculinity (be they mapped onto male or female characters) and with male power in the form of Adama and Tigh; the civilian fleet is framed through feminine archetypes, epitomized in Roslin's quiet, maternal energy. Such imagery maps onto a very conventional gendered story of the state/nation relationship documented by feminist IR theorists (Peterson, 1993; Tickner, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Elshtain, 1997). On gender regressiveness in BSG see also Lapidus, 2009.

makes the entire operation much more community focused. The elements of democracy pervade all ships, military and civilian."⁴⁰

At the end of the episode *Razor*, which retells the story of the pilot through the eyes of the *Pegasus* crew, Apollo asks his father whether Cain and Shaw were wrong to abandon and massacre civilians, and Adama responded that history will make the judgment. But he also pointed out his privilege in being surrounded by a balance of opinions on the issue:

"I know that I didn't have to face any of the situations that she did. I had the President in my face, arguing for the survival of the civilian fleet. I've Colonel Tigh keeping me honest, balancing my morality and my tactics. And I had you."

Bridging the Civil-Military Divide. Indeed, when tensions are at their worst, Roslin and Adama rely on Adama's son, Apollo, to bridge the civil-military divide – a more Janowitzian view of what it takes to maintain a stable balance between the two realms. Apollo is escorting Roslin's ship home to Caprica when the attack occurs and so he finds himself in her company during the early stages of the war. He quickly aligns himself with her and the civilian authorities after she is sworn in. Roslin recognizes his value as a broker between the government and the military and requests his services as a personal consultant thereafter.

Roslin: "I'm not looking for military advice. I'm looking for advice about the military... And you can keep your day job at the C-A-G."

Apollo: It's pronounced "CAG".

Roslin: (*smiles*) Do you see why I need you?

Commander Adama is less happy with this arrangement, as he prefers a clear dividing line between the military and the government, but it is precisely in Lee's refusal to choose sides that he both problematizes the civilian-military gap and bridges it. And very quickly, the notion of the gap between two realms is unpacked and rearticulated, as Lee distinguishes the government from the state and the state from the people. Simultaneously he signals his allegiance to neither institution but to the rule of law – a third way that places him in periodic tension with both the government and military leadership. Indeed this strategy conforms more closely to an emerging perspective in civil-military relations scholarship associated with Rebecca Schiff, who argues not only that civ-mil is the product of the tripartite interaction between state, military and citizenry but that stable relations between the three

⁴⁰See "Thoughts on Pegasus," *Unofficial Battlestar Galactica Blog*, online at http://www.battlestarblog.com/2005/09/thoughts_on_peg.html, accessed February 28, 2011. A commenter on the same blog thread wrote: "The Pegasus is the Galactica, without the civilian influence over time." See John, September 26, 2005, 03:47 pm at *ibid*.

does not require clear separations.⁴¹ It is precisely this messiness that is captured and played out in the BSG narrative.

But the show also reflects and feeds into a societal sense that the culture gap between civilians and military is wider than ever, even as the conceptual gap between their roles is dangerously weakening. On the one hand the general mistrust of the military by civilians is often signified on the show through incidents of popular unrest and interactions with snooping journalists, as discussed further below. Such representations find their real-life analogues in the culture of Wikileaks and comments threads in the left blogosphere. On the other hand, the tendency of military personnel to look down on civilians for their ill-discipline and sense of entitlement is often reflected on BSG in the grumblings of Colonel Tigh and the amoral, ill-disciplined, hedonistic populism embodied in the ill-judgments of Gaius Baltar and self-centered indulgences of Ellen Tigh.⁴² These themes tap into real-life narratives to this effect – exemplified, for example, in the various “He the Soldier, You the Civilian” home-made videos circulating on YouTube, and reiterated in by Lt. General John Kelly in a November 2010 speech four days after his son was killed in Afghanistan.⁴³

