

The relevance of humanitarian intervention



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In my opinion, during a crisis situation there are three concepts that interplay to result in the atrocities: conflict, violence and war. Conflict being an ongoing struggle between two or more parties may lead to violence which can either be direct by inflicting physical pain or injury, or it may be structural via oppression, exploitation or domination. An ongoing systemic political violence between these parties is what we refer to as a war. An intervention is vital in every stage; as a matter of fact intervening during a conflict situation between parties can prevent the potential inhumanity and savagery that are the constituents of wars and in some cases genocide. Because of the anarchic system of the international community and the sovereign rights of states, methods of intervention have to be carefully structured so as not to breach the sovereign rights of states and aggravate conflict situations.

It is normal to expect states to resolve conflicts between themselves and to prevent and control violence. However when violence escalates to a point where neither the sovereign states nor the parties involved can control the atrocities and the inhumane acts to innocent civilians, then an immediate intervention from the international community is highly vital. The United Nations (Security Council) should come to a quick and concise decision on how to protect the right of the civilians and to resolve the conflicts that lead to the violence, bringing justice where needed. An intervention should never be debated in situations where the lives and livelihoods of fellow humans are at stake. Even though an intervention does come with its limitations, the end goal of saving lives is of a greater importance when it comes the question; is humanitarian intervention relevant in resolving violent

disputes To begin with I would like to use an example from personal experience, where the intervention of a coalition of neighboring countries brought hope to many victims including myself and saved the lives of and livelihoods of a great many civilians. It is on this event that I base my strong support of humanitarian intervention.

The 11 year civil war in Sierra Leone had always been under the watchful eye of the international community; however few efforts were made to prevent what later on became one of the most brutal civil wars of the 20th century with a notorious signature of civilian mutilation. The war in Sierra Leone was allegedly supported by other members of the international community. Weapons were made available to the rebels via diamond smuggling, arms were purchased in Ukraine and smuggled through Libya, Burkina Faso, and Liberia and eventually made available to the RUF in Sierra Leone. After years of ongoing conflicts between the government and rebel group (revolutionary united front) led by Foday Sankoh with supports from Charles Taylor, a war lord and dictator in neighboring Liberia war finally broke out in the capital. On May 1997 when Sierra Leone's army (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council-AFRC) led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma invited the RUF to take over the capital and overthrow the government, the citizens of Sierra Leone were at the mercy of the rebels and the then corrupt army, with no one to defend their basic human rights. The Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) had to make an emergency intervention to save the lives of civilians in the absence of a proper functioning army, pushing the AFRC/RUF outside of the capital and reinstating the president. A defeated and demoralized RUF then began a

systematic campaign of murder, mutilation and kidnapping, referred to as "Operation No Living Thing", terrorizing the countryside. The AFRC/RUF infiltrated forces into Freetown catching ECOMOG by surprise, resulting in another brutal battle in the capital on January 6th 1999 which was later known as ??? the siege of Freetown???

The ECOMOG alone had difficulty fighting off the RUF the second time around since they were taken by surprise and unprepared, this resulted in a death toll close to seventy five thousand and more than one third of the country's population was displaced (Larry J. Woods and Colonel Timothy R. Reese, Military Interventions in Sierra Leone: Lessons From a Failed State pp 27).

After a fierce battle, in which civilians and ECOMOG alike lost lives, the ECOMOG did succeed in reinstating the government under the leadership of president Kabba. This scenario is one that testifies to the vitality of an intervention in the protection and reestablishment of human rights. However in my opinion since the early stages of the conflict efforts should have been made to resolve disputes and negotiate. The international community should have put more pressures on the Sierra Leone government to control the situation before it escalated to the disaster it later on became. Despite the high death toll and outstanding infrastructural damage to the country, it is safe to assume that without the presence of the ECOMOG and the later involvement of British troops and UN peace keepers, it would have been much worse. In the case of Sierra Leone, the intervention did occur in a relatively acceptable period of time and even though to this day there have been allegations formed against ECOMOG about their operations; some of which involved the reckless killing of civilians who they ??? thought??? were

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rebels, the ECOMOG's involvement in the Sierra Leone war did help save the lives of many. In the Rwandan genocide where the international community failed to deliver a proper intervention at the appropriate time, the extent of the damages to human lives was astounding.

