

Chapter 14

The Case for Decoupled Armed Interventions

There is growing opposition, both in the US and among its allies, to armed intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, unless vital core national interests are at stake. Even when governments engage in massive abuse of their citizens, for instance in Syria and before that in Iran, the nations of the world are increasingly reluctant to act. Indeed, the normative baseline, the default position for the international order, continues to be the Westphalian norm, strongly supported by China and Russia, and large parts of the third world. The high level of casualties and mounting costs of the longest war the US has ever been engaged in, in Afghanistan, as well as the lack of certainty that the results will ultimately vindicate this intervention, further reinforce the argument against armed intervention. True, the Libyan campaign has been deemed a success, but those involved are quick to stress that it does not set a precedent for such interventions in the future. The economic austerity regimes that the US and many of its allies are facing, as they seek to draw down their debt and reinvigorate their economies, further agitate against the expenditures involved in such interventions. As President Obama put it in the middle of 2011: “America, it is time to focus on *nation-building* here at *home*” (Obama 2011b).

This chapter suggests that if the humanitarian goals of armed interventions—stopping genocides, ethnic cleansing, and other massive abuses of civilian populations by their own governments—are decoupled from coerced regime change (e.g. democratization) and from nation-building, these interventions can be carried out effectively and at rather low costs. Hence, they need not be avoided in the future. In addition to decoupling, the standard for justifying a humanitarian intervention must be set at a high level (to be specified below). We shall see that this high level is justified by strong normative reasons and not merely prudential ones.

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The thesis for narrowly crafted armed humanitarian intervention is supported in the following pages by showing that a mixture of idealism and hubris has driven the West to assume that it can achieve much more than stopping massive abuse of a people by their government, and that the West's repeated failure to accomplish these expansive goals is a root cause for calls to avoid armed interventions altogether—including those missions whose normative standing is strong and which can be carried out effectively. (The following examination focuses on the US because it played a leading role in the matters at hand; however, the points made also apply to other NATO members, as well as other democracies such as Australia, South Korea, and Japan.)

14.1 The Idealism, Right and Left

Several armed interventions in the recent past sought much more than the Responsibility to Protect calls for ending massive humanitarian abuse—or interpreted it in a very expansive way. They often started with relatively narrowly crafted goals, but soon expanded these goals to include coerced regime change and nation-building, both because the US and its allies held that their democratic values call for such expanded missions, and because they believed that they could successfully transform other nations in a relatively short time and without undue outlays.

President Bush entered office in 2001 after strongly criticizing, indeed mocking, nation-building. In fact, in the second presidential debate against Al Gore, he claimed, “I just don’t think it’s the role of the United States to walk into a country and say, we do it this way, so should you” (Bush 2000). His subsequent policies, however, did not align with his original position, as was demonstrated three years later when he authorized the invasion of Iraq. The reasons behind his decision to invade Iraq in 2003 are reported to include intelligence reports that Iraq was amassing weapons of mass destruction, claims that Iraq had links to al-Qaeda, and—according to some—a response to attempts by the Iraqi government to kill his father. While all these attributed motives have been contested, there is little doubt that neoconservative normative arguments, which call for coerced regime change, played a key role in justifying the intervention in Iraq. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, neoconservatives championed “The Freedom Agenda,” which assumed that the nations of the world were moving toward liberal democratic regimes, and that the West was duty-bound to help lagging nations catch up with history by bringing them freedom, by force if necessary. In this vein, Iraq was not to be liberated merely for its own sake, but also to “flip” other autocratic regimes throughout the Middle East (Tanenhaus 2003).

President Obama entered office in 2009 committed to avoiding such coerced regime change interventions. His position was first laid out during his inaugural speech, in which he stated: “To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist” (Obama 2009a). This short quote deserves a careful reading. The first half of the sentence, in effect, announces that the United States will not seek to change regimes that violate

human rights. The second half lays out a condition: such intervention will be avoided as long as these illiberal nations do not use force. This is a sharp break from the Fukuyama-neoconservative-Bush position that, in order to secure peace, nations must have democratic regimes (Kristol 2006, p. 9; Fukuyama 1992).

Obama elaborated his position in what was framed as a major foreign policy speech in Cairo. He explicitly tied U.S. military intervention to security—and to no other goals:

We do not want to keep our troops in Afghanistan. We see no military—we seek no military bases there. [...] We would gladly bring every single one of our troops home if we could be confident that there were not violent extremists in Afghanistan and now Pakistan determined to kill as many Americans as they possibly can. But that is not yet the case. (2009b)

Later in the speech, when Obama did turn to discuss democracy, he stated: “I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other” (2009b).

