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Norrie MacQueen. *Humanitarian Intervention and the United Nations.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. xv + 240 pp. $32.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-3697-6; $100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7486-3696-9.

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The United Nations Approach to Humanitarian Intervention

One simply cannot consider intervention in the current world climate without taking into account the United Nations. In *Humanitarian Intervention and the United Nations,* Norrie MacQueen explores the capability of the UN to use its members' military assets to defend human rights. Whilst this is not the first book on the subject, even by this author, it does fill a crucial gap in providing a straightforward, detailed analysis of the relationship between the UN and intervention. More than this, it makes a valid contribution to the critical analysis of the present world system that has dominated intervention research in the last twenty years and provides a fundamental insight into the limitations of the current legal and political infrastructure surrounding intervention. Its central proposal is that the world stage has not changed as much as recent scholarship indicates, and this means that the UN remains the most effective body for implementing intervention. The extent to which the UN has ever been effective is, however, questionable.

For those who are not familiar with humanitarian intervention, this is the practice of attempting to halt humanitarian concerns, like genocide and the fall-out from natural disasters, in a foreign state. Whilst in practice intervention is often attempted in a number of non-military ways (for example through economic sanctions or refugee management), the most concerning and indeed the most studied is armed intervention. MacQueen is entirely focused with this military dimension, as he well should be. Scholarship on this area is fixated on the challenges these types of interventions generally face, particularly the tension between the notions of international order and state sovereignty, on the one hand, and the upholding of justice and human rights, on the other. As others have pointed out, this should be an area in which international law, and by extension bodies like the UN, should create a legal exception to its own conflicting laws.[1] But at present, armed intervention, even with the objective of halting genocide, is nowhere near as easy to execute as it should be. Any text that deals with intervention therefore needs to reconcile how sovereignty plays off against human rights. Due credit should thus be given to MacQueen's introduction, which is a masterpiece of succinctness. It avoids the quagmire of complex concepts such as the Responsibility to Protect but deals directly with the interminable debate between sovereignty and human rights. The result is a great overview of the role the UN has played, continues to play, and will play in future interventions. *Humanitarian Intervention and the United Nations* is highly recommended reading for anyone unfamiliar with the general issues surrounding intervention.

The first half of the text deals with the conceptual and ethical aspects of armed intervention and the United Nations. Initially MacQueen charts the development of humanitarian aims alongside the UN, claiming a heritage from the subtly successful League of Nations towards the armed interventions in the Congo and Lebanon, ending with Darfur. In this part MacQueen criticizes the recently emerged argument that the basis of international politics has started to shift. Common consensus is that the nature of international relations has changed over the last three hundred years. From the late 1600s the prevailing model has been based on the Westphalian system, with a state having absolute authority within its own borders by right; any action within its borders is therefore the state's own affair. In recent years, after the publication of the *Report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (ICISS), many thinkers have proposed that the ideas around sovereignty have changed–now sovereignty is seen as a responsibility and it is only granted if a state is capable of defending the human rights of its citizens.[2] This, of course, has had progressive repercussions for thought surrounding intervention, with the idea of sovereignty as a responsibility

justifying the action entirely. When states can no longer ensure the human rights of their citizens, their own right to sovereign borders is forfeited. However, MacQueen takes his analysis beyond the common wisdom, providing a critical analysis of the real state of this proposed post-Westphalian system. As he concludes, there is not as much evidence of a worldwide acceptance of the responsibility to protect as is necessary to prove the existence of a post-Westphalian world. Whilst many will disagree, the ICISS report has had a long honeymoon period with intervention scholars, and perhaps now is the right time for its ideas to be reassessed.

