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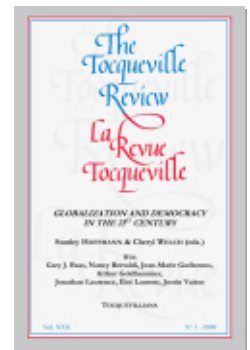
## Humanitarian Intervention in the 21 st Century

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## HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Gary J. BASS

What future is possible for the promotion of human rights after Iraq? George W. Bush's disastrous misadventure has rightly become the prime exhibit of the folly of military means. The fear of interventionism covers both left and right.<sup>1</sup> For some critics of the Bush administration, human-rights-minded liberals are due particular blame for being useful idiots for the Bush agenda.<sup>2</sup> The profound unpopularity of the Iraq war—in America, doubly in Europe, triply in the Middle East—shows a heartfelt and understandable revulsion against crusading foreign policy.

Even some of the most prominent humanitarian interventionists of the 1990s are properly sobered. Madeleine Albright, who in the Clinton administration was a loud voice for militarily defanging Slobodan Milosevic and still believes in stopping genocide with force, wrote, “many of the world's necessary interventions in the decade before the [Iraq] invasion—in places like Haiti and the Balkans—would seem impossible in today's climate.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a long history of humanitarian intervention, going back at least to the struggle to end the slave trade. After Britain banned the slave trade in 1807, British abolitionists pushed their government to enforce that standard. As Adam Hochschild writes, “British warships eventually began stopping vessels all over the Atlantic, and troops of

armed sailors boarded them to search for cargoes of slaves. In time, as many as one third of Royal Navy vessels would be engaged in such patrols.”<sup>4</sup> Britain followed up this military commitment to human rights with the bloody 1827 naval battle at Navarino Bay that freed Greece from Ottoman rule, by joining in a French-led mission to Syria in 1860-61, and by the epic 1876 debate between William Ewart Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli about “the Bulgarian horrors.” There is moral tradition here that includes Edmund Burke, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, James Madison, Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, William Wilberforce, George Canning, Giuseppe Garibaldi, John Russell, Charles Darwin, Anthony Trollope, Queen Victoria, Henry Morgenthau Sr., and Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>5</sup>

Still, the aftermath of Iraq makes for a particularly chilling moment for debates about any kind of intervention. Only a fool could look at the wreckage in Iraq and say: full speed ahead. This is clearly a moment for taking stock and asking painful questions. As Randolph Bourne, opposing the progressives who supported Woodrow Wilson’s entry into World War I, put it in 1917: “If the war is too strong for you to prevent, how is it going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes?”<sup>6</sup> There are many in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who worry that Western interventionism, cloaked in humanitarianism or otherwise, presages a new colonialism. Given the despicable Western record, this is a natural and appropriate fear.

After September 11, *realpolitik* returned with a vengeance. With the revolutions of 1989, the Cold War pressures that interfered with the pursuit of human rights politics had faded away like morning mist. But the West now found itself tempted, much like in the Cold War struggle against communism, to suck up to anti-Islamist governments that abused human rights, like those in Pakistan and Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Add to that Bush’s alienation of America’s allies, and the wrenching road to war in Iraq, and the post-2003 world is a singularly unlikely place for human rights politics to grow.

And yet the protection of human rights has not quite expired. Iraq makes it all the more surprising that, in 2005, a UN summit unanimously endorsed the ideal of a “responsibility to protect”—at a terrible moment in the Iraqi civil war. Despite that, R2P (as it is known), which is based on a Canadian initiative, has been embraced

by an impressive array of governments, including many in the developing world: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Britain, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Lesotho, Mauritius, Norway, Panama, Peru, Rwanda, South Korea, Sweden, Trinidad, and more. Kofi Annan, as UN secretary-general, issued a report that, invoking the Rwanda genocide, endorsed R2P: "It cannot be right, when the international community is faced with genocide or massive human rights abuses, for the United Nations to stand by and let them unfold to the end, with disastrous consequences for many thousands of innocent people."<sup>8</sup>

At the 2005 summit, Latin America, given its history of colonization, was surprisingly supportive of R2P. Tanzania and South Africa remembered the 1994 Rwandan genocide as an example of world indifference toward Africa, and pushed the sub-Saharan African states forward. Bangladesh, which in some ways owes its founding to at least a partially humanitarian intervention, has been an enthusiastic backer. With Latin America and Africa on board, there was substantial backing for R2P from the developing world.