And he stated, “Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election” (2009b).

As time passed, President Obama came under withering normative criticism from both the right and the left, not merely for not interfering to stop violations of the Responsibility to Protect, but also for not promoting human rights and democracy more vigorously and explicitly (Malinowski 2009; Wasserstrom 2009). Of Obama’s trip to China, Phelim Kine, a spokesman for Human Rights Watch, said, “It was a missed opportunity. He failed to address some of the most specific and visceral human rights abuses going on in China” (Mosk 2009, p. A3). Larry Cox, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA, stated that Obama “has created a false choice between having to speak out forcefully on human rights or being pragmatic and getting results on other issues” (Colvin 2009). Bret Stephens, a columnist at the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote that Obama’s time in office has “[treated] human rights as something that ‘interferes’ with America’s purposes in the world...” (Stephens 2009, p. A19).

Obama’s response to the 2009 Iranian protests were initially subdued, and he faced considerable criticism as a result (Obama 2009c, 2009d). Obama initially stated only that he was “deeply troubled by the violence that [he’d] been seeing on television,” but that the US would continue to seek to dialogue with Iran. Obama’s reaction was widely criticized. “Obama’s posture has been very equivocal, without a clear message,” said Representative Eric Cantor, then House minority whip. “Now is the time for us to show our support with the Iranian people. I would like to see a strong statement from him that has moral clarity” (Cooper and Landler 2009, p. A16). Steven Clemons, director of the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation, said, “For Barack Obama, this was a serious misstep... It’s right for the administration to be cautious, but it’s extremely bad for him to narrow the peephole into an area in which we’re looking at what’s happening just through the lens of the nuclear program” (Cooper and Landler 2009, p. A16).

The same pattern unfolded in the first weeks of the 2011 uprising in the Middle East. President Obama was at first rather circumspect in his comments, but, under criticism from both the right and the left, spoke out more strongly in support of

democratic forces in Tunisia and Egypt. And in 2011, an armed intervention in Libya that started as a humanitarian intervention quickly morphed into a forced regime change drive. And before too long, several leading voices called for massive nation-building by introducing a Marshall Plan for the Middle East. Former U.S. National Security Advisor and NATO Supreme Allied Commander General James Jones has explained, “We learned that lesson after World War II—you know, we rebuilt Europe, we rebuilt Japan. That was an example of an enlightened view of things. The Marshall Plan, I am told, wasn’t very popular in this country, but we went ahead and did it” (Jones 2011). Secretary of State Hillary Clinton believes “as the Arab Spring unfolds across the Middle East and North Africa, some principles of the [Marshall] Plan apply again, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. As Marshall did in 1947, we must understand that the roots of the revolution and the problems that it sought to address are not just political but profoundly economic as well” (Clinton 2011a). Two professors at Columbia Business School, Glenn Hubbard (who was also Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under George W. Bush) and Bill Duggan, argued that a Middle East Marshall Plan would “limit the spread of Islamic extremism” in the region (Hubbard and Duggan 2011). Senator John Kerry argued that “we are again in desperate need of a Marshall Plan for the Middle East” (Kerry 2011). Senator John McCain also expressed support for such a plan. And in *Prospect*, MP and former foreign office minister David Davis calls for a British Marshall Plan in the Middle East, arguing that such a plan “is one of the best ways to consolidate and support the Arab Spring as it stands, [and] could spark reform in other Arab Gulf countries too” (Davis 2011).

Some realists and conspiracy theorists may well deconstruct these normative appeals and the reactions to them and point to other motives instead (access to oil being one often cited). However, I suggest that analysis of these rationales (not carried out in the confines of this chapter) would show that normative considerations, which had “real” effects because of their resonance with opinion makers and voters in the United States and in other nations, did play a significant role in the repeated transformation of foreign policy from a position that was antagonistic to forced regime change and nation-building—to one that sought to carry them out. (Some may argue that averting humanitarian crises requires expanding the mission to unseating tyrants and building civil society and stable governments. For my response, see below.)

