Humanitarian Intervention : A return to core values

For many the term "western" or "the west" are common terms used in the media to such an extent that we give their meaning very little thought; yet the split between several European countries on the one hand and the USA on the other over the 2003 Iraq War illustrate that this is not as homogeneous a group as is often portrayed. Although both the USA and the EU are part of the grouping, this is not simply a geographic term as Australia is a key member; nor is it a financial term, although free-market economics is seen as a complementary feature. Western nations largely share a common belief in certain core values that tie us together in one community. Although springing from different sources, the values can be encapsulated within the modern concept of human rights.

This inevitably begs the question as to what extent human rights are universal. To understand this we must first discuss what human rights are. We must determine our stance on the subject of whether a right exists prior to it being legislated upon. My instinct and empathy says that yes of course it does. I want to believe that regardless of any written law, there is a basic truth that exists separate to society and legal procedures. Yet philosophically speaking this is very difficult to prove. However, the answer to this question allows us to move forward to determine our policy. If we belief in human rights, then defining our foreign policy as a humanitarian one is not simply an altruistic move; it is a question of our fundamental beliefs. Following existential philosophy, it is not simply okay to hold those beliefs and not act; our action determines our identity and reinforces our beliefs. We would become a hollow shell if we did nothing when confronted with ethical dilemmas abroad. Intervention is therefore a matter of our self-identity.

For many years the issue of state sovereignty conflicted with the idea of intervention. This came to a head in 1999 when NATO intervened in Kosovo despite objection from various quarters. This intervention led to the UN rethinking its position on humanitarian intervention and the subsequent declaration on the Responsibility to Protect. The effects of the UN's Responsibility to Protect resolution have not yet become evident in the international arena. Yet this watershed resolution helps codify the above ideas. Of course it can be taken as an excuse for declaring war, which means that before we declare war we must be sure in our minds that such a human right exists or else we risk being imperialistic in our actions. Samuel Huntington used the term "civilization" in his 1996 book : *Clash of Civilizations*, to describe, as he perceived it, the separate areas of the world where different cultures predominate. Recognising such regional differences is important, as the Arab World or Asia may not hold the same values as the west. We must develop a true inter-civilisational definition of human rights.

The end of the Cold War was recognised by many as a turning point in international relations. Prior to the 1991 Iraq War George H Bush declared in a speech to a joint session of Congress (Sept 11 1990) that there was a real chance for a New World Order. Although this was perhaps short-lived, the spirit of the period allowed for successful intervention in several conflicts to the advantage of the residents of the areas affected. We need not look far to find examples of this: following unsuccessful attempts by the UN to limit the conflict, under the guise of the UN Protection Force (Bosnia 1992-95), the successful intervention of NATO in Dec 1995 allowed for the ending of the Bosnian Civil-War. Eventually handing over its mandate to the EU in 2004, the NATO operation is widely regarded as a success, both by the IC and within Bosnia. Alas, it goes without saying that Rwanda (1994) was a dark moment for the IC, but other events in the period, such as the UK operation in Sierra Leone provided positive examples of military intervention. Interventions during the 1990s included: Europe: Bosnia, 1995; Kosovo, 1999; Africa: Sierra Leone, 2000; Pacific Asia: East Timor, 1999.

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By the turn of the decade many people found truth within Huntington's thesis in the events surrounding and following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. There appeared to be an intrinsic difference between east and west. This changed both policy makers', and the public's ideas on humanitarian intervention. The positive spirit of the International Community (IC) in the 1990s, with regards humanitarian intervention, was damaged further by the somewhat dubious ethical aspects of the 2003 Iraq War, as well as via widespread public fatigue concerning the Afghan conflict. The concept of military intervention had become intertwined with the neo-conservative flavour of President George W Bush's foreign policy package: intervention became synonymous with regime-change and neo-imperialism.

Following the George W. Bush presidency, an understandable result of the situation that occurred in Iraq, and the war-weariness that exists with regards Afghanistan, is that politicians in both Europe and America have returned to a defensive posture in terms of military expeditions. In many ways facets of isolationism can be seen in the discourse that surrounds the topic. Few now speak of grand expeditions to intervene in trouble spots around the world.

In the present economic climate this is perhaps understandable, and none would question the economic rationality behind budget cuts in the military *per se*. Following Iraq and Afghanistan there is a danger however that people associate intervention with interfering or see it as a fear motivated strategy. Whilst the threat of terror was a justifiable motivation for the 2001 Afghan operation, it should not be looked at as the only factor. Humanitarian intervention rests on our sense of ethics and this should be salvaged from the lessons learnt over the past decade of war. Failure to recognise this will, as pointed out by the UK Shadow Defence Secretary: Jim Murphy, means that the next Kosovo will receive stank interest.

Today, we also have to consider supranational states such as the EU. No longer is foreign policy the sole domain of the nation-state, now much is ascribed to organisations that exist above the individual state. As the march of globalisation continues onwards and the supranational state becomes an evermore common feature within international relations it is increasingly important that the fundamental issue of humanitarian intervention be addressed. The beliefs of the 1990s, or for that matter the inter-war years of Wilsonianism, should not be cast aside and forgotten. In 1977 Hedley Bull published his defining book*: The Anarchical Society*, in which he declared the existence of an international society of shared norms and values. If the International Society that Hedley Bull talked of is to be anything more that an academic concept, that we must define our policy according to such societal ideas. Humanitarian Intervention must be re-visited as the only true form of military expedition acceptable and in fact favoured. As it stands, the UN Charter clearly states wars of self-defence as being the only acceptable type. While specifically expanded to include collective self-defence, this has been traditionally understood as against an external aggressor; yet collective self-defence can, conceivably, include defence from internal aggressors such as state authorities.

This dual understanding of collective self-defence has led to impasses at the UN Security Council before, such as in 1999 with reference to Kosovo. The ever-present problem of an impasse at the UN should not be used as an excuse for inaction. Whether it be Kosovo, or Sierra Leone, the west has successfully intervened regardless of stalemate in the UN. Only through such bold steps can the west redeem itself after the dubious start it gave the 21st century via the War on Terror. The UN's Responsibility to Protect provides the legal framework and justification for intervention by stating that its each and every state's responsibility is to protects its citizens from instances of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Failure to do this means that the state has renegade on its responsibility and thus sovereignty. The IC then has a right and moral duty to intervene. Only our own indifference and ineptitude can stand in the way.

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