India, frustrated at its exclusion from a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, was initially reluctant. But according to Gareth Evans, pressure from Paul Martin, Canada's prime minister, including pointed reminders of India's own justifications for its 1971 intervention in what was then East Pakistan and is today Bangladesh, made Manmohan Singh, India's prime minister, come around.

There is far more skepticism about these prospects in the developing world, especially in the Middle East and Asia. The goal of human rights activists must be not just a coalition of would-be intervenors, but also of countries that might themselves face intervention. For all that, it is clear to many in the developing world that unchecked state sovereignty is too often the excuse of brutal authoritarians. Far from being the norm, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe stands out as an aberration, one of the rare leaders who overtly opposes R2P: "The vision that we must present for a future United Nations should not be one filled with vague concepts that provide an opportunity for those states that seek to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. Concepts such as 'humanitarian intervention' and the 'responsibility to protect' need careful scrutiny

in order to test the motives of their proponents.”<sup>9</sup> No democracy activist, Zimbabwean or not, would be much surprised by that statement. As the political scientist Andrew Moravcsik has argued, in newly-established democracies with a recent history of human rights abuses, liberals tend to try to lock in their protection by signing up to international human rights treaties.<sup>10</sup> The same pattern could apply to the adoption of R2P. For example, Desmond Tutu called for intervention in Zimbabwe, although preferably only with unarmed African observers: “The concept of the ‘responsibility to protect’ was adopted unanimously by the UN World Summit in 2005. Yet, it remains controversial because it is often assumed that it implies the use of military force for purposes of humanitarian intervention. We believe, as was recognised at the UN World Summit, that military force should only be a last resort when needed to prevent or halt large-scale loss of life.” As Tutu points out, the African Union’s constitutive act grants, in article four, the “right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.”<sup>11</sup>

Of course, it is possible that the debate over R2P could be purely a matter of posturing. It is relatively easy for governments like Botswana and Ghana to sign up for R2P; it would be much harder for them, in a crisis like the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya, to hint that foreign troops might have to step in if their own national security forces could not protect civilians. Depressingly, the 2005 summit enshrining R2P seems to have done little for Darfur. The proof is in the policies. And if those policies are to have legitimacy, the Western powers are going to have to do a better job building genuine support for them in the developing world.

#### RUSSIA

Intervention is almost as controversial in the great powers. In the foreign and defense ministries of the strongest states, there is still a heated debate over the prospects for humanitarian intervention.<sup>12</sup> Russia and China lead the way in overt opposition.

As Russia sinks into authoritarianism, it has shown a pronounced wariness toward international institutions and norms of human rights. Under Vladimir Putin’s rule, the state has restored power to the security services, with the FSB resurgent despite the disbanding of the

old KGB in December 1991.<sup>13</sup> In Chechnya, what was supposed to be a two-week cakewalk dragged out into an interminable slog, with a horrifying cost for the civilian population there.<sup>14</sup> Putin rankled at Western criticism of Russian tactics. He once suggested that a French reporter, who had asked a tough question about Chechen civilian casualties, was a sympathizer with Islamist fanatics and ought to come to Moscow and be circumcised.<sup>15</sup> For Putin, such criticism amounted to a pretext for a kind of neocolonialism by a predatory West. In July 2006, Putin, then president of Russia, replied to complaints about his centralization of power by saying that “colonial powers ... cited arguments such as playing a civilizing role, the particular role of the white man, the need to civilize ‘primitive peoples.’”<sup>16</sup> On the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia, Putin said, “We never would have agreed to that type of interference in the internal affairs of another country. That sort of behavior simply cannot be justified, even for so-called humanitarian reasons. I believe that the operation itself was a major mistake in international relations and a violation of the founding principles of international law.”<sup>17</sup>