One serious difficulty the expansive approach to armed intervention encounters, as a normative principle, is that it has not been (and we shall see cannot be) consistently applied. In earlier ages, nations could act with limited concern for public opinion. However, as the masses became more educated and paid closer attention to public affairs (facilitated by greater access to information via the media), governments recognized the necessity of justifying their actions; they were now forced to provide a normative rationale for them. They would be held accountable. Fulfilling such a responsibility requires a measure of consistency. This is, of course, what is meant when one states that the Goddess of Justice is blind: she treats all comers in the same way, and it is in large part that consistency that legitimates her role as ultimate arbiter. Inconsistency is associated with arbitrariness, a failing of which the

American public is not tolerant, but which has, unfortunately, dogged US foreign policy in the matters at hand.

Throughout the Cold War, the US positioned itself as the champion of freedom, yet it supported military dictatorships in South America, Asia, and elsewhere. During the recent uprisings in the Middle East, the US fought to oust Qaddafi, but merely urged Mubarak to step down in Egypt; it cheered the departure of Tunisia's Ben Ali, while at the same time making few, delayed, and muted pleas for Saleh to step down in Yemen (LaFranchi 2011). It waffled on Syria and the Green Movement in Iran and, in effect, supported the autocrats of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Even as Bahrain was violently suppressing protests, and just before Saudi Arabia sent its troops to help, Secretary Clinton commended King Hamad for engaging in "meaningful outreach and efforts to try to bring about the change that will be in line with the needs of the people" (Clinton 2011c).

American leaders tried to explain away these gross inconsistencies. Most notably, Secretary Clinton, in a speech asserting US commitment to "sustained democracies" in the region, argued that diverse approaches were called for given such a "fluid" situation and that "a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't make sense" (Clinton 2011b). In his speech at the National Defense University justifying the Libyan intervention, President Obama took pains to emphasize that it was geared only toward that particular country, rather than representing a broader doctrine (Obama 2011). These arguments, however, have persuaded neither critics abroad nor those at home—again, because they are inconsistent. Critics cannot help but notice that the US lectures Russia and China about human rights, but provides equipment and training to the secret police of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, and previously propped up the dictators of Argentina, Chile, and Indonesia, among others. It intervened in Libya but not in Syria, where there were more casualties even though the rising groups were composed of peaceful civilians rather than armed rebels.

Consistency does not require relying only on one criterion. As President Obama pointed out, if US vital interests are directly affected—say, a foreign power is blocking the shipment of oil through the Strait of Hormuz—the US will act, based on interest considerations and not necessarily what other nations consider the right foreign policy. There may well be other grounds for differential treatment of nations that seem to engage in similar violations of human rights, but these must be articulated. Otherwise, instead of adding to the legitimacy of one's action, the rationale provided raises doubts and opposition, as has often been the case in the past. Indeed, when a nation cannot provide a consistent rationale for its armed interventions in the internal affairs of other nations, this ought to be one reason such acts are avoided.

14.1.1 The Hubris

Foreign policies that favor coerced regime changes as well as those that call for long-distance nation-building (that is, nation-building by one country in some other country, often on the other side of the ocean), draw not merely on the conviction that

it is the role of the West to bring its light to those who have not found it, on idealism, but also on the assumption that the West can transform other nations into liberal democracies, or at least help stabilize their government, prevent civil war, shape law and order (what is called state-building, which is less demanding than nation-building), and develop modern economies (which key advocates hold mainly requires freeing the nations from the old regimes that rely heavily on government interventions in the marketplace). That is, these transformations are not merely worthy ideals, but ideals that can be advanced, and in relatively short order, without unduly taxing the involved Western nations. This attitude reflects a mixture of a Western sense of exceptionality, superiority, positive thinking, and faith in social engineering. The result is what Peter Beinart calls “the beautiful lie”: a hubristic sense that the US can accomplish anything and thus needs no limits, and that US interests are wedded to international military domination (Beinart 2010, pp. 378–380).

Actually, the record of such interventions is very poor. The United States, for instance, after WWII, engaged in coerced regime changes in sixteen nations, eleven of which failed to establish a functioning democracy. True, Germany and Japan are exceptions (Pei and Kasper 2003). However, even a cursory examination of the conditions that existed in these nations shows that these conditions do not exist in the Middle East, which is the reason a Marshall Plan here cannot be effectively introduced (Etzioni 2007).

Germany and Japan had surrendered after decisive defeat in a war and fully submitted to occupation. That is, new regimes were installed only after hostilities had completely ceased. There were no terrorists and no insurgencies.

