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Humanitarian intervention in the long nineteenth century

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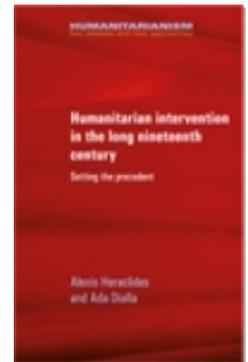
Published by Manchester University Press

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Preface and acknowledgements

The nineteenth-century precedent of humanitarian intervention was little known until recently. Most international relations and international law scholars as well as diplomats are unaware that humanitarian intervention has a longer history and is not simply a post-Cold War phenomenon. In the nineteenth century it was invoked and recognized by European states, public opinion and international jurists, from the three-power intervention in the Greek War of Independence (1821–32) until the more controversial US intervention in Cuba in 1898, but also with regard to other instances short of the use of armed force in cases of humanitarian plight from Peru to the Congo and from Naples to Russia.

But even among the few who are aware of the nineteenth-century experience there has been a reluctance to include it as a precedent, in view of the different circumstances and standards reigning prior to 1918, not least the embarrassing 'civilized–barbarians' dichotomy. Only a handful of international lawyers have used the nineteenth-century 'doctrine' of humanitarian intervention to butttress contemporary thinking on the idea.[1]

In recent years the claim that the nineteenth century was a heyday of humanitarian intervention has been made more convincing with Gary Bass's *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (2009). Lesser known is a lengthy paper by Tonny Brems Knudsen given at a conference in 2009.[2] These two works, as well as a lecture by André Mandelstam[3] in the inter-war period and a chapter by Martha Finnemore[4] in the mid-1990s, convinced us that a book on our part was in order.

The idea for this book matured following a workshop on humanitarian intervention at the University of Malmö in March 2010, where a paper on humanitarian intervention in the nineteenth century by one of the authors of this volume was well received.[5] By the time we had secured a contract with Manchester University Press, a second book appeared, edited by Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (2011) and when writing our book, a

third book was published, Davide Rodogno's *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Intervention in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914. The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice* (2012). Ours is the fourth book in English. Why yet another volume on the history of humanitarian intervention?

The book by Bass, well researched and written in an engaging manner to reach a wide audience, brings to life three cases of intervention in the nineteenth century, but does not deal with international law and the views of international jurists in those days (which is basic, for humanitarian intervention evolved as a concept or doctrine of international law), or with political theory and philosophy (for instance making only passing mention of J. S. Mill).

The Simms and Trim edited volume is an important scholarly book but is not focused on the nineteenth century: it begins with the sixteenth century and ends with interventions in the 1990s. 'Humanitarian intervention' is understood very broadly to include humanitarianism, and not as understood in the study of international law and international relations, namely as armed intervention to end suffering in humanitarian plight or protracted internal wars. Moreover, that book is not concerned with international law and the views of international lawyers in the nineteenth century. Having said this, we have benefited from several excellent chapters in the book, notably those by Trim on the Renaissance roots of humanitarian intervention, Rodogno on the Lebanon/Syria case, Schulz on the 1875–78 Balkan crisis and Sewell on the 1898 US intervention in Cuba.

Rodogno's book is crisp and persuasive as regards its subject matter, humanitarian intervention in the Ottoman Empire and the Orientalist gaze of the Europeans, and its overall thrust is closer to what we had in mind when we started writing our book, though ours is broader; we cover not only the Ottoman Empire but also include specific chapters on political theory and the thinking behind international law.

This book is an attempt at a comprehensive presentation of humanitarian intervention in theory and practice. It starts with a brief presentation of the present situation and debate and then moves centuries back in time, with the genesis of the idea in the Renaissance followed by the nineteenth-century civilization–barbarity dichotomy, with its concomitant Eurocentric/Orientalist gaze towards the Ottomans. We continue with the pivotal international law dimension, examining the arguments of advocates and opponents of humanitarian intervention from the 1830s until the 1930s, concluding the first part of the book with international political theory and intervention. In the second part, four case studies are examined in detail in five chapters: the Greek case (1821–32), the Lebanon/Syria case (1860–61), the Balkan crisis and Bulgarian case (1875–78) in two chapters and the US intervention in Cuba (1895–98).

This volume is of course a joint venture. This is the case with five chapters, namely chapters 3, 6, 7, 8 and 11. The other six chapters have been written by one author, namely chapter 9 by Ada Dialla and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 10 by Alexis

Heraclides. Note that all the translations from the original languages are by the two authors unless otherwise stated.

We would like to thank a number of individuals for their advice and support. Special thanks are due to the Mill scholar Professor Georgios Varouxakis for his help and advice and to Professor Bertrand Taithe for his valuable comments and suggestions. We would also want to thank international law Professor Antonis Bredimas, Hegel scholar Professor Georges Faraklas and, at the LSE, Professor Kevin Featherstone and Dr Spyros Economides. Alexis Heraclides would also like to thank his Panteion colleague Dr Chrisafis Iordanoglou and his schoolmate and oldest friend John N. Faraclas for their generous hospitality in London when the research for the study began in the first part of 2011, and Ismini Demades, Ioanna Antonopoulou and Tena Prelec for technical assistance during two fruitful sojourns at the LSE in 2011 and 2013. Ada Dialla would like to thank the personnel of the Russian State Library and the State Archive of the Russian Federation for their assistance during her research trips in Moscow.

Notes

1   See e.g. J.-P. L. Fonteyne, 'The Customary International Law Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention: Its Current Validity Under the U.N. Charter', *California Western International Law Journal*, 4 (1973–74), 203–36; R. B. Lillich, 'Humanitarian Intervention: A Reply to Ian Brownlie and a Plea for Constructive Alternatives', in J. N. Moore (ed.), *Law and Civil War in the Modern World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 229–51.

2   T. B. Knudsen, 'The History of Humanitarian Intervention: The Rule or the Exception?', 50th ISA Annual Convention, New York, 15–18 February 2009.

3   A. Mandelstam, 'La protection des minorités', *Recueil des cours de l'Académie de droit international*, 1 (1923), 369–82, 388–91.

4   M. Finnemore, 'Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention', in P. J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 153–85.

5   See A. Heraclides, 'Humanitarian Intervention in the 19th Century: The Heyday of a Controversial Concept', *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations*, 26:2 (2012), 215–40.