There was certainly no chance of international peacekeeping to save the Chechens, no matter how awful the situation there got. Anna Politkovskaya, the brave reporter for the skeptical *Noraya Gazeta* who was murdered in her Moscow apartment building in October 2006, was one of the few Russians to even contemplate the prospect. She wrote, “The international protectorate is absolutely necessary. And even though official Moscow is not willing to so much as consider such an outcome, it is critical. A third party is needed like air—it must separate the opposing sides for some time (these are not, as the official Kremlin propaganda has it, the militants and the Feds, but the Feds and the civilians), appease passions as much as possible, and start working to soften both sides’ positions.”<sup>18</sup> But she knew there was no way that Russia would fail to veto a UN resolution sending in the blue helmets: “Iraq and Yugoslavia are not Russia. Iraq and Yugoslavia are merely members of the UN, whereas Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council with veto privileges. ... If Russia does not want this to happen, the council cannot do anything. Most of the council diplomats came to the same conclusion: sending peacekeeping forces to Chechnya is impossible; to believe otherwise is an illusion.”<sup>19</sup>

Exactly as Poltikovskaya said, Putin has refused to hear of peacekeeping troops in Chechnya. “That’s out of the question,” he said bluntly.<sup>20</sup> He could only imagine such a mission if Chechnya was an independent state and thus could invite in whatever international forces it wanted. When it was pointed out to him that NATO in 1999 said that Kosovo was still part of Serbia, Putin replied, “That’s why we are not agreeing to any options like Kosovo.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite that, Russia has found itself invoking the language of humanitarian intervention in order to justify its war in Georgia in 2008. Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, said that the Georgian leadership “gave an order which led to an act of genocide, which resulted in war crimes, ethnic cleansing. And this, of course, cannot go unanswered.”<sup>22</sup> The Russian state prosecutor’s investigative committee opened an official criminal case, under Article 357 of the Russian Criminal Code, into genocide against the South Ossetians. Dmitri Rogozin, Russia’s ambassador to NATO, claimed that at least 2,500 people had been killed in South Ossetia and declared, “proportionately this is the biggest act of genocide in the history of Europe since World War II.” Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, Putin’s loyalist, told a news conference, “the problem of ethnic cleansings there does exist, and we’ve been quite resolute in raising the issue and will continue raising it in the future to expose the people responsible for them. ... International law qualifies such problems as a crime, like the slaughter of thousands of people, and it is called genocide.”<sup>23</sup>

But Russia could not make its pretext stick. In Bosnia and Rwanda, independent human rights groups amassed volumes of evidence of crimes against humanity (much to the embarrassment of Western governments). In South Ossetia, Human Rights Watch and *The New York Times* were unable to corroborate Russian government allegations of a death toll of some 1,600 South Ossetian civilians.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is not clear that Lavrov’s description, even taken more or less at face value, would qualify South Ossetia as a situation so dire that nothing but intervention would suffice. Not every instance of civil strife warrants outside intervention. As Michael Walzer, the preeminent scholar of just war, once put it, “I don’t mean to describe a continuum that begins with common nastiness and ends with genocide, but rather a radical break, a chasm, with nastiness on one side and genocide on the other.”<sup>25</sup> By that standard, South Ossetia

seems not to be in the league of Rwanda (where as many as 800,000 people were killed before Tutsi rebels stopped the genocide), Bosnia (where some 100,000 people died), or Congo (where some three million or more have perished).

There is a gruesome ambiguity in trying to figure out when enough civilians have died to justify a humanitarian intervention. If one waits until the death toll reaches the proportions of Rwanda, fewer people will doubt the need for action, but that action will be too late. But if one acts early, then critics will ask afterward if the intervention was really necessary. Many people, especially in Russia, criticized NATO for going to war in 1999 over a relatively small number of dead Kosovars.

Of course, entering such debates, we will often find ourselves looking bad. In Georgia, Russia seems quite clearly to have been using humanitarian rhetoric as a pretext. Despite that, the Russians can credibly point to frequent Western hypocrisy on the issue of humanitarian intervention. As many Russians would quickly note, George W. Bush tried to justify the Iraq war by accusing Saddam Hussein of gassing his own people, without mentioning that the United States was at the time supporting Hussein's government. Still, American hypocrisy does not excuse Russian hypocrisy, and Bush is no excuse for Putin.