Early in the post-Cold War era, scholars of civil-military relations recognized in these evolving patterns the seeds of trouble. As early as 1992, Charles Dunlap penned a famous essay entitled *The Origins of the American Military Coup of 2012* in which he asked readers to imagine the consequences of ongoing shifts in force structure, mission creep and weakened social ties between military personnel and civilian society. Tom Ricks’ 1997 ethnography of a Marine platoon, painted a picture of alienation from the civilian society left behind.⁴⁴ Michael Desch, in laying out his structural theory of civil-military relations, concurs that “once-ideal patterns of civilian control changed for the worse with the end of the Cold War.”⁴⁵

Whatever the explanation, it is increasingly accepted that as alienation is increasing, the very distinction between soldiering and politicking is arguably weakening.⁴⁶ Some commentators have argued that the current civil-military imbalance, presumably epitomized by the public relations fiasco that resulted in General McChrystal’s resignation, results from a politicization of the officer corps that is undermining its role as a profession. Colonel Matthew Moten has recently critiqued the political activism of retired generals and the outsourcing of military activities to the private sector. In a recent *Foreign Policy* article, Michael Desch too writes about how contemporary non-wars have blurred the lines between the political and military so neatly conceptualized by Huntington:

⁴¹ Schiff, 2009.

⁴² Cynthia Enloe’s research on military wives (2000) suggests that this caricature is somewhat, though not entirely, at odds with typical social relations between officers and their civilian wives.

⁴³ See Jaffe, 2011.

⁴⁴ Ricks, 1997.

⁴⁵ Desch, 1999, p. 1

⁴⁶ Nielson and Snider, eds, 2009.

“Nothing better illustrates this fact than that every-soldier of the post-cold War era, the ‘strategic corporal,’ who in our current wars must fight on one block, deliver aid on the next, and provide a seminar on local politics on the third. In COIN and nation-building, the distinction central to the old balance that kept the civil-military peace from the post-Vietnam years until the end of the Cold War has been largely erased, with the consequences we are living with today, and likely to have to deal with for as long as we are conducting these sorts of military operations.”

This narrative suggests the military’s distinct identity as a profession is being strained at the same time as its alienation from society is arguably deeper than ever. Although it remains a matter of debate how significant this “gap” is and how to measure it, such perceptions are widespread.⁴⁷ Perhaps they help explain the widespread appeal of BSG to military personnel as well as civilians. BSG too portrays a world in which the military takes on new roles, problematizing its sense of identity. But it also portrays efforts to stabilize that sense of crisis through bridging the culture gap.

Moreover, by appealing to both groups, the show has served as a conduit for deliberations among civilians and military personnel on the nature of this divide. In comments on an International Studies Association panel, political scientist Dan Nexon referred to his time as a civilian analyst at the Department of Defense and how conversations on strategy, tactics and foreign policy around his cubicle often included BSG metaphors. Peter Singer, Brookings Institute analyst and author of several books on military affairs, referenced BSG in interviews about this book, describing how he spoke about the show in the context of his interviews with professors at the Naval War College.

This civil-military deliberative synergy is evident in the blogosphere as well. On the Gantry Launchpad thread to which I referred earlier, military personnel weighed in on Casey Tompkins’ claim about civilian supremacy, ultimately changing Tompkins’ mind:

I have no idea what the Cattlecar Galactica constitution sez, but when you dragged my it into the context of my oath, well I’m standing here on terra firma: it is not the place of the generals to act in that fashion. No matter how deep the line of succession established to re-establish governance in the event of a decapitating attack on the USGOV you go, you won’t find a General... it’s not a General who is kept at a secure location during the State of the Union address... for a reason. – John of Arrggh! at July 24, 2005 10:02 a.m.

I can see where I got my earlier impressions wrong. I wouldn’t call what Adama did a coup, but a couple of folks (you included) have properly pointed out that what he did was irregular, if not illegal. So let’s all give Mr. Moore a big hand for doing a great job of entertaining while stimulating. – Casey Tompkins, at July 28 2005 9:20 a.m.

⁴⁷ Feaver and Kohn, eds., 2001.

