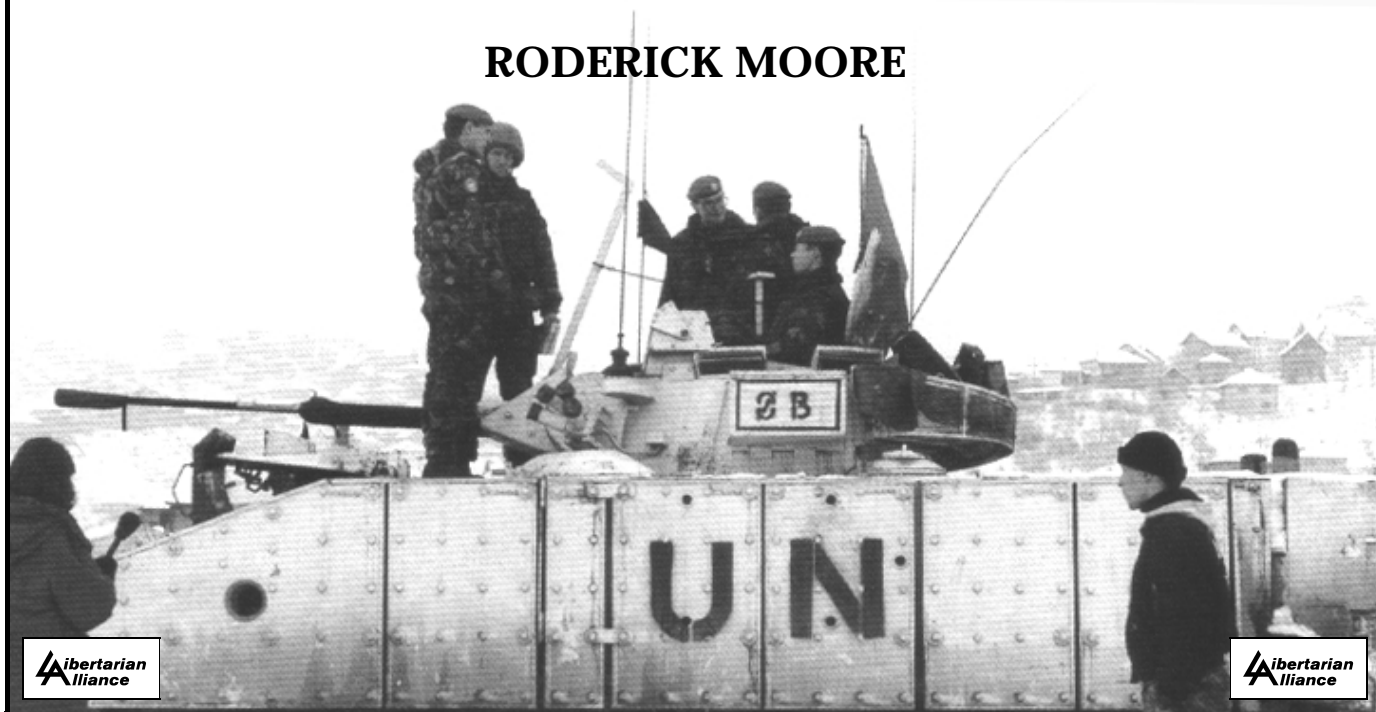


FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-COMMUNIST WORLD: THE CASE FOR SELECTIVE INTERVENTION

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Since the fall of communism we have entered a new era in world history. During the Cold War we were faced with one big problem which threatened the survival of mankind, but we are now living in a safer but more complicated world with many small local problems. At the moment there is a lot of controversy about what foreign policy Britain and the other Western democracies should adopt in the post-communist era. Every reasonable person accepts that we have a right to use force to defend our own national security, but there is a great deal of disagreement about whether we should ever intervene militarily in other countries for purely humanitarian reasons, when our security is not threatened. Some people want NATO to

become a global police force which keeps the peace all over the world by intervening indiscriminately in every crisis, while others, including many libertarians, believe in a strict policy of non-intervention.