#### CHINA

If Russia lost the purity of its opposition to humanitarian intervention in its public statements on South Ossetia and Georgia, China has stuck to its guns with substantial—although not perfect—consistency. As a matter of principle, the Chinese government stands for national sovereignty. In 1999, Tang Jiaxuan, as China's foreign minister, denounced NATO's Kosovo intervention as an "ominous precedent in international relations" and warned of "the rampage of hegemonism."<sup>26</sup>

Emerging from the trauma of its own colonization, in the "century of national humiliation," China is jealously protective of its own sovereignty. It sees itself as a champion of anti-imperialists in the developing world. China worries about secessionists, not just in Taiwan, but also in Tibet and Xinjiang, where Tibetans and Uighurs rankle under Han Chinese domination. And the Chinese government



does not appreciate the criticism it has faced from Western human rights groups and governments.

At least since the 1960s, China's leadership has worried that human rights could be used to intrude on Chinese sovereignty. In the 1990s, the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia forced the Chinese government to back away from its prior advocacy of the right of self-determination for colonized peoples. Instead, as Allen Carlson argues, China argued that self-determination was a right only for unified peoples in states that were already sovereign. In particular, China demanded the right to control Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.<sup>27</sup>

China is deeply wary of Western calls for humanitarian intervention, in Darfur or anywhere. In 2005, at the summit on R2P, China denounced the principle. As far as official China is concerned, human rights abuses—even widespread massacres—are a domestic matter for Sudan or Burma. "It is not China's Darfur, it is first Sudan's Darfur and then Africa's Darfur," said Liu Guijin, China's special envoy for Darfur.<sup>28</sup>

Even so, China's stance is not purely oppositional. China has signed and ratified the Genocide Convention, which could open the door to international intervention to prevent or punish genocide. So Chinese officials argue that Darfur does not count as a genocide. They point to a UN commission report from 2005 that accused Sudan and Sudanese-backed militias of widespread and systematic atrocities in Darfur, but not genocide. (The UN did write that the bloodshed "may be no less serious and heinous than genocide," and that some Sudanese leaders might have acted with genocidal intent.) Some will point to the Iraq war as genocidal, accusing Americans of gross hypocrisy.

As China expands its regional and, to a lesser extent, global influence, it has supported a number of governments with appalling human rights records. Close to home, in 1988, China signed the first trade pact that Burma had with a neighboring country. Burma stuck with China in the international isolation that followed the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989, and offsets India's regional influence.<sup>29</sup> Even so, China's support is not absolute. In 2007, as street demonstrations against the military junta spread, China quietly

cautioned the Burmese government not to repeat the bloody suppression of demonstrations of 1988.<sup>30</sup>

Further afield, China has expanded its influence in Africa. (In 1989, in his article suggesting the end of history, Francis Fukuyama wrote that China “no longer tries to cultivate influence in distant African countries as it did in the 1960s.”<sup>31</sup> Not so.) China was an early supporter of Zimbabwe’s independence and saw Robert Mugabe as an anti-colonial hero. Mugabe said in 2003, “China’s politics have always been pro-Africa, pro-Third World, anti-imperial and anti-hegemonic.”<sup>32</sup> In his late authoritarian phase, Mugabe has made much of his “Look East” policy (although some Chinese officials uncomfortably suggest that this refers not just to China, but also other Asian states like Malaysia and Singapore as models of development). China has provided important military and economic support to Mugabe. In July 2005, despite some real Chinese official anxieties, Mugabe spent six days in talks in Beijing, where President Hu Jintao called him “an old friend.”<sup>33</sup> In April 2008, a shipment of Chinese weapons bound for Zimbabwe was stopped at the port of Durban in South Africa—throwing fresh attention on China’s support for Mugabe, even after the crisis over Zimbabwe’s 2008 election.<sup>34</sup> Most strikingly, in July 2008, China—joined by Russia—vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe and punished Mugabe and his inner circle.<sup>35</sup>

More than any other place, Darfur has thrown China’s African influence in a harsh light. Since the bloodshed started in Darfur in 2003, China was Sudan’s closest friend. China is the fastest-growing oil consumer on earth, and prizes Sudanese oil. Sinopec and the China National Petroleum Company are the leading investors in Sudan’s oil fields. For its part, China has been a major arms supplier to the Sudanese government, and repeatedly used its UN Security Council permanent seat to shield Sudan from international condemnation and sanctions.<sup>36</sup> In August 2006, the UN Security Council tried to reinforce an overwhelmed African Union force in Darfur with some 20,000 UN peacekeepers. But China insisted on including an invitation to Sudan to consent to the troops, which took a year.

