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## Humanitarian intervention in the long nineteenth century

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# Part II

Practice



## Introduction

Our criteria for selecting the *armed* humanitarian interventions of the nineteenth century are the following (which conform with the understanding in the long nineteenth century, as elucidated in [chapters 4](#) and [5](#)): (1) governmental onslaught against unarmed people or atrocities by both sides in a protracted internal war; (2) humanitarian concern, that is, stopping the ‘effusion of blood’, as one of the main reasons and official justifications for intervening; (3) military intervention, ranging from ‘peacekeeping’ (in today’s parlance) to hostilities or a full-scale war; and (4) intervention opposed or reluctantly condoned by the incumbent.

A clarification is in order as regards the second criterion, motivation, which harks back to the ‘right intention’ of the ‘just war’ doctrine (see [chapter 2](#)). One view is that pure humanitarian motives are of the essence, ‘altruism writ large’.<sup>1</sup>

A more pragmatic line is that there is always a mix, for, as Rougier had put it, with the nineteenth-century experience in mind, ‘it is practically impossible to separate the humanitarian motives of intervention from the political motives and assure that the intervening parties are absolutely disinterested’.<sup>2</sup> Thus several authors yesterday and today are prepared to regard a case as humanitarian if there is a combination of motives and the humanitarian motives are no sham.<sup>3</sup>

A third line is that since even the best of motives or intentions<sup>4</sup> may turn out disastrously in the field, the crux is a positive humanitarian outcome irrespective of the real motives,<sup>5</sup> but this is probably going too far.

On this basis of the above four criteria we will examine four cases. The case of Crete, which appears in some discussions on humanitarian interventions in the nineteenth century, will not be included. In fact Crete presents two cases, in 1866–68 and again in 1896–98. The former witnessed reports of massacres while in fact the Ottoman authorities tried to be restrained in subduing the Cretan uprising so as not to allow foreign intervention on humanitarian grounds. Apart from diplomatic support for the Greeks from Russia, great power involvement was limited to the sending of warships to gather fleeing Greek Cretans. As for 1896–98, the six European powers were requested by the Porte to curb Greek

aid to yet another Cretan uprising and the powers actually intervened as peace-keepers in Crete (with warships and troops) on behalf of the Ottomans. Other cases that happen to be included in some lists of humanitarian interventions, such as the Armenians or the situation in Macedonia in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century, did not involve military operations but diplomatic pressure.

Humanitarian reasons have also been referred to by some commentators with regard to the outbreak of the First Balkan War. In fact the official humanitarian justification at the time was bogus. The aim of the coordinated acts of aggression by Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro was to oust the Ottomans and annex as much of Macedonia as they could, a process which had begun in the 1890s with guerrilla warfare by rival Greek and Bulgarian volunteers supported by their respective governments.<sup>6</sup> Ottoman rule had its flaws, in particular under Abdulhamid, and especially in the case of the Armenians, but the Ottoman Empire, following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution (which was heralded by the minorities and by neighbouring states), had become an imperial republic, with a parliament representing most of the minorities. Ironically (and tragically), when the four states launched their attack in October 1912, the Ottoman government was under the firm grip of liberal elder statesmen bent on curbing the influence of the nationalist Young Turks.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in the course of the 1912 war, Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia acted in a manner that was hardly within the confines of humanitarian law, committing a series of atrocities against unarmed Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

At this juncture an additional point is worth making with a bearing on the presentation of the case studies. The field of international relations as conceived by the traditional realist paradigm (which dominated the scene from 1945 until the mid-1970s and is hardly a spent force today) is statist: it regards states as the key units of analysis, seen as unitary actors, akin to billiard balls<sup>9</sup> whose outer shells (diplomats, foreign ministers, prime ministers and heads of state) are in contact. Further, a clear distinction is made between domestic politics and international politics, with the former being seen as having little impact on the latter save as regards aspects of power (power inputs).<sup>10</sup>

Such views may seem today *passé* and social constructions by recalcitrant realist scholars, but they are a fairly accurate depiction of the state of play in the nineteenth century, the golden age of traditional diplomacy, with the making of foreign policy in the hands of a small elite circle of foreign ministers, ambassadors (and other professional diplomats), monarchs, presidents (in the US case) and prime ministers, and a limited number of figures inside and outside government. This small circle shaped foreign policy and kept it away from the 'prying eyes' of an increasingly vocal public. As Richard Pipes points out, foreign policy relations 'proved to be that area of politics which was resisted most successfully the encroachments of democratic control'.<sup>11</sup> There was also the implicit assumption that responsible governments and diplomats knew how best to promote national interest and *raison d'état*, away from the passions, sentimentalism or jingoism of

the public. These few individuals played a key role in foreign policy and, despite the 'unspoken assumptions'<sup>12</sup> of a state's foreign policy, they at times held divergent views within the same decision-making milieu, views that are well worth referring to, and show that foreign policy was then hardly as uniform and coordinated as is often assumed.<sup>13</sup> This divergence of opinion within the same decision-making body was also symptomatic of the acute dilemmas posed by humanitarian plights.

On the basis of all of the above, the presentation of the four case studies will for the most part be traditional, with emphasis on diplomatic history and the views of key individuals.

## Notes

- 1 R. B. Miller, 'Humanitarian Intervention, Altruism, and the Limits of Casuistry', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 28:3 (2000), 4, 16. See also on this question A. Krieg, *Motivations for Humanitarian Intervention: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 37–55.
- 2 A. Rougier, 'La théorie de l'intervention d'humanité', *Revue générale de droit international public*, 17 (1910), 525.
- 3 It has been argued that 'concern with interests can help to give humanitarian war the kind of political anchorage that it may require in order to remain limited. As long as the interests in question are neither illegitimate nor preponderant, their presence need not subvert the justice of the war'. See A. Coates, 'Humanitarian Intervention: A Conflict of Traditions', in T. Nardin and M. S. Williams (eds), *Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 77.
- 4 Some authors distinguish between intentions and motives, pointing out that what matter are intentions (namely the intention to save people from massacre) and not motives, which are almost by definition bound to be mixed (they include instrumental motives) and hardly purely humanitarian. See on this point in particular F. R. Tesón, 'Humanitarian Intervention: Loose Ends', *Journal of Military Ethics*, 10:3 (2011), 200–6.
- 5 N. J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9, 24, 29–30, 37–40.
- 6 D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897–1913* (Thessaloniki: Institute of Balkan Studies, 1966).
- 7 See F. Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6.
- 8 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1914), *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914).
- 9 A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).
- 10 K. J. Holsti, *The Divided Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 22–3; J. A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983), 18; P. R. Viotti and M. V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 5–6.
- 11 R. E. Pipes, 'Domestic Politics and Foreign Affairs', in I. S. Lederer (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 146.
- 12 K. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), xii.

- 13 J. Mayal, 'Introduction', in P. Sharp and G. Wiseman (eds), *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1; K. Hamilton and R. Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (London: Routledge, 1995), 89–135; G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7; Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, xii, 3–4.