While the German and Japanese reconstructions were very much hands-on projects, following the experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, few, if any, give serious consideration to the possibility that the West will occupy more lands in the Middle East or attempt to manage their transformation. The post-Arab Spring attempts at reconstruction that are currently underway amount to long-distance social engineering, with the West providing funds and advice, but primarily leaving the execution to the locals. That is, no boots on the ground—and no managers to advance either political or economic development. Such engineering is much more difficult to carry out.

One further notes that even before WWII, German and Japanese citizens strongly identified with their nations and were willing to make major sacrifices for them. And this nationalistic sentiment and corresponding willingness endured throughout the reconstruction period. The first loyalty of many citizens of Middle Eastern nations—many of which are, in reality, tribal societies that have been superficially cobbled together by Western countries, is to their ethnic or confessional group. They tend to look at the nation as a source of spoils for their tribe and fight for their share rather than make sacrifices for the national whole. Deep ethnic and confessional hostilities, such as those between the Shi’a and the Sunnis, among the Pashtun and the Tajik, the Hazara and the Kuchi, and various tribes in other nations, either gridlock the national polities (e.g. in Iraq and Afghanistan), lead to large-scale violence (e.g. in Yemen, Bahrain, and Sudan), result in massive oppression and armed conflicts (e.g. in Libya and Syria), or otherwise hinder political and economic development.

Max Weber established the importance of differences in core values when he demonstrated that Protestants were more imbued than Catholics with the values essential

for modern capitalistic economies. Indeed, economic developments in Catholic countries (such as those in Southern Europe and Latin America) lagged behind the Protestant Anglo-Saxon nations and those in Northwest Europe. Weber also pointed to the difference between Confucian and Muslim values, thus, in effect, predicting the striking difference between the very high rates of economic development among the South Asian ‘tigers’—China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea—and the low rates of Muslim states. These differences in core values are the major reason foreign aid played very little role in the strong takeoff in ‘Confucian’ societies, and the reason for the poor record of foreign aid in Muslim ones. These values can change overtime, but hardly at the urging of the West, on its schedule.

One must also take into account the fact that Germany and Japan were developed nations before WWII, with strong industrial bases, strong infrastructure, educated populations, and strong support for science and technology, corporations, business and commerce. Hence, they, in effect, required reconstruction. In contrast, many Middle Eastern states lack many of these assets, institutions, and traditions, and therefore cannot be reconstructed but must be constructed in the first place—a much taller order. This is most obvious in Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, and Libya. It is also a major issue in nations that have drawn on one commodity, oil, to keep their economy going, but have not developed the bases for a modern economy—especially Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Other nations, such as Tunisia, Pakistan, Morocco, Syria, and Egypt, have better prepared populations and resources, but still score poorly on all these grounds compared to post-WWII Germany and Japan.

Germany and Japan also had competent government personnel and relatively low levels of corruption. In many nations in the Middle East, corruption is endemic, pervasive, and very difficult to scale back to levels sufficient for a functional government. Thus, one must take into account that a significant proportion of whatever resources are made available to Middle Eastern nations will be siphoned off to private overseas bank accounts, allocated on nepotistic bases to cronies and supporters, and that a good part of the funds will be wasted and not accounted for.

Also often overlooked is the fact that the Marshall Plan entailed much larger outlays than have been dedicated in recent decades to foreign aid that seeks to stimulate economic development (not to be conflated with military aid). In 1948, the first year of the Marshall Plan, it consumed 13% of the US budget. In comparison, the United States currently spends less than 1% of its budget on foreign aid.

Moreover, the US and its allies are entering a protracted period of budget retrenchments in which many domestic programs will be scaled back—including aid for the unemployed and poor, and for education and health care—as well as military outlays. It is a context in which the kinds of funds a Marshall Plan would require are extremely unlikely to be available.

In short, even if there were no normative reasons to question the expansive missions of armed interventions, there are prudential reasons to minimize them, namely that they tend not to yield the hoped-for results. Moreover, they squander scarce resources (both economic and political capital) and backfire, because the disap-

pointing outcomes agitate against future interventions, even those that are normatively compelling and can be accomplished.