Still, under international pressure, China has noticeably softened its hard line. It has pressured Sudan to accept the hybrid UN-AU peacekeepers, and even contributed a small contingent of Chinese engineers to help them.

It is possible to imagine a rising China becoming more obdurate in its conception of national sovereignty, or becoming socialized into liberal internationalist norms.<sup>37</sup> In an influential speech in September 2005, Robert Zoellick, then America's deputy secretary of state, said, "it is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China's membership into the international system: We need to urge China to become a *responsible stakeholder* in that system." Even as he outlined his vision for China's core role in world politics, Zoellick specifically rapped China's knuckles over Darfur: "On my early morning runs in Khartoum, I saw Chinese doing tai chi exercises. I suspect they were in Sudan for the oil business. But China should take more than oil from Sudan—it should take some responsibility for resolving Sudan's human crisis. It could work with the United States, the UN, and others to support the African Union's peacekeeping mission, to provide humanitarian relief to Darfur, and to promote a solution to Sudan's conflicts."<sup>38</sup> If the Chinese government truly wants to join the international community and take its full place as a respected great power, then a more decent policy on resisting genocide will be a tremendous asset.

#### EUROPE

In the West, there is more enthusiasm about the idea of intervention. This is not just an American or Wilsonian notion. (Indeed, it is worth remembering that Woodrow Wilson himself, when confronted in 1915 with the Armenian genocide, shrugged off the pleas of Henry Morgenthau Sr., Wilson's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, for steps to help the Armenians.) Some of the most important advocates are actually from middleweight countries.<sup>39</sup> R2P is, after all, a Canadian initiative.<sup>40</sup> If Michael Ignatieff becomes, as seems quite likely, prime minister of Canada, then one of the major intellectual architects of the current incarnation of humanitarian intervention will be running a G-8 country. As he once wrote, "Human rights has gone global by going local, anchoring itself in struggles for justice that can survive without American inspiration or leadership. The movement does not have its headquarters in

Washington.”<sup>41</sup> And perhaps the most tireless advocate for R2P is an Australian: Gareth Evans, the former foreign minister.<sup>42</sup>

Bernard Kouchner, a founder of Médecins Sans Frontières who is now France’s foreign minister, has since Biafra been an passionate advocate of human rights and rescue—*le droit d’ingérence humanitaire*.<sup>43</sup> His rhetoric reached a peak over Kosovo, but with a distinctly European emphasis on non-American solutions (as well as a rather contradictory appeal to both peace and military means):

The intervention in Kosovo signifies that we have to forge a new ideal of European and world youth based on a constant rejection of war, a strong-hearted world democracy, and the means to implement those goals without constantly relying on America to provide the basics. ... Intervention can be summed up quite simply ... Auschwitz never again, Pol Pot never again, Kosovo and Rwanda atrocities never more. Intervention is the protection of minorities and of the essential species: man, the potential victim.<sup>44</sup>

Kouchner lost considerable credibility in France for supporting the overthrow of Saddam Hussein because of Iraq’s horrific human rights record.<sup>45</sup> “It was a question of overthrowing an evil dictator,” he said in 2004, “and it was right to intervene.”<sup>46</sup> Even so, French President Nicolas Sarkozy named Kouchner, a Socialist, as foreign minister. Sarkozy himself made a point of chairing a UN Security Council meeting on Africa in 2007, including plans for humanitarian intervention in Darfur and Somalia.<sup>47</sup>

In May 2008, after a cyclone struck Burma and the government blocked international aid groups, a frustrated Kouchner suggested sending aid there regardless of whether the Burmese government consented to that. He told reporters at the United Nations, “We are seeing at the United Nations if we can’t implement the responsibility to protect, given that food, boats and relief teams are there, and obtain a United Nations’ resolution which authorises the delivery [of aid] and imposes this on the Burmese government.” Since “constant pressure on the Burmese authorities” had not helped, he pointed out bluntly, “It would only take half an hour for the French boats and French helicopters to reach the disaster area, and I imagine it’s the same story for our British friends.”<sup>48</sup>

Kouchner certainly has plenty of British friends. As prime minister, Tony Blair followed explicitly in Byron and Gladstone’s tradition of interventionism to stop massacre. Blair led humanitarian

interventions in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. He envisioned a kind of future practice after Kosovo: “The most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people’s conflicts.”<sup>49</sup> Blair’s successor has continued this vision. In April 2008, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told the UN Security Council, “It is to our shame that the international community did not act in Rwanda. Darfur shows the urgent needs that yet have to be met.”<sup>50</sup>

Still, for all this rhetoric, there is hardly a European rush to intervene in Darfur or Congo. To the contrary, the European powers and Canada remain wary of military commitments. The war in Iraq was a bitter experience, and the Afghanistan war—which had vastly more international approval and legitimacy at the outset—has been unpopular too. France, Germany and Italy have resisted having their troops fight in the crucial south in Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup> Many Europeans dread a return to militarism in their politics.

