

THE LIMITS OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

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In the field of foreign policy, Britain and the other Western democracies should avoid wasting lives and money on futile wars, but we should also avoid leaving our friends in the lurch when it is within our power to help them. In *Foreign Policy Perspectives* No. 34 (Libertarian Alliance, London, 2000), I attempted to work out some rules of thumb for avoiding both of these mistakes. I discussed the circumstances in which we might be justified in intervening in another country's affairs for humanitarian purposes, and my conclusions were as follows:

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 this pamphlet, I propose to look more closely at the second and third types of case. My aim is to identify the circumstances in which these kinds of intervention have been successfully practised in the past, and attempt to predict the circumstances in which they are likely to be successful in the future.

DIFFERENT CIVILISATIONS HAVE DIFFERENT VALUES

The purpose of humanitarian intervention is to help other people, but it is no good trying to help people unless (a) they

want to be helped and (b) they are making some effort to help themselves. (This is why I am against intervention in cases of the fourth type, such as Somalia and Sierra Leone. People who are fighting each other are not helping themselves.) Here in the West, we often take it for granted that if we introduce democracy and human rights into another country, then by definition we are helping it, but we forget that Western civilisation does not cover the whole world, and Western values are not universally accepted. If the people of that country do not value democracy and human rights as much as we do, they may regard our intervention as imperialism rather than help. I am not suggesting that we are wrong to value democracy and human rights, but I think we should bear it in mind that if our way of life is really the best, then there should be no need for us to impose it on other people by force, because there is nothing to stop them imitating us of their own free will.

If the success of intervention depends on the values of the people we are trying to help, then we need to know how far Western civilisation and Western values extend. One of the most useful guides to this subject is Samuel P. Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (Touchstone, London, 1998, first edition 1997). According to Huntington, the world can be divided into nine civilisations: Western, Orthodox, Latin American, Moslem, African, Hindu, Buddhist, Sinic and Japanese (see Huntington 1998, pp. 26-27). Some of the details of his scheme of classification are open to criticism. For example, he treats the Orthodox and Latin American civilisations as separate from Western civilisation, when it would make just as much sense to regard them as branches of it. The main influences on Western civilisation have been Christianity, Greek philosophy and the Roman concept of the rule of law. They were all present in the Byzantine Empire, from which the Orthodox countries got their culture, although those countries have developed along slightly different lines from Western Europe. In Latin America, the Spanish and Portuguese influence on the local culture has been very much greater than that of the American Indians, whose contribution to society has been mainly racial rather than cultural. There is also an important cultural division inside Western civilisation between Continental Europe and the English-speaking world, which is just as deep as the divisions separating the Orthodox countries and Latin America from the rest of the West. However, with these reservations, Huntington's scheme is a good way of making sense of today's world. The map at the end of this pamphlet shows a modified version of it, which I propose to rely on from now on.

Huntington warns us that we should not allow superficial appearances to mislead us into believing that Western values are becoming universal. In Chapter 3 of *The Clash of Civilisations*, he draws an important distinction between Westernisation and

Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 38

ISSN 0267-6761 ISBN 1 85637 548 X

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
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modernisation. Many non-Western countries are modernising today, in the sense that they are making advances in literacy, education, science, technology and industry, but that does not necessarily mean that they are accepting Western political ideas. It is true that in the late 20th Century, over thirty former dictatorships became democracies, but this only happened in certain parts of the world. As Huntington later points out:

Democratisation was most successful in countries where Christian and Western influences were strong.

By the 1990s, except for Cuba, democratic transitions had occurred in most of the countries, outside Africa, whose peoples espoused Western Christianity or where major Christian influences existed. (Huntington 1998, p. 193)

Apart from the former communist block, democratisation took place in Spain, Portugal, Latin America, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan. All the countries involved were part of Western civilisation in the broadest sense except South Korea and Taiwan, and in those two countries the movement towards democracy was led by members of the Christian minority. So far, the only major non-Western countries which have been democracies for any length of time are India and Japan, each of which has its own unique civilisation. In other civilisations, the prospects for democracy and human rights are not so good, and this is especially true of Islam. As Huntington puts it:

The general failure of liberal democracy to take hold in Moslem societies is a continuing and repeated phenomenon for an entire century beginning in the late 1800s. This failure has its source at least in part in the inhospitable nature of Islamic culture and society to Western liberal concepts. (Huntington 1998, p. 114)

If we want to know where humanitarian intervention is likely to succeed, then we should start by looking at Huntington's map of the world.

SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

In Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 34, I discussed the American interventions in Grenada, Panama and Haiti between 1983 and 1994. These were all Type 2 cases, and they were all successful. It is worth noting that all three countries are part of Western civilisation. Since I wrote that pamphlet, there has been a successful Type 3 intervention on the other side of the world, in East Timor. This former Portuguese colony was occupied by Indonesia in 1975, when the Portuguese withdrew, but the local people never accepted Indonesian rule, and the occupation led to years of guerrilla warfare. In 1998 a new government came to power in Indonesia, and in 1999 it held a referendum on East Timorese independence, which was won by the nationalists. However, the government proved to be unwilling or unable to protect the East Timorese against a reign of terror by private militias, which appeared to be colluding with the Indonesian army. At that point, an Australian-led international force occupied East Timor to provide protection. Since then, the country has been administered by the United Nations to prepare it for independence, and there have been no further crises. It is significant that East Timor is a mainly Christian country, thanks to the work of Portuguese missionaries who first arrived there as early as the 16th Century, and many of the people are partly of Portuguese descent, because of Portugal's policy of encouraging mixed marriages in its colonies.

In my previous pamphlet, I also discussed the Type 3 interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. In these cases, it is still too soon to tell whether intervention has been a success. In Huntington's scheme of classification, both countries could be described as borderline cases. Bosnia has a Christian majority, but of course it also has a large Moslem community, comprising about two-fifths of the population, while in Kosovo the majority of the people are Moslems. (In Albania proper, the population is

about 70% Moslem and 30% Christian, but I cannot find any published figures for Kosovo which distinguish between Albanian Christians and Serb Christians.) In both countries, the Moslems are Westernised, because they have been surrounded by Christians for hundreds of years, and few of them support Iranian or Afghan-type fundamentalism. Those of them who have turned to fundamentalism have done so mainly in response to Serb persecution. In Bosnia, the success of intervention will depend partly on whether the NATO powers allow the local people to partition the country, instead of imposing multiculturalism on them by force, but it will also depend partly on whether the Moslems' commitment to Western values proves stronger than their commitment to their religion. They have proceeded democratically so far, so we can be cautiously optimistic. The Kosovo Albanians have also shown some degree of commitment to Western political ideas, because after the Serbs abolished their provincial assembly, they spent eight years campaigning for independence by peaceful means, before finally resorting to force out of desperation. It is worth noting that the Albanian sense of national identity is based on language, not religion, and it is difficult for Albanian Moslems to be anti-Christian, since Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, was a Christian who led the resistance to the Turkish invasion in the 15th Century. In Kosovo, as in Bosnia, there are grounds for optimism about the outcome, but the values of the local people will be the crucial factor.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

I did not discuss international law in Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 34, but it seems appropriate to say something about it here, since in the last few years it has often been claimed that one intervention or another was illegal under international law. I have no legal qualifications myself, but the law exists for the benefit of everyone, not just lawyers, so I am going to do my best to interpret it. According to Article 103 of the United Nations Charter 1945, the Charter has priority over all other international agreements, which sounds like a promising start. However, on the subject in question, the Charter seems to contradict itself. The relevant passages read as follows:

Article 1. The purposes of the United Nations are:

(2) To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.

Article 2. The organisation and its members, in pursuit of the purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following principles:

(4) All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

Which should take priority: self-determination or territorial integrity? The Charter does not say. Article 2(4) obviously prohibits acts of aggression by one nation against another, such as Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, but what about the Kosovo crisis? If the Kosovo Albanians have a right to self-determination, was the NATO attack on Serbia consistent with the purposes of the UN, or was it a violation of Serbia's territorial integrity? A cunning lawyer could prove that any given Type 2 or Type 3 intervention was legal by invoking Article 1(2), or he could just as easily prove that it was illegal by appealing to Article 2(4).