In other contexts, the show has served as a social lubricant mediating discussions of human security across the civilian-military divide. Marc Garlasco, a senior analyst from Human Rights Watch, conducted one of the seminal interviews with elite Army interrogator Captain Ian Fishback that broke the story about US treatment of detainees in the war on terror. An article in *Esquire Magazine* documents how he used science fiction narratives, including *BSG*, to establish rapport with the Captain:

At first, things were awkward. Garlasco suggested a beer and Fishback said he'd prefer a lemonade. When the food came, Fishback said grace. I'm sitting with a Jesus freak, Garlasco thought. He began to wonder if this was some kind of religious crusade. Soon, though, they clicked on the peculiar mutual grounds of guns, military history, and *Battlestar Galactica*.⁴⁸

Ultimately, Fishback gave the recorded interview and access to subordinates on which Human Rights Watch's report *Leadership Failure* was based and provided the Congressional testimony that resulted in the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005.

At times, the show speaks to the civilian-military gap more explicitly. In the series, Adama reaches out to the public, inviting a film crew "unlimited access" to the *Galactica* in order to put a "human" face on the military. This episode, "Final Cut" plays on mutual civilian-military mistrust in the war on terror, with anti-war activists suspicious of military behavior, and troops feeling unappreciated by a civilian sector thanklessly benefiting from their sacrifice. The general professionalism, humanity and just warrior-hood of the troops is highlighted in the episode, with Apollo making a sympathetic plea for respect. Through witnessing day-to-day life aboard ship, the journalists' critical views are replaced by respect for the crew, and this is reflected in D'Anna's final documentary report:

"I came to Galactica to tell a story. In all honesty, I thought I knew what that story was before I ever set foot here. How an arrogant military let their egos get in the way of doing their job safeguarding the lives of the civilian population. But I found the truth was more complex than that... The story of Galactica isn't that people make bad decisions under pressure. It's that those mistakes are the exception. Most of the time, the men and women serving under Commander Adama get it right. The proof is that our fleet survives. And with Galactica at our side, we will endure. This is D'anna Biers, Fleet News Service."

"Final Cut" promotes a view that close civilian-military engagement can lead to a strengthening of mutual understanding and respect between the sectors, an optimistic view that gives little attention to the socio-political challenges of embedding civilian journalists with the military. As a popular cultural artifact, it itself performs that very function through its narrative: *BSG* provides a no-holds-barred representation of the military side of things in an imaginary world for consumption by civilians of a nation at war. As such, it taps into and

⁴⁸ See Richardso, 2006.

corrects for the sense of alienation between the two realms, opening new conversations. In short, BSG aims not just to model effective and just civil-military relations and their complexities, but also to build a discursive bridge between two very different and often too distant real-life audiences.

Secured How?

“Hopefully Egypt follows the model of making the military subservient to the civilian leadership. Like in America. And Battlestar Galactica.” – Featured tweet, *Huffington Post*, February 2011.⁴⁹

As Roland Paris documents, a significant part of the human security research agenda has been empirical work analyzing the extent to which the security sector is constrained by human rights and humanitarian law in the means it uses to achieve its goals.⁵⁰ Humanitarian law governs the treatment of enemy non-combatants in times of war, and significant research has gone into analyzing the conditions under which states comply with norms against targeting civilians and mistreating prisoners, assuming dire defense needs.⁵¹ Non-derogable provisions in human rights law govern the limits to state curtailment of its own citizens’ human rights and civil liberties in times of war or national emergency; and considerable empirical attention is being paid to these questions as well.⁵² An argument put forth by much of this research is that the most significant threats to individuals are often the states and militaries that claim to protect them, not “the enemy” from whom they are protected.⁵³ While at least a significant branch of human security studies recognizes the importance of well-disciplined militaries in the protection of civilians, as a general framework human security is concerned about developing security sector policies that minimize the potential for human rights to fall prey to “national security.”