#### AMERICA

The strangest case is America. In the 2000 American presidential campaign, both Al Gore and George W. Bush said they would not have gone into Rwanda. And yet in the 2008 campaign, after the searing experience of Iraq, both the Republican and Democratic parties somehow managed to nominate candidates who were loudly supportive of humanitarian intervention. This was despite the massive military commitments still ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the fact that decisive action in Darfur, the western region of Sudan, would require confrontation with another Arab League member state.<sup>52</sup> As Condoleezza Rice once told Bush, “I don’t think you can invade another Muslim country during this administration, even for the best of reasons.”<sup>53</sup>

John McCain, the Republican candidate in 2008, had in 1999 sponsored a Senate resolution to authorize “all necessary force”—meaning ground troops—to defeat Yugoslavia in the Kosovo war. The Clinton White House had ruled out ground troops and had not asked for the resolution, and the Republican leadership worked hard to block McCain’s resolution. But McCain complained that the use of air power alone allowed Slobodan Milosevic to scatter his security forces and thus “displace, rape and murder more Kosovars more quickly than he could have if he feared he might face the mightiest

army on Earth.”<sup>54</sup> McCain was not always a humanitarian interventionist; he had voted against using force to get humanitarian aid into Bosnia in 1992, before turning, after the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995, to support deploying American troops to enforce the Dayton accords. During the 2008 campaign, McCain said, “I feel strongly about Darfur, and yet, and this is where the realist side comes in, how do we *effectively* stop the genocide in Darfur? ... I think it was pretty clear that in Kosovo, we could probably benefit the situation fairly effectively and fairly quickly. And yet I look at Darfur, and I still look at Rwanda, to some degree, and think, How could we have gone in there and stopped that slaughter?”<sup>55</sup>

Even more striking was the Democratic discourse. One might have expected some kind of Republican hawkishness. But President Barack Obama won his party's nomination in 2008 in large part because of his opposition to the Iraq war: he had been against it from the start, unlike his chief rival Hillary Rodham Clinton. Even so, Obama surrounded himself with humanitarian hawks. Samantha Power, the author of a hugely influential and Pulitzer Prize-winning book on America's failure to stop genocides, was a close campaign aide and is now a senior director at the National Security Council.<sup>56</sup> The highest ranked is Vice President Joe Biden, whom Obama chose as his running mate mostly for his foreign policy credentials. As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, while himself running for the Democratic presidential nomination, Biden called in April 2007 for American military action in Darfur: “I would use American force now. I think it's not only time not to take force off the table. I think it's time to put force on the table and use it.” Biden suggested that 2,500 American troops might “radically change the situation on the ground now.”<sup>57</sup>

Susan Rice, a senior campaign official who is now the American ambassador to the United Nations, was equally outspoken. She comes to the issue of genocide prevention with a painful past. During the Rwanda genocide, in April 1994, Rice, then the National Security Council director for international organizations and peacekeeping, startled the others on an interagency teleconference by asking, “If we use the word ‘genocide’ and are seen as doing nothing, what will be the effect on the November [congressional] election?”—a blunt intrusion of domestic politics into the foreign policymaking process.<sup>58</sup> Since then, she has tried to make up for Rwanda in Darfur. In 2006,