If written law is too ambiguous to be any help, then perhaps we should rely on precedent instead. By my reckoning, there are eight countries in the world today which owe their independence wholly or partly to foreign military intervention, as follows:

Countries Which Gained Independence With Foreign Military Help

	Date	Former ruling power	Source of help
USA	1783	Britain	France
Greece	1829	Turkey	Britain, France, Russia
Belgium	1830	Netherlands	Britain, France
Italy	1859(1)	Austria	France
Bulgaria	1878(2)	Turkey	Russia
Cuba	1899	Spain	USA
Panama	1903	Colombia	USA
Bangladesh	1971	Pakistan	India

(1) The liberation of Lombardy from Austrian rule by the Kingdom of Sardinia with French support in 1859 was the first step towards a united and independent Italy, which was achieved in 1861.

(2) Autonomous in 1878, fully independent in 1908.

In the cases of Bulgaria, Cuba and Bangladesh, the intervention was humanitarian in the fullest possible sense, because the ruling power committed atrocities during the struggle for independence. In every case, it is now universally recognised that the country in question has a right to independence, and since two of the countries on the list are important enough to be members of the Group of Seven, their independence sets a good precedent for the legality of intervention.

INTERVENTION IN THE TURKISH EMPIRE

Two of the countries listed above were originally ruled by Turkey. The history of the Turkish Empire in the 19th Century is worth studying, as it provides a whole series of examples of humanitarian intervention by the European powers in the days before the UN Charter was written. The first intervention was in Greece, which rebelled against Turkish rule in 1821. In 1827, Britain, France and Russia signed the Treaty of London, under which they agreed to mediate on behalf of the Greeks. Later the same year, the Turks fired on a joint fleet sent by the three powers to enforce an armistice. The result was the Battle of Navarino, in which the Turkish navy was wiped out. In 1828 Russia declared war on Turkey, and in 1829, under the Treaty of Adrianople, Turkey agreed to recognise Greece's independence.

The second intervention was in the Lebanon, where a conflict broke out in 1840 between Maronite Christian peasants and their landlords, who belonged to the Druze sect. This continued on-and-off for the next twenty years, and then suddenly intensified. In 1860 there were massacres of Christians by Druzes in the Lebanon and by Moslems in Damascus, with the connivance of the Turkish authorities in both cases. France responded to the crisis by sending troops to the Lebanon to protect the Christians. In 1861, under pressure from the European powers, Turkey agreed to set up a special administrative district called the Sanjak of the Lebanon. The district had a Christian governor appointed with the approval of France, Britain, Prussia, Austria, Italy and Russia, and these six countries guaranteed the right of the Christians to live in peace and practise their religion. This arrangement lasted until the First World War, and there were no further atrocities against the Christians during that time.

Incidentally, the tragic history of the Lebanon in more recent times is due to an unwise decision taken by the leaders of the Maronite community after the First World War. In 1920, when the League of Nations made the Lebanon a French mandated territory, the Christian leaders asked the French government to expand the boundaries of the old Sanjak to include some mainly Moslem areas such as the city of Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley. They believed that a larger Lebanon would be more economi-

cally viable, but the cultural mix eventually destroyed the country's political stability. Ironically enough, they proved to be wrong about economic viability, because some countries – Singapore, for example – are thriving today in spite of their small size. Singapore's success is largely due to its role as a financial centre, and the Lebanon performed a similar role in the Middle East before the civil war. A smaller Lebanon could have become a Mediterranean Singapore.

Returning now to the 19th Century, another Balkan crisis broke out in 1876, when the Bulgarians rebelled against Turkish rule. Turkey attempted to suppress the rebellion by sending troops to massacre thousands of Bulgarian villagers. This led to a Russian declaration of war on Turkey the following year. The war ended with a Russian victory in 1878, and under the Treaty of San Stefano, Turkey recognised Bulgaria's independence. However, Britain objected to the terms of the treaty on the grounds that it upset the balance of power between Russia and Turkey, so the Congress of Berlin was held to decide on a new peace agreement. Under the Treaty of Berlin, which was signed later that year, part of Bulgaria became autonomous under a prince chosen by the Bulgarians themselves, while the rest of it, known as Eastern Rumelia, remained a Turkish province, but was administered by a Christian governor approved by the European powers. Eastern Rumelia was annexed by Bulgaria in 1885.