BSG is quite clearly a text that plays with the tension between human rights and national security in existential crises: at heart the show is a commentary on US policy in the global war on terror.⁵⁴ Despite its brutality, the limits of political violence on board Galactica, the failure of the occupation on New Caprica, and the transitional justice theme in its aftermath all suggest that the show comes down on the side of human security and portrays a military in which such behavior is largely the norm, where the exceptions play out to emphasize the importance of the general rule. Moreover the show appears to argue, somewhat controversially from a human security perspective, that a military appropriately

⁴⁹ Available online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/t/hopefully-egypt-follows-t_36109537052196864.html. Accessed February 28, 2011.

⁵⁰ Paris, 2000.

⁵¹ Downes, 2008; Valentino, Huth and Croco, 2006; Kahl, 2007.

⁵² For an overview of the literature on human rights compliance, see Ron and Hafner-Burton, 2009.

⁵³ Rummel, RJ. 1994. *Death By Government*. NY: Transaction Publishers.

⁵⁴ Buzan, 2010.

governed in fact represents the best balance between security and humanitarian values of all possible configurations of security forces.

At first, disagreements over the proper means of securing a civilian population are endemic in the series throughout discussions across the civil-military divide. Yet despite its hyper-masculinized military thematic, the initial adoption of Roslin's refugee frame might be understood as an early nod by the screenwriters to a conception of "inclusive security" promoted by the security sector reform movement and feminist security analysts. The inaugural Roslin/Adama encounter can easily be read as a dialogue between realist/militarist and feminist conceptions of "security." The realist/militarist view stresses vanquishing the enemy, taking as its referent point the secure borders of the body politic and disregarding the incidental effects on actual people. The feminist view stresses protection and literal reproduction of civilian bodies. Ultimately Adama chooses what had originally seemed like the more emasculating choice, but also the one consistent with the just warrior-hood he aims to embody: a military posture justified through reference to the protection of civilians, with the "fleet" reconstituted as the national home-front.

What this "protective" role means in practice is a point of tension in the early episodes, with Roslin and Adama united, however, in the view that the rights of the civilian population must be the referent point of policy. Roslin calls on the *Galactica* crew not only to protect convoys from Cylons but also to maintain order among civilians who are become restless due to privation. Adama warns that it is necessary to separate the military from the police, when she requests his assistance:

"I'm not gonna be your policeman. There's a reason we separate military and the police: one fights the enemy of the state, the other serves and protects the people. When the military becomes both, then the enemies of the state tend to become the people."

The government is faced with a bind: in the circumstances it is impossible to organize police forces, so Roslin implies that she will play the role of the military's antipode that would aim toward the protection of the people (from the military, if necessary). Subsequent episodes demonstrate how simplistic both propositions turn out to be: civilians are equally at risk from one another in some cases as from the military. Yet in aiming to protect them and maintain order, regrettable incidents do happen, as Adama predicts, and this strains civilian-military relations. Tensions spike when Marines fire accidentally on civilian protesters. The military's response to these tensions says much about the show's regarding the dialectic between the two realms.

And it has been appropriated as such politically. In January 2011, the Egyptian middle class took to the streets to demand the resignation of their President, Mubarak, after decades of repressive rule. The Egyptian military soon signaled to the political leadership that it would not fire on the protesters, and after several weeks of protest Mubarak stepped down with the military leadership assuming control. The revolution followed a similar course of

events in Tunisia, with the military siding with the people over the political leadership and assuming control during a power vacuum.

“Adama’s” quotation on the military versus the police began circulating in the blogosphere and Twittersphere in connection to the events in Cairo. Blog threads on Reddit and Gizmodo reiterated the quotation along with a photograph of Admiral Adama, encouraging readers to draw the connection.⁵⁵ And they did, en masse. The Reddit thread attracted 532 comments as of February 28, 2011. A Facebook Wall Photo page of with the quotation contains 6,000 “likes” and over 1800 comments.⁵⁶ The quotation appeared in retweets and Facebook status updates as the events in Egypt unfolded.

