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"Making Intervention Work" by Morton
Abramowitz and Thomas Pickering*

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October Roundtable: Introduction

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October Roundtable: Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

"Making Intervention Work." by Morton Abramowitz and Thomas Pickering. Foreign Affairs. September/October 2008.

Keywords

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“Making Intervention Work.” by Morton Abramowitz and Thomas Pickering. *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 2008.

An annotation

Recent events, including armed conflict and natural disaster, have alerted the international community of the critical demand for mechanisms that allow for the safe and effective facilitation of humanitarian intervention. To an increasingly larger extent, diplomacy, campaigns of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the international media play a significant role in raising awareness of human rights abuses and violations that occur worldwide. However, according to authors Abramowitz and Pickering, despite numerous calls to action, the United Nations remains the major enforcer of international conventions and norms.

“There have been remarkable advances in the fields of human security and human rights...terms such as ‘never again’ and appeals for ‘humanitarian intervention’ and a ‘responsibility to protect’ have become commonplace.”

Regardless of idealistic conceptions of enforcement and intervention, advocates, governments, and NGOs remain hampered in their efforts to protect lives on the ground. Thus, securing and providing for communities ravaged by war or natural disaster is increasingly stymied by political inaction and repression. In responding to such crises, Abramowitz and Pickering call for a revamped and reinvigorated United Nations to provide the much needed legitimacy, capability, and resources to protect those in need.

“Reinvigorating the UN—which is still perceived by most countries as the preeminent institution providing international legitimacy—will be essential. What is needed is a streamlined UN decision making process, ready UN access to military and other forces, and strong investment in diplomacy by key states and institutions.”

In making their recommendations on reforming the United Nations, Abramowitz and Pickering focus on restructuring the Security Council, establishing a limited peacekeeping force, and investing in high-level diplomacy. But, for the authors, improvements to the United Nations system will only be successful if they occur in conjunction with the continued participation of advocates, governments, and NGOs. Moreover, efforts made by the international community, particularly those made by governments and politicians, must take greater account of public sentiment surrounding human rights atrocities.

“These measures would not necessarily resolve the world’s many humanitarian disasters, nor do they represent the final word on these matters. But they would offer a greater likelihood that strong international action would be taken in the most challenging situations.”

Abramowitz and Pickering realize that simply restructuring the United Nations will do little to resolve problems of intervention. Specifically, more must be done to include the international community in the complex mechanisms and practicalities that ensure effective and legitimate intervention in all cases.

These issues and others are considered in this month's Roundtable.