The implications of this conclusion for the future of military intervention are not, however, as detrimental as one might think. Instead, MacQueen argues, the UN provides a key facilitator for humanitarian actions and, having been developed in a Westphalian system, remains as effective today as it ever has been. What is most illuminating in MacQueen's argument is the long-term analysis of how intervention has been dealt with inside the limits of this state system. He places a significant amount of emphasis on the legacy of the League of Nations and how the UN has had to react to avoid facing the same fate as the League, whilst also trying to meet similar objectives as its predecessor. In MacQueen's reading the League of Nations proves to have had a significant legacy in providing a precedent for an inter-state body making physical changes to the real world, with the League's establishment of the Saar region and the Permanent Court of International Justice as exemplars of this. Despite the ultimate failure of the League of Nations, these small glimmers of success gave credit to the burgeoning idea of an international organization to bring peace. This demonstrates the capacity for the UN to enact interventions inside the limits of right-based sovereignty.

What follows is an extended discussion of the UN and intervention after the Second World War. It is no surprise that the shape of international relations was affected by the Cold War and this continually altered the approach the UN had to take in staging interventions. A very clear and concise summary of this period is delivered which covers areas including the development of humanitarian law, the rise of peacekeeping, and the growth of a human rights ethic. MacQueen also deals with some of the more challenging examples of interventions and explains how these have moved the history of intervention. The United Nations Operation in the Congo is explained as a game-changer, in so far as it was an intervention rather than a peacekeeping mission and marks a shift from traditional models of state conciliation. Most refreshing in this first section of the book is the exploration of little-known interventions. The examples of Kashmir, West New Guinea, and Palestine, despite their successes, have all been overshadowed in recent years by more violent interventions that have garnered media focus. A reprisal of these early interventions is therefore timely, and MacQueen proves convincing in assigning these examples genuine importance.

MacQueen then goes on to explore the changes that the end of the Cold War brought to the UN. After the collapse of the USSR there was an extraordinary increase in the number of interventions and peacekeeping missions undertaken by the UN, and attempts are made to explain why this was the case.[4] This period is described as one of "new peacekeeping," although this seems to be due more to the quantity of interventions than the quality. A part of this change in quantity is attributed to the fact that the number of problems that limited the practical efficacy of the UN in staging interventions dropped dramatically. MacQueen follows on from the "new and old wars" theory proposed by Mary Kaldor, which argues that since the end of the Cold War the nature of conflict has changed to small-scale wars between people rather than states and hat this generates increased human rights violations.[4] The implication is not only an increased demand for intervention, but also that the nature of this intervention has changed as genocides now rarely occur across state borders. This has obvious and dire consequences for the unique role that the UN can play in intervention as an institution concerned with states. Still, perhaps some of MacQueen's thought has grown out of date, with situations like Kosovo marking a close to the immediate post-Cold War period of intervention, and the application of the ICISS's recommendations. Another constructive component of this section is one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of former UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*. This quite rightly concludes that intervention needs to change to a multifunctional practice that focuses as much on pre-emptive action and post-conflict peace-building as on prevention at the time of violence.

Whilst MacQueen's discussion of this period is solid, in being so based on the international system there is a distinct lack of awareness of other factors. Since the close of the 1980s intervention has flourished. As the author argues, this has, in part, been due to both a shift in the dynamics of state interaction and the contributions of individuals like Boutros-Ghali and Lakhdar Brahimi, a UN special advisor on peacekeeping. But there are other explanations that are less explored. MacQueen does describe a growing awareness of genocide from a world media which suddenly offered 24-hour coverage and gained

an increased audience, leading to what has been termed "the CNN effect."[5] The physical and emotional distance of viewers from victims thousands of miles away started to close with the rise of the world media at the same time that interventions started to increase in frequency. No one can deny the extent to which the news media influenced the decision to intervene in Kosovo, especially after the revelations of Rwanda. Whilst factors like this are covered in some regard, perhaps it would have been beneficial to look to a broader spectrum outside of an international relations context to appreciate why interventions increased. Recent studies have, for example, examined a genuine belief held by states that intervention could create deep social changes in the intervened state, and generate political currency at home.[6] The belief that intervention was also becoming easier helped increase the practice as well. The emphasis is put on changes on the world stage, but there is a far more complex picture in explaining why interventions increased in this time. MacQueen ends this section of theoretical engagement by addressing the extent to which the responsibility to protect has altered the underlying function of intervention.