This quote from Commander Adama has been floating around the internet the last few days in the wake of the unrest in Egypt. So say we all!

Harrah Mubarek is out of power but the military is in control again now. This quote from Commander Adama has been floating around the internet the last few days in the wake of the unrest in Egypt. I think this is still appropriate and a mantra worth remembering...

Tweets and comments referencing BSG also began appearing in general coverage and commentary on the revolution unrelated to this particular quote:⁵⁷

[@ramblerori](#) said: RT [@Moltz](#) Just gifted the entire run of Battlestar Galactica on iTunes to Egypt so they can see how a military and democracy can work together. Twitter 11 February 2011

[@Dartanion](#) I know it's sad, but my grasp of the interplay between Mubarak and Egypt's military is much stronger from having seen Battlestar Galactica. Twitter 10 Feb 2011

In general, the original quote – which some commenters attribute to earlier sources - appeared to have been disseminated as a supportive rallying cry to both frown on the Egyptian political leadership and laud the military who refused to step in against its own

⁵⁵ See Reddit, “Battlestar Galactica Quote is Now Appropriate for Egypt?” Available online at http://www.reddit.com/r/politics/comments/fbnua/battlestar_galactica_quote_is_now_appropriate_for/?limit=500. Accessed February 29, 2011.

⁵⁶ See Wall Photos at <http://www.facebook.com/BSG>. Accessed February 29, 2011. While a majority of these comments were duplicative “so say we all!”s or “he is so right!” or “I miss BSG,” many commenters began arguing the finer merits of police rule versus military rule, whether or not the police were likelier than the military to constitute a humane security sector, and how if at all the quotation was even applicable to the situation in Egypt.

⁵⁷ Seemingly BSG penetrated some individuals’ subconscious associations with Egypt: twittered one individual: “Last night’s dream was a mashup of the blizzard, protests in **Egypt**, and **Battlestar Galactica**.” Twitter - 02/feb/2011 18:29:17

people at government behest –suggesting BSG’s mimicry of Western political norms.⁵⁸ Various tweets and status updates read:

Mubarak should clearly watch more #BSG: <http://t.co/wTz9ILP> #Adama #Mubarak #Egypt

Amber Sisko Why the hell isn't this show being played constantly in every government office in every country? So say we all. February 1 at 1:29pm · Like · 3 people

These sentiments draw on the common media narrative about Egyptian civic-military relations: that while the civilian population has detested the police under interior ministry, they have had a relatively good relationship with the military, which they have seen as a professional force that has served to protect Egypt.⁵⁹ However, in the wake of the military takeover some commentators positioned Adama’s quote as a warning of the dangers of military involvement in domestic governance:

Battlestar Galactica, entertainment aside, touched on a LOT of political, social, and religious aspects that will allow it to be a show that is relevant for decades to come. With the strife currently going on in Egypt the government has decided to use the military as part of it’s police system. Trying to keep a revolution that they have caused down. This quote quickly and efficiently sums up why this is a bad idea.⁶⁰

I think there is a danger whenever the military starts to become entwined in domestic affairs or taking on any kind of policing role. Yes, the military isn't fighting the people now, but it sets a really bad precedent.

I hope Egypt doesn’t continue this military-run government. I mean, we all saw what happened on Battlestar Galactica.

Indeed the Egyptian military has long been entrenched in the governance of Egypt not only politically, but also economically, which has serious implications for democratic reform.⁶¹ Thus, while the resignation of Mubarak was a step toward democratization and true revolution, many experts argued it should not be considered a revolution by itself. As Su put it pithily, “For democracy to prevail in Egypt, deposing Mubarak will not be enough. What is

⁵⁸ A similar intertext is beginning to be noticeable with respect to Libya as well. See for example, Onenow, “Plea to Libyan Military: Reject All Illegal Orders,” at *Reflections of an E.T.*, available online at <http://www.ets-reflections.com/?p=28>. Accessed February 28, 2011.