along with Anthony Lake—who was White House national security adviser in 1994 and is also haunted by Rwanda—Rice called for the use of force. In particular, she was critical of the UN’s ability to save Darfur from what she called genocide. She warned of “unenforced U.N. resolutions,” pointed to China’s shielding of Sudan, and asked: “Will world leaders continue to give the perpetrators of genocide a veto over international action to stop it?” Her own solution was a UN resolution demanding that Sudan accept the deployment of UN peacekeepers with a week, or face military force—American or NATO air strikes against Sudanese airfields and military sites, and a possible blockade of Port Sudan. Most strikingly for the ambassador chosen to revive American credibility at the UN after Bush went to war in Iraq without the Security Council’s approval, Rice was in 2006 willing to use force without Security Council authorization: “If the United States fails to gain U.N. support, we should act without it.” In Kosovo, she noted, the UN had “effectively blessed NATO military action retroactively.” She wrote, in an argument unlikely to warm hearts in Beijing, Moscow or even Paris, “Others will insist that, without the consent of the United Nations or a relevant regional body, we would be breaking international law. Perhaps, but the Security Council recently codified a new international norm prescribing ‘the responsibility to protect.’”<sup>59</sup>

Obama himself promised on the campaign trail to enforce a no-fly zone over Darfur. As he told CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, “In a situation like Darfur, I think that the world has a self-interest in ensuring that genocide is not taking place on our watch. Not only because of the moral and ethical implications, but also because chaos in Sudan ends up spilling over into Chad. It ends up spilling over into other parts of Africa, can end up being repositories of terrorist activity.” Although Obama seemed to prefer a UN no-fly zone, and certainly preferred as much multilateralism as possible, he cautiously acknowledged that he might have to act even without Chinese and Russia approval: “I think our intervention in the Balkans ultimately was the right thing to do, although we never got the sort of formal consensus and coalition that we were able to achieve, for example, in the Gulf War. And so, the situations are going to vary.”<sup>60</sup>

Still, Obama enters office hobbled beneath an unbearable burden: wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Iranian nuclear ambitions, North Korean nuclear defiance, Pakistani instability, the management of the

vital relationships with China and Russia, Al Qaeda's murderous plots, a devastating global economic crisis, and much more. Sudan can hardly be at the top of his list. As it was for Bosnians and Rwandans, the most desperate people in the world are likely to find that their survival is a priority issue only for themselves.

#### LOOKING FORWARD

There is some evidence that humanitarian intervention makes a positive difference. The British navy saved the lives of African slaves; America could have saved lives in Rwanda. The political scientist Page Fortna has demonstrated that the presence of UN peacekeepers, under either consent-based Chapter VI or imposed Chapter VII missions, makes peace substantially more likely to last, all other things being equal—especially since the end of the Cold War, when most of the UN's efforts at peacekeeping took place.<sup>61</sup>

The economist Paul Collier rightly warns that Cold War interventions, both Soviet and American, were disastrous for places like Angola. But he argues that the West drew exactly the wrong lesson—do not intervene—from Somalia, with tragic consequences in Rwanda. As an example of the benefits of outside intervention, he points to the British intervention in Sierra Leone as a “huge success. ... I can think of no other way in which peace could have been restored and maintained in Sierra Leone.” There, the government and people welcomed British intervention, which took less than a thousand soldiers to secure the country. Collier argues that foreign forces are required: if security is to be maintained by the troops of a government emerging from civil war, its concomitant high spending on the military can all too easily be interpreted by the wary rebels as a sign that the government is going to be repressive, tempting the rebels to break the ceasefire. Thus as Collier puts it, “that is what modern armies are for: to supply the global public good of peace in territories that otherwise have the potential for nightmare.”<sup>62</sup>

Collier, like many others, notes that Iraq makes it hard to talk about Sierra Leone. If Iraq shows the cost of over-intervention, Rwanda shows the cost of under-intervention. Looking forward, the challenges for anyone hoping to get outside help to people in places like Congo are daunting. One has to get news to democratic publics at a time when even the big newspapers are shuttering their foreign bureaus; one has to build coalitions in a public that is naturally



preoccupied with a global economic crisis; one has to play complex multilateral politics through regional organizations and the UN. One has to persuade skeptics in the developing world that humanitarian intervention is not just neocolonialism, and convince Russia and China that it is more than thinly disguised Western hegemony. One has to share the burden so that it cannot be seen as simply an American project, but the responsibility of all the world's free countries: Japan, Canada, western and central and eastern Europe, a great deal of Africa, almost all of Latin America, and important growing democracies like India, South Africa and Brazil. Humanitarian intervention certainly has a past, although a checkered one. Despite all the high-flying rhetoric in Washington, London and Paris, the unanswered question is whether it has much of a future.

## NOTES

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