I disagree with both of these points of view. In my opinion, we should be more discriminating about where and when we intervene, and what we urgently need now are guidelines to help us to decide whether intervention is likely to do any good. The present state of affairs is unlike anything that has existed since before the First World War, so the present generation of politicians have had no experience of dealing with anything like it, and they are learning everything by trial and error. This makes it inevitable that they will make mistakes, and constructive criticism would be much more helpful to them than the hysterical diatribes about so-called "American imperialism" which we have been hearing recently from some quarters. In this essay my aim is to work out a few rules of thumb, based on empirical evidence, about the circumstances in which humanitarian intervention may be justified.

FOREIGN INVASIONS

Humanitarian intervention may be considered for three main purposes: (a) to protect one country against aggression by another country; (b) to overthrow a dictatorship; or (c) to stop a civil war. The first type of case is the least likely to be controversial, because there is no question of any violation of sovereignty, since the purpose

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of intervention is to put a stop to intervention by someone else and defend or restore sovereignty. The liberation of Kuwait in 1991 was a model example of this type of intervention; it was well-planned, well-executed and completely successful. When Saddam Hussein's forces first occupied Kuwait, some pessimistic pundits predicted that if we tried to get them out again, the war would drag on for years and the casualty rate would be as bad as in the First World War. In the event, the Iraqi army was routed in a ground campaign which lasted only five days. Some people may argue that the Gulf War was not an example of humanitarian intervention, strictly speaking, since our national interests were at stake because of Kuwait's oil exports to us. However, Douglas Hurd, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, maintains that if the oil had been the only thing that mattered, it would have been much cheaper and safer to do a deal with Saddam Hussein and let him keep Kuwait (see Douglas Hurd, *The Search For Peace*, Little Brown, London, 1997, p. 119). Since the Gulf War, no other nation has committed an act of blatant aggression, so the victory by the Coalition forces seems to have had a deterrent effect. If a similar crisis does arise in the future, we should deal with it in the same way.

DICTATORSHIPS

At first sight, the idea of sending troops to a country to overthrow a dictatorship and establish free institutions seems very attractive. However, it is not enough just to create free institutions; they have to be maintained once they have been created, and that can only be done by the people of the country, not by foreign forces. In 1859, John Stuart Mill wrote in his famous essay *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* (reprinted by the Libertarian Alliance in 1987, Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 8, first published 1859) that:

“It is a mistake to give freedom to a people who do not value it.” (Mill 1859 p. 6)

These words are just as valid today. However, some of Mill's other comments are open to debate. His rule of thumb for determining whether a people did in fact value freedom was that if they could overthrow a native despot without foreign help, then they valued it, but if they needed foreign help, then they did not value it, therefore they did not deserve help. On the other hand, he believed that if they were living under a dictatorship imposed by a foreign power, then it might be justifiable for another foreign power to liberate them. I would argue that foreign intervention to overthrow a native dictatorship can sometimes be successful, and this is proved by recent experience in the Caribbean region. The examples which I have in mind are the American military actions in Grenada, Panama and Haiti.

Grenada was a former British colony which became self-governing in 1967 and was granted full independence in 1974. In 1979 a Marxist organisation called the New Jewel Movement seized power and set up a dictatorship. In 1983 a power struggle broke out, in which Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister, was opposed by Bernard Coard, the Minister of Finance, and General Hudson Austin, the army commander. The result was that Bishop was overthrown and executed by Coard and Austin. At that

point the United States sent troops to overthrow the dictatorship and restore democracy. Since then, there have been no reports of any more trouble in Grenada.

In Panama, Guillermo Endara was elected President in 1989, but General Manuel Noriega refused to recognise the result of the election. Later that year, the United States sent troops to defeat Noriega's forces and enable Endara to take office. The Haitian case was very similar. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected President in 1990, but he was deposed by the army a year later. In 1994, when American forces landed, they were able to restore him to power without firing a shot, because the Haitian army surrendered without a fight. Like Grenada, Panama and Haiti have not suffered a major political crisis since then.