The first section of this book does do a good job of discussing the theory of intervention. It deals with the development of this theory, giving due prominence to key individuals who have furthered the practice. In the main it discusses the capacity of the UN to initiate an intervention, and the point in time when this is most appropriate. It also assesses the aptitude of the UN for operating in a Westphalian context. The book then shifts tact, and explores the actual practice of UN intervention, ultimately with the aim of analyzing if and how we can call any intervention a success. Here there is a balanced appraisal of UN interventions, both recent and in the past.

This second half of this book comprises a number of case studies, including Africa, the Balkans, and East Timor. These provide a practical balance for the theoretical arguments put forth previously. They introduce the reader to some of the better known and more commonly cited interventions, again in such a way as to familiarize readers clearly and concisely with the examples. Good connections are made both between consecutive cases of interventions and between interventions and the UN. The section on Africa makes the deliberate and well-furnished argument that one intervention leads to another, or in some cases to the absence of another. In this manner the decision to avoid intervention in Rwanda is explained, and it is uplifting to see that MacQueen avoids the often used argument that the lack of oil or diamonds explains why the outside world did not intervene. There is some loss of engagement with theory here, and little of the second section directly relates to changes and continuities in the Westphalian system. More effort is made in illustrating the idea that the end of the Cold War brought significant changes in intervention and increased the number of cases where interventions were appropriate. While the focus remains on the capacity of the UN to intervene, it is important to note that MacQueen also looks at alternatives, exploring the notion of African solutions to African problems and non-UN-backed enforcement in the Balkans. Although the general thrust of his argument is somewhat lost in this part, it does enforce the idea that the UN is the most suitable intervener.

The book closes with the argument that it is not always appropriate to intervene, and there seems to be a pessimistic streak throughout the conclusion. War is supposedly necessary, and the sole way in which political and social conflicts that reach certain levels can be resolved. Whilst this realist tone dominates his argument, MacQueen does accept that the case for intervention should be forwarded on a casuistic basis. This dictates that there are cases in which conflicts need to run their course, but that there is also a place for interventions that come at the point in a conflict where an opportunity for external help ebbs to become part of the resolution process. A very good comparison of Angola and Mozambique supports his argument. Aside from a discussion of what constitutes success, which must also be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, MacQueen concludes that if intervention is to be carried out, the UN is the only body capable of dealing with it. The UN sits on a world stage that has not yet moved beyond its Westphalian limitations. There is no other body that can suitably balance all the demands of an intervention with the limitations that the present international situation places on it. At the very least the UN provides a legitimate body to approve intervention. Nonetheless, MacQueen realizes that there are weaknesses to the UN system. Rapid reaction and clear objectives are something that the UN can only rarely provide. Despite this MacQueen concludes, to paraphrase Winston Churchill's quip on democracy, that the UN is the worst agent of intervention, apart from all the others.

This book certainly provides a solid and critical approach to intervention theory. It is easily accessible without dumbing down the subject and engages the reader in a stimulating way that avoids overburdening them with complex theories and unnecessary information. Amongst all this it also provides a clear argument, that the UN is not as capable of staging interventions as it

claims to be but is still more capable than any other alternative. As I have described, the close association of this book to international relations theory is a weakness in terms of really answering the research questions set out. But it also proves a great strength in making this text relevant and accessible. Whilst the number of publications that consider the topic of humanitarian intervention has grown progressively larger in the last decade, there is still no real standard basic text on the subject. It may be presumptuous to claim that MacQueen has produced a work that could fill this need, but this book is certainly to be recommended as solid introductory reading, for theory on the topic at the very least. I only wish that a text as clear and precise as this had existed when I was introduced to the subject.

Notes

[1]. Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.

[2]. Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun et al., *The Responsibility To Protect: Report of The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

[3]. Between 1988 and 1992 the annual budget for UN peacekeeping operations grew from $230.4M to $1689.6M. See Boutros-Ghali, *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations*, UN Document A/50/60-S/1995/1, available at http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agsupp.html.

[4]. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[5]. Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 25.

[6]. Stephen Wertheim, "A Solution from Hell: The United States and the Rise of Humanitarian Interventionism, 1991-2003," *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, nos. 3-4 (2010): 149-72.

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