⁵⁹ Westervelt, 2011.

⁶⁰ Stuart Conover. 2011. “Wisdom from Battlestar Galactica as Applied to Modern-Day Conflicts.” At Civin.org, available online at <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.civin.org/wp/wisdom-from-battlestar-galactica-applied-to-modern-day-conflicts/>. Accessed February 28, 2011.

⁶¹ Cook, 2007.

needed is an overhaul of state-military relations.”⁶² He meant Mubarak was not the source of the problem but rather a symptom: Egypt’s military had too much power.

Indeed on 26 February 2011, the military resorted to using force in a crackdown on protesters who had returned to Tahrir Square in Cairo, firing tasers, beating them, and making arrests.⁶³ The military made a public apology, claiming the crackdown was not authorized, and claimed to have released all detainees. However, according to foreign reporters, the military had been attempting to project a façade of neutrality during the initial protests, while Mubarak was still in power, but, behind the scenes, was detaining and torturing protesters.⁶⁴ After Mubarak left office, groups like the Human Rights Watch also documented reports of sixty-six or more missing persons presumed to be in detention under the current military-run government.⁶⁵

Yet as an empirical matter, it is not at all obvious that the relativist sentiment in the Adama quotation – or its appropriation to current events in Egypt – is correct. As the Egyptian case particularly shows, a country’s police can also be fairly brutal. Moreover the seemingly clear line between military and civilian sides of the security sector has long been muddled by changes in military doctrine, including the use of troops for operations other than war, the outsourcing of military activities to civilian contractors, and the co-mingling of military and police in peacekeeping missions. This particular quotation might be read not as a statement of empirical reality or causal relations but as an invocation of the inside-outside discourse of the sovereign state – a discourse as ill-suited in the show (as subsequently demonstrated) as it may now currently be to global political realities on Planet Earth.

In fact, what is more curious that this particular quotation has been widely politicized as emblematic of the “wisdom of BSG” because the show as a whole appears to position the military as a *better* provider of security for civilians than the civilian security sector. Against his initial impulses, Adama accedes to Roslin’s request. When a police force is ultimately trained on New Caprica, it is portrayed as a repressive tool from which the military must rescue the civilian population. Subsequently, it is civilians who take justice into their own hands with vigilante trials of former police officers, and once again it is up to intervene on the side of the law and encourage Roslin to establish truth commissions. This is a somewhat greater emphasis on the military as security provider than most of the security sector reform movement would argue is desirable.⁶⁶ This is precisely because *Galactica* makes the case that a military should and *can* behave as a largely disciplined, human-security-minded force for the civilian good.

The story of the Gideon massacre is in fact illustrative of this wider point. While seemingly an episode that confirms Adama’s original fears (and those of political bloggers),

⁶² Su, 2011.

⁶³ Wan, 2011.

⁶⁴ McGreal, 2011.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch, 2011.

⁶⁶ Bruneau and Matei, 2008, p. 913.

the narrative of the Gideon is also a conduit for demonstrating what defines a just fighting force: the effort to avoid and to atone for civilian harms. And it is treated as an aberration resulting from Tigh's mis-decisions and disruption of the civil-military balance, not definitive of *Galactica's* standard operating procedures.⁶⁷ There is a clear consensus among civilians and military that the incident was a tragedy.⁶⁸ The notion that rule of law must prevail is reiterated, though often in the breach, throughout the series.