In these three cases, the crucial factor was the degree of public support for free institutions. The Panamanians and the Haitians were both struggling to elect leaders democratically, but they were being thwarted by the army. Grenada had been a democracy only four years earlier (although there were allegations of corruption against the previous Prime Minister, Eric Gairy), and the people welcomed the Americans as liberators.

Now compare these Caribbean nations with Iraq. Iraq became independent in 1932, after hundreds of years of Turkish rule followed by fourteen years of British administration under a League of Nations mandate. Officially it was supposed to be a constitutional monarchy, like Britain, but in practice the elections were often rigged. The last time it held anything resembling a free election was in 1954. Opposition parties were banned later that year, and since then it has always been either a one-party state or under military rule. The monarchy was overthrown in a coup in 1958, and all other changes of government have also been achieved by violence. With a track record like that, Iraq is not going to become a democracy tomorrow or the day after. Bombing it to try to influence its internal affairs is only likely to strengthen support for Saddam Hussein by enabling him to pose as an Arab patriot who is defying the Western infidels. Even if he was overthrown through Western intervention, the next leader might be just as bad. If one single Iraqi soldier, plane or missile crosses the border, or seems on the verge of doing so, then we should do what we did in 1991, but while Saddam Hussein keeps his forces inside Iraq and does not threaten his neighbours, we should leave him for the Iraqis themselves to deal with, if they have the will.

The same arguments apply to other countries. If a nation has a recent history of democracy, or if the people themselves are already struggling to achieve it, or if there are any other signs that they would value it, then we should consider intervention. Otherwise, non-intervention would be the wisest policy. If a nation is not likely to become a democracy in the foreseeable future, we should set the people a good example by the way we govern ourselves, and if they want to learn from us, we should welcome them, but we should not try to impose our way of life on them by force.

CIVIL WARS

There are two kinds of civil war: those in which both sides want to take control of the whole country, and those in

which one side wants independence for its own area. A war of the first kind can only break out if there are roughly the same number of people on each side. If the great majority of people supported one side, that side would soon win, and the conflict would not last long enough to become a civil war. (It would be a revolution rather than a civil war.) We could intervene in this kind of war in two ways: either by choosing the side which was in the right and helping it to win, or by occupying the country and keeping the two sides apart by force. In the first case, we would be fighting half the population, and in the second case, we would be fighting all the population. In either case, it would be a long, costly struggle with little hope of success. Even if we did succeed, we would have to occupy and administer the country permanently, otherwise the fighting would break out all over again as soon as we withdrew our forces. That would be even more expensive. I referred earlier to choosing the side which was in the right, but in practice that sort of situation would be unlikely to occur. At the end of the 20th Century, a country where the people are still resorting to civil war to settle their political disagreements is likely to be so backward that both sides are just as bad as each other. Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that one side believed in democracy and the other side believed in dictatorship, a country where only half the people believed in democracy would be unlikely to stay a democracy for very long, so intervention would be unlikely to do any good.

As an illustration of these points, take the case of Somalia. Somalia became independent in 1960, when the former colonies of Italian Somalia and British Somaliland were united. It was a democracy until 1969, when Mohammed Siad Barre seized power and made himself a dictator. He was overthrown in 1991, and since then the country has been in a state of anarchy (which in this case is a synonym for chaos). The intervention by United Nations forces between 1992 and 1995 achieved absolutely nothing. Somalia was in a state of anarchy when they arrived, and it was still in a state of anarchy when they left. The trouble is that the Somalis are divided into clans which have been fighting each other for hundreds of years. Colonisation by Europeans stopped the fighting for a few decades, but old habits die hard. The United Nations hoped to pacify the country by keeping the clan chiefs apart, but this proved to be prohibitively expensive. The sad truth is that the only thing you can do with a place like Somalia is leave it to stew in its own juice and hope that one day the people become civilised enough to get tired of fighting.