It was the fastest, most efficient killing spree of the twentieth century.

According to background on the events of the genocide given Sean D.

Murphy's Humaitarian Intervention: The United Nations in an Evolving

World Order, in the early 1990s, Hutu extremists within Rwanda's

political elite blamed the entire Tutsi minority population for the country's

increasing social, economic, and political pressures. Tutsi civilians were also

accused of supporting a Tutsi-dominated rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic

Front (RPF). On April 6, 1994, after the killing of President Habyarimana, a

Hutu, violence began almost immediately.

Under the cover of war, Hutu extremists launched their plans to destroy the

entire Tutsi civilian population sending out radio messages urging the killings

of Tutsis, turning neighbors against each other. By the end of April more

than 200,000 thousand were reported dead and atrocities only became

more brutal. One such gruesome scenario mentioned was the killings of 500

Tutsis who had taken refuge in a church compound were shot or hacked

to death by Hutu soldiers within a two day period. Rwandan government

officials at some point reported that 10,000 bodies were floating down the

Kagera River into Lake Victoria. Throughout this period a humanitarian

intervention was still not decided upon. As a matter of fact the United States

referred to the high death tolls as war time casualties (Powers Samantha,

Bystanders to Genocide). The role of the US was further analyzed within the

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article; the United States is still held accountable for not only refusing to intervene but in fact making successful efforts to remove UN troops from Rwanda, working to block the authorization of UN reinforcements, refusing to use technology available to stop critical radio broadcasts that were an instrument in the coordination and perpetuation of the genocide and finally the fact that the American government refused to accept the events as a genocide but rather as ??? acts of genocide??? so as to avoid moral obligations.

These allegations against a ??? superpower??™ such as the United States with respect to the negligence of their moral responsibility is much worse than any allegations made on breaching the sovereign rights of Iraq. This scenario leaves me with the question of how a country that takes pride in being the ultimate example and perpetuator of democracy stand by and watch close to a million people killed in a genocide that could have been easily thwarted. Clinton??™'s lack of interest in the ongoing atrocities in Rwanda was supposedly a lack of knowledge of the true events of the war. Samantha Powers reports further that during the first three days of the killings U. S. diplomats in Rwanda reported back to Washington that well-armed extremists were intent on eliminating the Tutsi entirely and the American press spoke of the door-to-door hunting of unarmed civilians.

By the end of the second week informed nongovernmental groups had already begun to call on the Administration to use the term “ genocide,”. With all this knowledge not to speak of the technological capabilities of the US to seek to understand a situation, how then can their actions or lack thereof be based on ??? not knowing the full extent??? of the situation. Saddam

Hussein was found in deep hiding in Iraq, and civilians were being killed in the open in Rwanda with an average of 8000 deaths a day, what differences between these two scenarios prompted a lack of a humanitarian intervention in the latter and a coalition of forces present in the former. To this day the consequences or outright disapproval of the Iraq war faced by the government of the United States can never surpass that stained identity of world power and leader in democracy and human rights protection and liberation. The international community at large is to be held responsible alongside the UN for failing to organize resources and launching an intervention sooner so save the lives of so many innocent civilians. This is a type of mistake that the world at large must never allow to happen again.

However like all situations, the notion of humanitarian intervention can be misused for self interests purposes. This draws light to the section on ??? The intervention Quandary??? mentioned by Richard Falk in his article, Humanitarian Intervention: Imperatives and Problems. Richard talks of ??? the yellow light of caution??? being more appropriate than the green light which was a go ahead for any interventionist approach with humanitarian aim and the red light which opposed any intervention whatsoever in the name of protection of the sovereignty of states. Indeed such a precaution is necessary so as to impede invasions that are solely self interest driven but masked with concerns for human rights. This forethought is necessary to prevent interventions that are in fact recipe for greater disasters from taking place; such as the invasion of Iraq by a coalition of forces led by the United States.