At times, of course, the show is more intentionally brutal. Even so, the moral themes throughout the show is that effective and legitimate military force can only be sustained if wielded with due respect for the rule of law and human rights, and that a properly disciplined military can be relied upon to play this role. During the occupation on New Caprica, human society shifts from a refugee frame to an insurgent frame as some choose to fight back against rule by the Cylons, which have gone from genocide to state-building. Tigh chooses suicide bombing, a tactic Tyrol opposes.⁶⁹ And once the humans are rescued from New Caprica, some carry out vigilante executions against those who had once "collaborated" with the New Caprican government. But while lead characters often make questionable decisions, things invariably go poorly for them when they violate basic standards of justice: the insurgency against the Cylons only results in death lists, and it becomes clear to those running the "citizens' tribunals" that their efforts are seriously flawed.⁷⁰

And close as the show edges toward brutality at places, the contrast between the toying with abuse at the desperate margins and its systematic sanction as policy is drawn neatly through reference to the *Pegasus*. Whereas on *Galactica* assassination attempts are officially punished by incarceration, on the *Pegasus* mere questioning of orders gets officers shot. Whereas Adama only reluctantly polices civilians protesting water shortages, Admiral Cain sends troops to massacre civilians unwilling to sacrifice their FTL drives. On *Galactica*, Cylon prisoners may be slapped about or mock-drowned to gather intelligence; on *Pegasus* they are also raped and tortured with electricity for sadistic pleasure. The *Pegasus* counter-factual asks the viewer to distinguish between wanton war criminality in the service of

⁶⁷ Contrary to the civilians' assumption that a war crime has occurred, the back story is that protesters attacked soldiers' first: the "massacre" was at best self-defense, at worst, accidental fire in a moment of panic. Even so, soldiers involved carry such guilt at the incident that one even attempts to assassinate Colonel Tigh, whom he holds responsible for putting them in the situation.

⁶⁸ This regard for civilian life is fore-grounded in the initial encounter between Roslin and Adama. While she forces Adama to wait, she completes a conversation with Billy over the treatment of prisoners in the civilian fleet, rejecting the possibility of letting them starve: "They're still human beings. Tell the captain I expect daily reports on his prisoners' well-being and if there are any 'mysterious' deaths, the Astral Queen may find herself on her own and without the *Galactica's* protection."

⁶⁹ See Mikkel, this volume.

⁷⁰ Along with the coup episode, the early part of Season Three attracted significant attention from military bloggers and conservative political bloggers/blog commenters, who were critical of the seeming critique of the war on terror embodied in these episodes. See for example Bryan, "Out the Airlock" at *Hot Air*, available online at <http://hotair.com/archives/2006/10/27/out-the-airlock/>.

military agendas versus the ethical tight-rope walked by well-meaning leaders aiming to protect their own population.

The encounter serves as a catalyst for *Galactica* crew to remind themselves again what they are actually about: that a certain line must not be crossed, lest their identity as just warriors be compromised; that just warrior-hood means among other things the protection of prisoners and non-combatants; and that achieving those means can mean standing up to unjust authority – a decision that must be defended rather than punished by those in power. Although the *Galactica* leadership ultimately pulls back from assassinating Cain – a decision of questionable morality from a human security view given the threat she clearly posed to the civilian fleet – Cain is instead killed by the prisoner she tortured. The narrative echoes arguments, commonly made by critics of the Bush Administration, that a lawless security apparatus can only sow its own defeat.⁷¹

Actors associated with the show have themselves argued publicly that the key purpose of the show was to promote a human rights culture, and used this argument to interface with and influence political debates over human rights, identity and political violence. At a United Nations panel discussion in 2009, Edward Olmos made a lengthy speech on the concept of “race as a cultural determinant” calling out the UN diplomats for persisting in the use of the concept – one he considers inimical to human rights discourse. “That’s what the show brought out,” he argued. In drawing directly on his identity as constituted by the show, and also invoking his authority (as constituted by the show), Olmos signaled a clearer message than the show itself provides, and also a clear reminder that *BSG* is not simply entertainment but a political commentary on the meaning of human security.

Representing and Destabilizing the Human Security Nexus

We have argued that *BSG* presents a narrative of human security as normative, with an ever widening understanding of ‘human,’ a series of consequences for behavior that violates human right standards, and a civil-military tension resolved progressively in favor of democratic, civilian rule. While erring on the side of the general package of human security norms, *BSG* also begs the question about civilian supremacy.