Wars of independence are rather different. The crucial factor which makes a difference is that it is possible to separate the combatants geographically. If the nationalist forces win the war and gain independence, it is only necessary to keep the peace along the border, not all over the country. In the 19th Century, two European nations won their independence thanks to intervention by foreign powers, and it is worth considering the circumstances in which it happened.

The Greek War of Independence broke out in 1821. By 1827 the Greeks were still fighting, but the Turks were gaining the upper hand. In that year, Britain, France and Russia signed the Treaty of London, under which they agreed to mediate on behalf of the Greeks. To enforce an

armistice, the three powers sent a joint naval force to Greece under the command of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington. The Turks opened fire on Codrington, and he responded by sinking their fleet at the Battle of Navarino. This victory tipped the balance in favour of the Greeks, and the success of their cause was assured in 1828 when Russia declared war on Turkey. Under the Treaty of Adrianople, which Russia and Turkey signed in 1829, the Turks recognised Greek independence.

In 1830 the Belgians rebelled against Dutch rule and declared independence. They succeeded in taking control of most of the country in a few weeks, with very little fighting. Prussia, Austria and Russia threatened to send troops to restore Dutch rule by force, but Britain and France talked them out of it. In 1831 the Dutch invaded Belgium, and for a few days they were on the verge of reconquering it, but it was saved by a French army which arrived in the nick of time. France sent another army to Belgium in 1832 to force the Dutch to evacuate the citadel at Antwerp, which they had held since independence; this action was accompanied by a British and French naval blockade of the Dutch coast.

Today there is nothing controversial about the existence of Greece and Belgium as independent nations. Everyone takes it for granted, and only historians remember that their independence was originally secured by foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Turkey and the Netherlands. In these cases, intervention had a successful outcome because the Greeks and the Belgians were advanced enough to do a good job of governing themselves. When we are deciding whether to intervene in a war of independence today, we should consider whether a nationalist victory is likely to lead to a more stable and democratic system of government.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: BOSNIA AND KOSOVO

In the last few years, the NATO powers have intervened in two wars of independence in the former Yugoslavia. I propose to discuss the case of Kosovo first, because the issues involved are not as complicated. The Yugoslavian government, which was controlled by the Serbs, abolished the Kosovo provincial assembly in 1990 to stop it declaring independence. The members of the assembly went into exile in Croatia, and with the help of their supporters in Kosovo they succeeded in holding a referendum in 1991 and elections in 1992 and 1998, despite the disapproval of the Serb authorities. It was only after the Kosovo Albanians had spent eight years trying to proceed democratically and failed to get anywhere that they finally resorted to guerrilla warfare. I would argue that the decision by the NATO powers to come to their aid was right in principle precisely because they were trying to proceed democratically. If we had left Kosovo under Serb control, when nine-tenths of the population wanted independence, the government would have had to become more and more tyrannical and repressive to force the Albanians to submit to it against their will. A government with so little public support does not deserve to survive; it deserves to be removed from power as soon as possible. It is hard to predict how good the Kosovars will be at governing themselves, since Albania itself is not exactly the most stable democracy in Europe, but they should have a much better

chance of building a free society if they accept the basic legitimacy of their government than if they regard it as a foreign oppressor.

However, even if the decision to intervene was right in principle, it was very badly executed. Never having served in the forces, I am not an authority on how to win a war, but it is obvious even to a civilian that if the NATO powers had sent ground troops to Kosovo right at the start, the war would have lasted a lot less than eleven weeks and the Serbs would have committed a lot fewer atrocities. The shambles in Kosovo makes a striking contrast with the swift and effective campaign against the Iraqis in Kuwait, and it shows that George Bush was a much more competent and resolute leader than Bill Clinton.

