

Why did War Become Legitimate to Solve Humanitarian Crises?

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ABSTRACT: *Humanitarian aid is one of the most important and challenging issue in the world. Challenging sovereignty become the only way for NGOs to provide aids for those countries torn by war, especially those area which were taken by rebels. After the collapse of USSR, the United States became the only super power nation who mainly carry out humanitarian aid.*

After the failure of Somalia operation by US army in 1992 due to casualties, military intervention for humanity was introduced and considered to be the only way to solve humanitarian crises.

KEYWORDS: *Humanitarian intervention, International community, Human rights, NGOs*

Date of Submission: 13-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 27-05-2022

I. INTRODUCTION

War was not used to solve humanitarian crises before 1990. From the end of World War Two until the end of the Cold War, peaceful intervention was the main method of humanitarian aid. In 1950, an international organization called High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) was founded. This non-governmental organization focused on helping refugees through international collaboration during the post-World War Two period. The rights of refugees are protected by allowing them to seek asylum and to resettle them in another states.

In 1967, a group of French doctors intervened in the Biafra Crises under the Red Cross. This organization was called Doctors Without Borders and changed the direction of humanitarianism. During the Biafra Crisis (1967-1970), this new form of humanitarianism challenged sovereignty. This NGO argued that the welfare of victims is more important than the power of the state. In addition, “bearing witness” became their motto. Not only did Doctors Without Borders help with medical intervention. They also focused on rights and justice. As one of the founders of the organization declared, “the doctor engages himself in the name of a certain conception of man and of his rights: The right to life, respect of the human being.”

After its dissolution in 1991, the USSR was no longer a superpower. It stopped to exist at that time. The United States became the only global power. It also became the main humanitarian actor in the world. For example, the US Intervention in Somalia was authorized by the United Nations (UN) and was carried out by the US military in 1992. Due to the civil war in Somalia agriculture was damaged, which caused a nationwide famine. More than four million people were impacted. However, Operation Provide Relief (1992) undertaken by the UN failed because of Somalia’s civil war. Under these circumstances, the UN accepted the proposal to send American combat troops there to protect aid workers. (Although the US military captured one of the most powerful warlords, the operation was perceived to be a failure due to casualties.) In his book, historian Michael Barnett introduced the concept “armed for humanity”, which means that in Somalia war became then a method to solve humanitarian crises.

A few years later in 1994, the genocide in Rwanda became a turning point in military humanitarianism. Hutus attacked Tutsi and killed around 500,000 to 600,000 people. However, the West initially did nothing to intervene in the brutal massacre. The big powers felt guilty about the death of so many innocent people. The genocide also reminded the US and the European Union of the Holocaust of Second World War. In order not to repeat the failures of the past, the West decided that war or military intervention is legitimate and moral. The form of intervention is forced military intervention, sanctioned by the United Nations majorly motivated by humanitarian concerns. Nevertheless, as Samantha Power (2002) points out in her book, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, US reaction to these genocide crimes against humanity still lacked a robust response when demanded. The development of international laws against genocide took many years to achieve meaningful change.

II. Liberal Humanitarianism

Started in the mid 1990s, politicians in the UK and the United States advocated military intervention as a legitimate way to solve humanitarian crises. The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated the idea that the force can be used for good ends. For example, to enhance security and build democracy, he stated “This is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values. We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand. We must not rest until it is reversed. We have learned twice before in this century that appeasement does not work. If we let an evil dictator range unchallenged, we will have to spill infinitely more blood and treasure to stop him later.” in his speech “Doctrine of the International Community”. To summarize, the above influential administrations purport a new thinking of military intervention, ‘For the purpose of stopping genocide, the use of force is not a last resort; it is a first resort’.

Bill Clinton, as the president of the only remaining superpower, also believed that it was legitimate for the international community to use armed humanitarian intervention for good ends. American journalists also advocated this view. As *The New Republic* remarked, “If it is recognized that the only proper response to genocide is the prompt use of force, then it must also be recognized that only the United States has the political and military muscle to lead such a response to genocide”.

From February to June of 1998, the Kosovo war marked the first time a group of states acting outside UN authority under the goal of humanitarian that violent another state’s sovereignty. In Kosovo, the conflict between Albanians and Serbs in Yugoslavia intensified in 1999. The Albanian’s Liberation Army wished to be independent from Serbia and claimed that they lacked rights. They also argued that Serbs deported ethnic Albanian Kosovars. Serbian police responded to KLA, resulting in the death of 16 Albanian fighters and four Serbian policemen.

NATO then intervened by bombing the Asobo region that forced Serbs to surrender within weeks, suffering few casualties but causing at least 488 deaths of civilians. According to historian Stephon Wertheim, interventions appeared easy— “where the US intervened, it seemed to succeed.”

III. “Responsibility to Protect”

After NATO’s intervention in the Kosovo crisis, the idea of Liberal Humanitarianism was translated into an international law through a UN resolution called “The Responsibility to Protect (2005)”. This resolution states that every country has the responsibility to protect its own people from genocide or other humanitarian crises, and that if the state is unable to do so, the responsibility will be shifted to international community through forces. As Former Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan argued in his annual report in 1999, “If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica, to gross and systematic violation of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?” The intention of war intervention does make a contribution to those who were not protected by sovereignty; however, the result was the opposite of what was intended.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the humanitarian war failed. According to the results of the Somalia War 1993 and Yugoslavia Crisis in 1999, military intervention creates more negative effects than protecting people from suffering. Including unnecessary death of both army and citizens, as well as large economic cost of operations.

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Zhang Tianhanshuo. “Why did War Become Legitimate to Solve Humanitarian Crises?.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 11(05), 2022, pp 11-12. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722