The final intervention involved Greece again. When it first became independent, it covered a much smaller area than today. Its northern border was less than a hundred miles north of Athens, and the rest of the mainland and the island of Crete remained Turkish. In 1896 the Greeks of Crete rebelled against the Turks and demanded unification with Greece. As in Bulgaria, the Turks responded by massacring the rebels. In 1897, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy and Russia sent a joint military force to occupy Crete and protect the Greeks. The powers forced Turkey to make Crete autonomous under a Christian governor, although the island remained under nominal Turkish sovereignty for the time being. This state of affairs lasted until 1913, when Greece and some of the other Balkan states defeated Turkey in the First Balkan War, and Greece annexed Crete and the rest of the Greek mainland.

INDONESIA: THE TURKEY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The purpose of all these interventions was to liberate Christian peoples who were struggling for independence from a repressive Moslem empire. Today, history may be about to repeat itself in another Moslem empire in a different part of the world. Indonesia, the world's largest Moslem state, is basically an artificial country created by the Dutch, who annexed many small states ruled by local princes and merged them to form the Dutch East Indies, which became Indonesia on independence. Today the country is run mainly by the Javanese, who make up about 60% of the population, and it has been described as a kind of Javanese empire. Although most of the people are Moslems, some of the islands in the east of the country are mainly Christian, and the local people are discontented with Moslem rule. East Timor, which I have already mentioned, is just one example. Nationalist movements are also campaigning for independence for the South Moluccas and West Papua, and in the South Moluccas there have been reports of atrocities by Moslems against Christians. Other mainly Christian areas include the Minahasa region in northern Celebes, where a nationalist movement was active from 1957 to 1961, and the islands of Flores, Savu and Roti. All of these areas are peaceful at present, but they could potentially try to break away and declare independence. It would be wise for the Western democracies to anticipate future events in Indonesia and prepare to follow the historic precedent which they set in the Turkish Empire more than a century ago.

CONCLUSIONS

I now propose to amend the conclusions which I reached in Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 34, to clarify the circumstances in which interventions of Types 2 and 3 are justified. I suggest that intervention to overthrow a dictatorship or enable a country to achieve independence is only justified if that country has a Western type of culture. In other words, the limits of humanitarian intervention should correspond to the limits of Western civilisation, except in cases of aggression by one country against another, where intervention is clearly authorised by the UN Charter. In particular, intervention in the internal affairs of Moslem countries should be strictly avoided, except to liberate Christian peoples who desire independence from Moslem rule.

