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When Steel and Guns Meets Bread and Butter

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When Steel and Guns Meets Bread and Butter

Abstract

Speaking before the 191-member United Nations in 2005, then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that "For the first time . we are agreed that states do not have the right to do what they will within their own borders but that we in the name of humanity have a common duty to protect people where their own governments will not." This notion, that of responsible sovereignty , says that nation states forfeit the right to uninterrupted internal freedoms when they no longer uphold the responsibilities associated with sovereignty.

Keywords

Human rights, War on terror, Humanitarian aid, Non-governmental organizations, Military

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When Steel and Guns Meets Bread and Butter

by Daniel J. Graeber

[Speaking](#) before the 191-member United Nations in 2005, then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that "For the first time . we are agreed that states do not have the right to do what they will within their own borders but that we in the name of humanity have a common duty to protect people where their own governments will not." This notion, that of [responsible sovereignty](#), says that nation states forfeit the right to uninterrupted internal freedoms when they no longer uphold the responsibilities associated with sovereignty. The evolution of international law has typically been to protect states from outside interference. However, the questions posed by such historical atrocities as [Rwanda](#), and most recently the devastation in Myanmar following [Cyclone Nargis](#), pave the way for a consideration for moral intervention. States have been historically reluctant to adopt humanitarian intervention into their military policy. The international legal regime, however, has widely recognized that intervention on behalf of humanitarianism is permissible when the use of force is restricted to that which saves lives.

Article 3 of [The Montevideo Convention](#) of 1933, which established the definition, rights and duties of a nation, says that one such sovereign duty of a nation is the right "to provide for its conservation and prosperity." This provision alludes to the emergence of responsible sovereignty. There are two ideologies of modern [sovereignty](#). One conceptualizes sovereignty as a right *of* statehood, and another envisions a right *to* statehood. State responsibility to sovereignty invokes an obligation to maintain internal order and protection of its citizenry. A state takes on a duty to its citizenry when [classic individual rights](#) are [exchanged](#) for protections provided by the state. Furthermore, the responsibility of the state to adhere to [internationally recognized](#) normative relations, both intra and interstate, is an obligation of sovereignty. The inherent rights of [non-intervention](#) in state sovereignty in an interdependent system may be cast aside if the responsibilities of state sovereignty are not met.

Writing for the May 19 online edition of *Mother Jones*, Bruce Falconer comments in his piece, "[Armed and Humanitarian](#)," that U.S. military doctrine has evolved to embrace [moral intervention](#) by way of "[stability operations](#)." The U.S. Department of Defense defines stability operations as "[m]ilitary and civilian activities conducted across the spectrum from peace to conflict to establish or maintain order in States and regions." These operations may place military forces in disaster areas, such as the earthquakes in Pakistan in 2005, in order to bring victims humanitarian supplies. The purpose, Falconer says, is to prevent states "from slipping into chaos." However, Falconer notes that nongovernmental organizations such as Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières, worry that this new military doctrine will paint them as agents of the intervening force, or at the very least, it will put them in the line of fire. But as U.S. military doctrine tries to catch up with Mr. Blair's sentiment regarding the "common duty to protect," so too must the NGO community, and Falconer, to be perfectly frank.

Humanitarian agencies worry that the U.S. military's new found interest in operations other than war will muddy the line between relief work and regime change. The article makes reference to

former Army Special Forces officer Roger Carstens, saying this emerging military doctrine makes sense. "We have the capability, we have the capacity, and we have the cash," Carstens says. "You put all the NGOs together, and they can't even come close to what an aircraft carrier battle group can deliver in a few sorties." But this is both duplicitous and contradictory to the mission for the NGO community to object to or complain about "the guns and steel of the military" being used to assist in humanitarian operations. In 2003, the U.S. military assisted in [humanitarian operations in Bam](#), Iran, yet there were no underlying efforts at regime change here, only assistance in the face of mounting disaster. Falconer backs his allegations with a statement by former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to solidify the concern. "Just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs . are out there serving and sacrificing on the front lines of freedom," Powell said in 2001. "NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team." But this doctrinal argument, in part, the [Powell doctrine](#), has been largely replaced by U.S. military strategists with what could be referred to as the [Petraeus doctrine](#), based on the counterinsurgency strategy laid out by U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus. This doctrine relies less on the "shock and awe" elements of the Powell doctrine and more on incorporating elements of the native population into providing solutions for violence. While the Powell argument certainly held validity in the 20 th century, it largely proved a failure in Iraq . Now, instead of "shock and awe," the new face of the U.S. appears to take lessons learned from the adage of finding native solutions to native problems.

Falconer's argument is off base, as is the NGO community's complaint that military force is malevolently utilitarian. When the United Nations closed its embassy in Baghdad following the devastating 2003 [bomb blast](#) that killed Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations should have sent in more advisers equipped to manage 21 st century conflict, not withdraw in fear from it. The same holds true for the NGO community. It, and the rest of the world, must adjust to a new face of conflict. The clean Cold War notion of a state-centric division between civilians and the military, between conflict and peace, no longer exists. In a globalized world, when ethnic identity supplants nationalism, and military force is no longer exclusively for fighting wars, the consideration must be made that "steel and guns" may run tandem to bread and butter.

Daniel J. Graeber has been a contributor to the Foreign Policy Association's Great Decisions series since its inception, writing on war crimes and international law. He has focused considerably on the legal aspects concerning the U.S.-led "war on terror" and various war crimes tribunals. He has lectured on the history of war crimes in the international arena and served as a professor of ethics at Grand Valley State University. He has published works on the history of the U.S. relationship with Israel and the U.S. foreign policy regarding Hamas. He is currently a writer for United Press International covering Iraqi political developments, as well as the oil and energy sector. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.