Critics may argue that to avert massive humanitarian abuse, regimes must be toppled and nation-building must take place, i.e. that these goals cannot be decoupled. However, there are clear instances in which such decoupling did succeed. Serbian ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was stopped without KFOR imposing any regime or engaging in significant nation-building. True, in the years that followed the UN engaged in a major nation-building drive, even seeking to build a multiethnic society. However, this drive has not succeeded (Jordan 2004). In other major humanitarian crises, such as Rwanda and Cambodia, Samantha Power showed in fine detail that the regimes first “tested the waters” to determine what the Western reaction was going to be. Only when the West was or at least seemed indifferent, did the genocide take place (Power 2002). That is, it seems that had the West made it clear that it would not tolerate gross violations of the Responsibility to Protect, this may well have been sufficient. In Libya in April 2011, as the rebels gained some momentum, Qaddafi suggested a ceasefire to be followed by a negotiation between the rebels and his government. Such a ceasefire could have been reinforced by a threat of renewed NATO airstrikes if the agreement was violated or by positioning UN peace keeping forces. The result it seems would have been no major humanitarian abuses in western Libya, but retention of power by Qaddafi’s regime in the eastern parts. However, NATO rejected this offer out of hand, ruling that Qaddafi must go, i.e. forcing a regime change. Whether this expansive approach was justified in this case will be determined by what happens in the future. If it leads to a stable representative government in all of Libya, overthrowing Qaddafi will seem much more justified than if the future entails tribal strife, unstable governance, possibly some kind of a new tyrant and, above all, numerous civilian casualties, as we have seen in liberated Iraq and Afghanistan.

14.2 Criteria for Interventions

The quest for criteria for interventions that can be justified and that can be carried out effectively may start with the Responsibility to Protect. There has been considerable difference of opinion as to what it specifically entails (Evans 2004; Feinstein and Slaughter 2004). Francis Deng and his associates, who were the first to write about “Sovereignty as Responsibility,” defined nations in which outside powers should intervene by defining the opposite: nations in which intervention would be impermissible. They determined that these were limited to nations whose governments “... strive to ensure for their people an effective governance that guarantees a just system of law and order, democratic freedoms, respect for fundamental rights, and general welfare” (Deng 1996). With the bar set so low and defined so vaguely, there are few nations that would not be vulnerable to intervention (Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003).

As we have seen, a substantially more limiting criteria were proposed by the Evans-Sahnoun Commission, which was established by the Canadian government

as an attempt to resolve a dilemma crystallized by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Annan had posed the question, “If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica- to gross and systematic violations of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity?” (Annan 2000) The commission, named the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), suggested a resolution that relied on a recharacterization of sovereignty. ICISS pointed to the Charter of the UN as “an example of an international obligation voluntarily accepted by member states,” and recommended that a similar conceptualization be applied to sovereignty, such that “sovereignty as responsibility” replaced “sovereignty as control.” Recall the ICISS threshold criteria for intervention: “(a) large-scale loss of life, actual or apprehended, with genocidal intent or not, which is the product either of deliberate state action, or state neglect or inability to act, or a failed state situation; or (b) large-scale ‘ethnic cleansing,’ actual or apprehended, whether carried out by killing, forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape” (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001). Moreover, both the Commission and the High-Level Panel assert that any intervention must be based on exclusively humanitarian intentions, be taken as a last resort, use only the minimum force necessary to complete the mission, and have reasonable prospects of success. That is, to achieve the large-scale saving of lives, not to force regime change and most assuredly not for nation-building.

Setting the bar for interventions along the lines the Commission suggested is supported by the tragic but inescapable fact that the political capital and economic resources needed for advancing human rights on the international level by the use of force are in very short supply. This is evidenced by the observation that many rights are often violated, and no actions are taken by foreign powers (Udombana 2004). Even stopping genocides has been, so far, beyond the international community’s abilities, as has stopping the bloodshed in numerous civil and international conflicts still smoldering in several parts of the world. This harsh reality is in sharp contrast to the vision that, following economic development and the toppling of despotic regimes, rights will flourish in one country after another. These great difficulties point to the need to set a high bar for interventions and to the importance of examining which rights should be promoted first and foremost.

A major reason it is morally appropriate to recognize the paramount standing of the right to life is that all other rights are contingent on this one, while the right to life is not contingent on the others.¹ It seems all too simple to state that dead people cannot exercise their rights, yet it bears repeating because the implications of this observation are often ignored: When the right to life is violated because basic security is not provided, all other rights are undermined—but not vice versa.

