

Solving major global issues by founding a system on ethical principles in simon b...

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Humanitarian Interventionism: A Lifesaving Policy

America, an opportunistic, diverse, militarily strong, albeit economically struggling nation is one of the most powerful nations in the world. Based on the principle that every human being is equal, despite their economic status, the culture or religion they belong to, or their ethnicity, and because of America's dominating status and strong military, it has a moral obligation to defend basic human rights and to protect human wellbeing, whenever these fundamentals are being threatened. This moral obligation should exceed cultural boundaries, encompassing the global arena in all its folds. According to Simon Blackburn in his book *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, " we may not be able to solve all the world's problems, but we should do our best with the ones we can solve" (43).

When studying human behavior and ethics, it is important to remember that what is considered " right" or " wrong" is subjective, varying from culture to culture, individual to individual. _ With that being said, America's involvement in the affairs of other countries may be perceived in a positive light by many, but may not necessarily be favorable to others. The ultimate questions ends up being, who is right? Despite this fundamental variance in attitude, however, America should have the moral obligation to intervene in a country if that country needs help. It is immoral for an able country—such as America, China, Russia, France, or England—to stand by and watch the inherent human rights of the People of other countries being compromised, or their wellbeing threatened.

The Rwandan Genocide is an excellent example of our breach of morality. When hundreds of thousands of innocent lives were being violently taken by the hands of angry men wielding deadly machetes, the UN refused to acknowledge the extremity of the situation as it was unfolding. In fact, they actually withdrew the soldiers that had been placed there to try and keep the peace, as their lives were being put in danger (" Backgrounder," 2004). Though they were economically and militarily able to intervene and put a stop to the genocide, the UN turned their cheeks to the extremely violent circumstances that were occurring in Rwanda. America, along with the other nations part of the UN, should have intervened as soon as the chaos broke out in order to limit the amount of fatalities. They, as a powerful and able empire, had a moral obligation to intervene and restore peace in the country that had lost all sight of morality.

According to the International Criminal Court, genocide is " any . . . acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (ICC, 2013). In the case of the Rwandan Genocide, the Tutsi and Twa minorities were being targeted by not only Hutu militia, but by Hutu civilians as well. _ The atrocities began in April of 1994, when a plane was shot down, killing all passengers, including the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. The 100 days that pursued were that of mass killings of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children. There were approximately 800, 000 fatalities in the short duration of the genocide. This unbelievable execution was not the product of a random free-for-all, but a strategic massacre. Rwandan armed forces attacked civilians, militiamen formed mobs, and the media aired hate messages encouraging Hutu

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civilians to kill the Tutsi civilians. _ Though it is said that the U. S. and UN had the capability to block radio signals from airing, nothing was done to stop them, nor was anything done soon enough to protect these innocent lives (“Backgrounder,” 2004).

At the time, the UN refused to recognize the crimes committed as acts of genocide, warranting them to legally stay uninvolved. In his essay “Rwanda Reconsidered,” Luke Glanville states “the emergent norm prescribing humanitarian intervention was too weak to compel the administration of President Clinton to do anything substantive to stop the slaughter of more than one in every ten Rwandans” (185). It was not until July of that year that the UN decided to finally intervene, deploying soldiers to restore peace in the country, and also at that time, the UN relocated many survivors to refugee camps in bordering countries. Unfortunately, however, international help came too late for the masses of perished lives. Holly Burkhalter says it best in her report “The Question of Genocide,” when she states:

The reasons for [the Clinton administration’s] stance include lack of leadership within the . . . foreign policy bureaucracy; its refusal to deal with the crisis as a human rights disaster [the Rwandan Genocide] demonstrably was; . . . and a general U. S. withdrawal from engagement in countries for which there is no strong domestic constituency. (44)

The UN should have recognized the events that were taking place in Rwanda as an extreme breach of human rights. All order and control in the country had been lost; militiamen rampaged the streets with machetes; radio broadcasts administered hate messages and rooted for mass killings of

Tutsis. America and the UN stood by while so many tragically lost their lives in what was, according to Burkhalter, “ the clearest case of genocide in 50 years” (44).

Glanville argues that with the institution of a liberal democracy, an empire should “ not only permit intervention but prescribe it in certain circumstances” (185). Circumstances that call for intervention include ones that endanger the lives or wellbeing of civilians, or threaten their fundamental human rights, which was demonstrated so obviously in Rwanda. Having defined this norm, it is appropriate to accuse the U. S., as well as the entire UN council, of violating an ethical norm. Glanville goes on, accusing the Clinton administration of “ vital self-interest” (190) and bringing to light their belief that if “ they themselves remained silent about the genocide, the silence in the streets, the media, Congress and internationally meant that they need not fear that they would pay a price for inaction” (195). The Congress, according to Glanville, knew the right thing to do was to intervene and help the Rwandan people, but chose not to do so. So long as they avoided the term “ genocide,” the American people would not be upset, and everyone—except, of course, the Africans who were being brutally tortured and murdered—would live happily ever after.

It is often said that there are two kinds of bullies: the person doing the bullying and the bystander witnessing the bullying happening, but does nothing. This same logic can be applied here, on an international political level. Ervin Staub discusses the bystander effect in his essay, “ Doing Good, Doing Bad, Doing Nothing.” He states:

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Nations have traditionally not seen themselves as moral agents. They have used national interest—defined as wealth, power, and influence—as their guiding value. Sometimes old ties to a country and to a particular group within it lead some nations to support the perpetrators—as in the case of French support for the Rwandan government—rather than the people who are being harmed. (831)

When refusing to stick up for what is right, one is actually implicitly supporting the wrong. During the time of inaction, the UN, according to Staub, was supporting the genocide, enabling it to transpire and gain momentum.

This type of globalization, where strong empires such as the UN, or more specifically, the U. S., China, England, and France, among others, help to protect humanitarianism in countries in danger of losing it, is the most moral foreign policy. This form of humanitarian intervention can be supported on the principle that every human being is fundamentally equal and therefore every human being should enjoy the same fundamental rights. Jon Aarte Scholte supports this conjecture, stating that “ globalization involves reductions of barriers to such transworld social contracts . . . [where] people become more able—physically, legally, linguistically, culturally and psychologically—to engage with each other wherever on planet Earth they might be” (59). A world where people are not separated from one another by imaginary borders is a world where everyone helps each other out; a world without cultural and ethnical barriers; a world with little disparagement between groups of people. Globalization is the first step toward this ideal,

and therefore, especially with matters of humanitarian misconduct such as the Rwandan Genocide, it should be a practiced doctrine of our powerful empire.