On the surface, *BSG* is a show highly committed to the idea of democracy and civilian control as part of a general cluster of claims made in the broad policy domain of “human security.” Yet *BSG* develops a critique of the notion that the popular will constitutes a valid basis for effective human security policies – a concern shared by some theorists of civil-military relations. There is a curious disjunction in the civ-mil literature, for example, between the assumed normative faith in civilian supremacy and the absence of consensus over whether democracy correlates with better war outcomes. One might legitimately question whether when species survival is at stake democracy should be an overriding value. Ultimately, while the show does espouse a continually pro-democratic ideology, it also

⁷¹Mulligan, 2008.

showcases the collective misjudgments such a system produces, and the implications for human well-being.

Relatedly, recent history has shown that civilian leadership can sometimes be worse for human security than the military, depending on how that leadership is exercised. Recent foreign policy debacles have been attributed to the unwillingness of the civilian leadership to pay attention to its generals. Enterline and Grieg have argued, for example, that the war in Iraq would have proceeded very differently had Eric Shinseki's suggestions been heeded by the Bush Administration.⁷² Thomas Ricks' history of the occupation draws similar conclusions.⁷³ As the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt currently suggest, the military can be a greater ally to the people than certain civilian governments and a far lesser threat than the police forces. This is increasingly acknowledged by some civ-mil scholars as well. Bruneau and Matei criticize the near-exclusive focus on civilian control in this body of literature: "civilian control by itself is no guarantee that the policy-makers will make good decisions, or implement policy in such a way as to result in military success."⁷⁴ Peter Feaver concludes that indeed civilian control carries some normative trade-offs well worth considering.⁷⁵

And so BSG leaves allows viewers to consider this idea that the cluster of norms associated with "human security" requires unpacking as well. It is noteworthy how often throughout the series the military emerges as the champion of rule of law, over the civilian leadership. Adama's early argument against using the military to police the population; his putting an end to the witch-hunts of "independent tribunals," and his diplomatic approach to hostage situations all constitute examples where military finesse outweighs civilian real-politick when it comes to protecting civilians. It might be argued that overall, Adama is often more willing than Roslin to think outside the box in order to properly weigh humanitarianism against military necessity. The moral story of BSG may in fact be the symbiotic relationship between democracy and benign militarism.⁷⁶

Thus the human security framework constitutes a lens to both reaffirm and problematize the conventional civil-military problematique, even as it promotes the concept of security sector reform: a set of arrangements designed to maximize the military's role as a servant of individual security. As a commentary on US civil-military relations, BSG argues in favor of a close and respectful interaction between civilians and the military, for respect for the role of the military, and yet for a carefully circumscribed relationship to the civilian

⁷² Enterline and Grieg, 2007.

⁷³ Ricks, 2006.

⁷⁴ Bruneau and Matei, 2008, p. 910.

⁷⁵ Feaver, 2003.

⁷⁶ Everett Carl Dolman makes a similar argument in his interpretation of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, arguing that critiques of the novel exhibit a naïve understanding of the dialectic between militaries and democracies: "The salient issue becomes not whether military and democratic values can co-exist, but can the truly democratic state independently emerge – much less maintain itself – without the democratizing influence of the authoritarianly organized military to sustain it?"

population and civilian government a military is expected to serve. The US civilian front is effectively distanced from the actual war and has been argued to have very little respect or understanding of the military. BSG provides a window into that world for civilians and imagines a gradual resolution of the civil-military balance in favor of greater civilian control as the structure of the threat shifts.

It is also deliberately designed to disrupt conventional political narratives about right and wrong in national and human security: “The series compels viewers to accept that during political and military conflict, despite any idealized standards of right and wrong, fundamentally decent people can behave in uncivil and immoral ways.”⁷⁷ As with other aspects of the series, the subtexts on civil-military relations and human security present tensions rather than arguments. They cue the viewer what to think about but not what to think. And they leave key questions for twentieth century civil-military relations unresolved and (perhaps) irresolvable.

⁷⁷ Goulart and Joe, 2008, p. 179.

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