The Bosnian civil war presented us with a much more complicated problem because it was actually two wars of independence, one inside the other. The Bosnian Moslems and Croats were fighting for independence from Yugoslavia, and the Bosnian Serbs were fighting for independence from Bosnia. In 1990, when Yugoslavia held its first free elections, the winners in Bosnia were the Moslem and Croat parties which wanted independence. In 1991 the Bosnian Serbs responded by setting up five autonomous regions within Bosnia, and later that year they held a referendum in which they voted to remain part of a Yugoslavian or Serb state. In 1992 the Bosnian government held its own referendum on independence, which was boycotted by the Serbs, and the declaration of independence after the referendum was immediately followed by the outbreak of the civil war. It is worth noting that until the war broke out, both sides were proceeding democratically. It was only when the fighting started that the Bosnian Serbs, with the help of the Yugoslavian government, seized a much larger area of Bosnia than they should rightfully have had.

The basic cause of the Bosnian dilemma is that the country has a mixed population. This is a consequence of Turkish imperialism. During the centuries of Turkish rule, many Serbs migrated to Bosnia from their own country, which was also under Turkish rule, and many Bosnians were converted to Islam. Today the intellectual elite treat the idea of multiculturalism as a sacred cow, and it is deemed to be politically incorrect to question it, but the awkward truth is that multicultural states usually do not work. The only successful multicultural state anywhere in the Western world is Switzerland, and its unique political system is the product of hundreds of years of evolution which cannot be imitated overnight. The only other advanced country which could be described as a multicultural success is Singapore, and although it is prosperous and stable, it is not all that democratic. It is not all that multicultural either, since three-quarters of the population are Chinese, while in Bosnia none of the three communities has an overall majority. (The proportions are roughly two-fifths Moslem, two-fifths Serb and one-fifth Croat.) Since the Dayton Agreement, Bosnia has been divided into two zones, the Moslem-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic, and at present the country is only being held together by the presence of the NATO forces of occupation. If NATO withdrew, the fighting would start all over again. If two ethnic groups object so strongly to living under the

same government that they are willing to start a civil war over it, it is futile to try to change their minds at gunpoint. We should face the fact that the only way to bring peace to Bosnia is to allow both sides to satisfy their aspirations to national self-determination, and that means allowing the Serb zone to break away and join Serbia. Of course, that would mean that the border between the zones would have to be tidied up, because at present it wanders all over the country, following the 1995 cease-fire line. It would also have to involve some resettlement of the population. I am not proposing more ethnic cleansing, of course, but in a place like Bosnia, peaceful ethnic separation may be the only alternative to ethnic cleansing. If the Serbs of Serbia were allowed to unite with their kith and kin in Bosnia, it might go some way towards soothing their feelings after losing Kosovo, and if it reduced their sense of being victimised by the NATO powers, it might make them less aggressive in the future.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the NATO powers should have occupied Bosnia in force as soon as the civil war broke out, not three years later. They should have made it clear to all three communities, but especially the Serbs, that if they wanted to partition Bosnia, the borders should be drawn by peaceful negotiation, and each community was entitled to a share of territory in proportion to its numbers, but no more than that. In the event, all attempts to reach a peaceful solution failed because the Serbs could always seize more land by force than they could gain by negotiation. It was not until 1995, when Croatia intervened in the war and routed the Serb forces, that the Serbs agreed to back down. If the NATO powers had confronted the Serbs with a force powerful enough to defeat them, they would have backed down a lot sooner.

CONCLUSIONS

As a summary of what I have said above, I propose the following rules for humanitarian military intervention, not as rigid dogmas, but as working guidelines to be revised in the light of future experience:

1. Intervention to stop aggression by one country against another is always justified.
2. Intervention to overthrow a dictatorship may be justified if the people are already struggling to achieve freedom, or if there is any other reason to believe that they would value it, but not otherwise.
3. Intervention in support of a nationalist movement in a war of independence may be justified if there is any reason to believe that independence would make the country more stable or democratic.
4. Intervention in a civil war in which both sides want to take control of the whole country is unwise and should be avoided.

In conclusion, I will just add one final comment. This essay is about humanitarian action rather than Britain's national interests, but they do not necessarily conflict. If intervention expands the area of the world which is governed by stable democracies, it is likely to lead to an increase in peace and prosperity which benefits the whole world, including Britain.