The supreme standing of the right to life is also supported by the finding that when basic security is provided, the public support for non-security (e.g. civil and political) rights increases, but not the other way around. A review of public opinion polls concerning attitudes towards civil liberties after 9/11 revealed that shortly after the attacks, nearly 70% of Americans were strongly inclined to give up various

¹For earlier discussion, see Shue (1996).

constitutionally protected rights in order to prevent more attacks. However, as no new attacks occurred on the American homeland and the sense of security returned (as measured by the return of passengers to air travel), support for rights was restored. By 2004–2005, about 70% of Americans were more concerned with protecting rights than with enhancing security (Etzioni 2004, pp. 38–39). Hence, the principal reasons for employing the US and international community’s limited intervention capital to save lives, along the lines specified by the commission, should be considered before armed intervention to promote other goals.

14.2.1 A Mental Experiment

To highlight the issue, the following minor mental experiment may serve. Assume that the Taliban in Afghanistan offers the US the following deal: The Taliban will commit itself to preventing Afghanistan from being used as a base for terrorists. Indeed, it offers to chase the remaining al-Qaeda members out of Afghanistan or turn them over to the United States and its allies if caught. In turn, it expects that the coalition forces will allow the Taliban to contend with other Afghan groups, and if it prevails, to govern Afghanistan the way it prefers, namely by imposing *sharia*. The Taliban would close schools for girls; require women to stay home unless accompanied by a husband or relative; force religious observances; eliminate voting rights, free speech, assembly; and so on. (The Taliban further suggests that the US could keep troops on some military bases out of populated areas for years to come so they would be readily available if the Taliban did not live up to its commitments, and the Taliban also understands that it would be severely bombed under such circumstances.

The US would thus face a stark choice between narrowly crafted security goals and the promotion of human rights beyond the right to life. Strong human rights advocates would reject such a deal. If the preceding analysis is valid, the US should accept it, on the grounds that even if many more lives of Americans, of other NATO members, and of Afghans were sacrificed, the Afghan people would still have to work out their own form of government and economy.

14.2.2 Which Means?

To argue that force—armed interventions—should be employed rarely, when the rationale that supports them can clear the high bar outlined above, is not to suggest that other means cannot be employed more liberally in the support of a much more extensive array of human rights.

Regarding normative means, national leaders can often chastise other nations for not respecting human rights and express their approval when such nations improve their human rights record. There are many instances where the lives of dissenters

were spared, or they were released from prisons or house arrest, because of drumbeats of criticisms from the international community—without armed interventions. Even general changes in policy have taken place. For instance, since the firestorm of criticisms China received following the Tiananmen Square massacre, China has exercised more restraint in its handling of opposition. Indeed, while China used to maintain that human rights are Western bourgeois values, it now holds that it respects them and is merely delaying the implementation of political rights until socio-economic ones are better advanced. Other Southeast Asian nations—Singapore, for instance—have similarly learned to at least show respect for these rights and have moved to violate them less often. Critics argue that by publically exhorting other nations, one merely insults their sensibilities and stiffens their rejection. Indeed, in some cases private presentations by one national leader to another may be the preferred way to proceed. However, by and large, other nations have shown little reluctance to voice their criticism of the West, and the West should as a rule articulate in normative terms the case not just for the right to life but for all the others.

The imposition of economic sanctions to advance human rights has a much more mixed record. They often result in imposing more suffering on the people than on the regime, as was the case in Saddam's Iraq. Rarely have they brought down a regime, as one notes after a generation of sanctions on Cuba. "Smart" sanctions—those focused on leaders and specific industries—may be more effective, but unless these are very widely supported by other nations, they rarely produce significant concessions (Pape 1997).

The observation that nations can employ non-lethal (normative and economic) means to promote human rights and democracy further supports the thesis that the use of force should be limited to preventing massive abuse of human lives and should not be allowed to morph into coerced regime change, not to mention into futile attempts at nation-building. For as we have seen, such expansive drives often succeed mainly in wrecking the prevailing regime but not in building a stable, representative new one. They cost numerous lives, both of the local population and those of Americans and their allies, and require a very large-scale commitment of resources in an era in which those are particularly short. At the same time, the record suggests that if the goals of armed interventions are limited to preventing massive human abuses, they can be successfully implemented. Hence, rather than giving up on all armed interventions that do not directly serve the vital interests of the nations involved, decoupled humanitarian missions can be justified—even in the era of grand austerity.

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