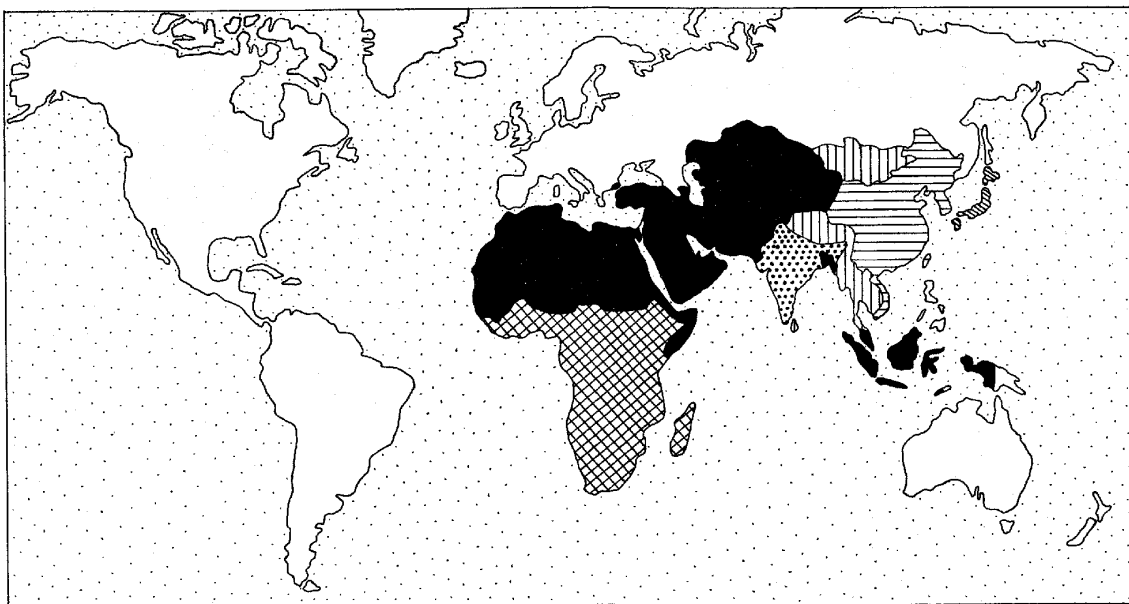
APPENDIX: DEFENCE AGAINST ROGUE STATES

This pamphlet is essentially about humanitarian action rather than defensive action, but I have said quite a lot about Islam, so it would seem like a glaring omission if I did not mention the 11th September atrocities and their aftermath. Samuel Huntington's ideas are just as relevant to this subject as they are to humanitarian intervention. At the time of writing, the Americans have deposed the Taliban, and by the time this pamphlet is published, they may have deposed Saddam Hussein as well, so the first thing that we need to consider is what we should do about rogue states after we have deposed the offending government. When the country in question is not part of Western civilisation, we should not be too optimistic about what we can achieve. The chances of countries like Afghanistan and Iraq becoming Western-type democracies in this generation's lifetime are nil, because they have the wrong kind of cultural heritage, and the cultural changes which would be necessary would take hundreds of years. Rather than trying to change the local way of life by force, we should simply concentrate on installing a government which does not commit acts of aggression or harbour terrorists. After that, we should get our troops out as quickly as possible, and hope that we have gained ourselves a breathing space of ten, twenty or thirty years before another gang of villains come to power. This is not a policy which will appeal to Tony Blair, who seems to be suffering from delusions of grandeur about his ability to right all the world's wrongs in

five minutes, but we need to be realistic. Our aim should not be to convince non-Western nations of the benefits of democracy and human rights, but to convince them that if they leave us alone, we will leave them alone.

Since the 11th September atrocities, it has sometimes been suggested that we should take the Allied military occupation of Germany and Japan after the Second World War as a model for our treatment of defeated rogue states. However, these cases were different in some important respects. Germany is a Western nation, and National Socialism was an ideology imposed from above by a political party, rather than a way of life which the German people had followed for centuries. As for the Japanese, there is no doubt that they regarded the Western nations as rivals, but they were not actively hostile to Western values in the way that millions of Moslems are today. On the contrary, they had just spent more than seventy years trying to catch up with the West by imitating us, so that they could beat us at our own game. All the Americans had to do was make them imitate us rather more closely.

The other main thing that we should consider is whether misguided attempts at humanitarian intervention in non-Western nations may harm our own national interests. If rogue states can portray themselves as victims of Western imperialism instead of aggressors, they may be able to attract sympathy and support from other non-Western peoples, so we should take care not to give them any excuses. That means that we should either deal with them decisively, by deposing the government, or we should leave them well alone. We should not muck about with half-measures like economic sanctions and air patrols, because (a) they do not work and (b) they give rogue governments and terrorists a grievance which they can exploit for propaganda purposes. According to Osama Bin Laden's propaganda statements at the time of the atrocities, two of his main grievances against the West were the sanctions against Iraq and the presence of American troops in his homeland, Saudi Arabia. If Saddam Hussein had been deposed and tried as a war criminal in 1991, or if Iraq had been left to stew in its own juice, there would have been a lot fewer recruits for Al Qaeda. In other words, when there is a mad dog on the loose, we should either shoot it or keep out of its way, not poke it with a stick.



The Civilisations of the Modern World
(adapted from Samuel P Huntington)