Why this is a good example for the definite pre meditation of humanitarian intervention ??? yellow light???, is because the initial reasons for the intervention was not exactly synonymous with the eventual cause of the invasion. At first it was more of an offensive approach, in search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorist activities within Iraq after September 11th. Despite the confirmation of UN observers on the lack of any signs of WMDs in Iraq, after months of conflict and rising death tolls on both sides the invasion took a more humanitarian turn, that is liberating the Iraqi??™s from a rule of tyranny and rebuilding its infrastructures to enable proper growth and development of the country. Such unclear motives are reason enough for the UN and the international community to take precautions in satisfying any humanitarian mission. Another example highlighted by Falk in his article that was also criticized was the invasion of Uganda by Tanzania in 1979 to ??? relieve??? the Ugandan people from a brutal dictator; Idi Amin. . Even though Tanzania??™s claim for attacking Uganda was based on human rights violations by the then dictator; this reason was not initially why they invaded. Their initial claim was for self defense, which was not exactly apparent since Idi Amin had voluntarily withdrawn his troops from Tanzania and was no longer of threat to its citizens and their livelihoods (Sean D. Murphy, Humanitarian Intervention: the United Nations in an evolving world order 1996 pp 107). Both scenarios are similar in the sense of unclear motives and the apparent breach of sovereign rights. However research done did indicate that Idi Amin leadership meant constant suffering of civilians and his removal from power did result in a positive improvement in

the country's fundamental infrastructures such as socio economic education etc.

this does not an approval of the invasion but a highlight in the good that comes from stepping in and liberating people otherwise subjected to terror. Such precautions to be made taken must never elude the fact that the longer the international community debates on an intervention the more atrocities are committed the more people suffer. We must not let these instances cloud our judgments about the benefits of the citizens of the countries after the intervention. in the case of genocide that occurred in Rwanda, which claimed the lives of almost a million Tutsi's, the validity of intervention should not have been in question; Imagine for one moment that, in those dark days and hours leading up to the genocide, there had been a coalition of states ready and willing to act in defense of the Tutsi population, but the council had refused or delayed giving the green light. Should such a coalition then have stood idly by while the horror unfolded? statement by Kofi Annan in his article 'Two Concepts of Sovereignty' published in September 1999 in The Economist.

This statement is evidence of an incident that would forever be present on the consciences of those who believe in the preservation of the rights of humanity and had the power to end the atrocities, yet stood by in the name of caution as the horror unfolded. In my opinion, when faced with the slightest possibility of massive crimes against human right the so called 'yellow light' should be switched to green almost instantly. It is better to have intervened and later realize that it would not have been necessary than to delay and have a devastating result. It is not apparent that every

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circumstance that poses a threat to the lives and livelihood of citizens of a country requires a forceful intervention but there are several forms of intervention that can go tremendous distances in helping those in need. Annan further outlines ; ??? On the one hand, is it legitimate for a regional organization to use force without a UN mandate On the other hand, is it permissible to let gross and systematic violations of human rights, with grave humanitarian consequences, continue unchecked??? The questions raised by the former UN secretary-general are ones that require great debate and with the bottom-line of protecting and restoring the basic rights of humanity by all means. It is safe to say that instead of condemning an intervention method, more efforts should be geared towards finding and using other forms of intervention that do not stand the risk of igniting further disputes. It is a moral responsibility to always protect the rights of the helpless.

It is this very connection that makes us human, for arguments sake: if there were to be an ??? alien invasion??? humans would have to stand up together as one unit to ensure survival and save humanity. So it does not matter whether it is Angola, Kosovo, Sierra Leone , Iraq, or Rwanda the lives and livelihoods of fellow humans should never be taken for granted, and intervention is by all means significant and as such a moral responsibility to all. Bibliography: * Sean D. Murphy, Humanitarian Intervention: The United Nations in an evolving world order (university of Pennsylvania press 1996) pp 107 * Kofi A. Annan, ??? Two Concepts Of Sovereignty??? (The Economist 1999) * Samantha Power, ??? Bystanders to Genocide??? (The Atlantic 2001)pp 1 * Richard Falk. ??? Humanitarian Intervention: Elite and Critical

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