HUMANITARIANS AND 'HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION': A PROBLEM

Prabhjot Nagra, University of British Columbia

ABSTRACT

Humanitarianism as a concept is arguably as old as humanity itself. To help ones fellow man in their time of need irrespective of race, religion, caste, or creed has been preached by innumerable ideologies. Despite being such a universally understood concept, in recent decades humanitarianism has faced increased conflation with 'humanitarian intervention'. This paper seeks to discern the differences between humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention and will do so by examining the ideological and foundational differences between the two concepts. The two concepts despite sounding similar are fundamentally different; they involve different actors and have different objectives. This paper will distinguish between state and non-state actors and the different humanitarian roles, values, and interests they have. This paper will posit that states that engage in military interventions are not humanitarians, and that the conflation of such actions with those of impartial non state actors are highly damaging to the ideals and values of humanitarianism.

Introduction

There is universal agreement that all people have fundamental rights and liberties that are inalienable; by the mere quality of being human we are entitled to fair treatment by our governments and we owe to one another a degree of mutual respect. The relations between citizenry and state have been the subject of much inquiry by many political theorists and philosophers over the ages. The thinkers of the enlightenment asserted the concept of the 'social contract' which posited that citizens give up some of their rights to the state in exchange for their protection and wellbeing (Grewal, 2016). But what happens when the state fails to meet its end of this implicit deal?

The Twentieth Century was a tumultuous and conflict filled era which made clear that states are fallible, even wilfully negligent in their duty to protect their own citizens from harm. It became evident that states could not be relied upon to ensure that the basic human rights of their citizenry would be respected, or that their citizens would be free from genocide and persecution. On numerous occasions such as: Holodomor, the Holocaust, the Armenian, Cambodian, Bangladeshi, and Rwandan genocides it was apparent that some states were more than willing to exterminate the very people they had the duty to protect (Weiss, 2016). It is because of the fallibility of states that humanitarian organisations serve an important role in ensuring that human suffering comes to an end. In the latter half of the 20th century humanitarians reacted to complex humanitarian emergencies when states failed to. In recent times states primarily led by the USA, have been empowered by the failures of the past to intervene when atrocities are being perpetrated by governments against their people (Weiss, 2016). Increasingly there has been a trend for powerful states to engage in humanitarian interventions which are military led operations undertaken by states against other states. These interventions violate the key principles of humanitarianism which strives to end human suffering, not to create more.

While interventionists claim that their military actions are conducted to end human suffering, that is often not the case. Humanitarian intervention is not the same as humanitarianism due to the principles of these concepts being fundamentally different. Humanitarians have the primary role to alleviate suffering wherever it may be, not to create more. State led military interventions are motivated by the interests of states and go counter to the altruistic principles of humanitarianism. This paper will posit that humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention are fundamentally different concepts and because of that humanitarians should not partake in state led military interventions against other states.

The Origins of Humanitarianism

The idea of humanitarianism has long been present among numerous cultures and societies; Michael Barnett notes that "religious, spiritual, and philosophical commitments have inspired acts of compassion" throughout history (Barnett, 2011). But as a term associated with "compassion across boundaries", humanitarianism is only about two centuries old (Barnett, 2011). The etiology of modern humanitarianism comes from Jean Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman who in 1859 while on a trip to Italy witnessed the bloody aftermath of the Battle of Solferino (Dunant, 1986). The battle was waged by massive French and Austrian armies against one another and at the battles culmination, tens of thousands of soldiers from the two sides lay dead or wounded on the outskirts of the Italian town (Dunant, 1986). Dunant who was horrified by the carnage he witnessed, organised the townspeople to provide aid to the soldiers who were in need (Dunant, 1986). This act of a Swiss man leading a group of Italians to aid wounded French and Austrian soldiers came to embody the spirit of modern humanitarianism.

A few years after the battle Dunant continued his mission by lobbying the leaders of European powers to establish laws for conduct during wartime, he recommended that "voluntary relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime" be established (Dunant, 1986). From Dunant's efforts arose the 'International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC), an organisation whose mandate it is to provide aid and to uphold the legal protections for both combatants and non-combatants (Bennett, 2006). The ICRC broadened the scope of humanitarianism, which grew to encompass the peoples of the world, with a mission to serve all, guided by the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The numerous humanitarian originations that developed from the foundations that Dunant and the ICRC laid further expanded the reach of humanitarianism. They are guided by key principles that mandate the provision of aid transcend

ethnic, religious and political boundaries (Bagshaw, 2012). These very important principles continue to be the driving force behind humanitarian action to this day.

The Role of Humanitarian Organisations

The creation of the ICRC in the 1860s as the world's first humanitarian organisation set a precedent which linked "humanitarianism to the provision of biomedicine and to the regulation of war" (Allen, MacDonald, and Radice 2018). The significance of this was the establishment of an important convention within the international community which recognised that vulnerable peoples need protection and assistance during times of war and man-made crisis. The premier principle of humanitarianism which embodies the spirit of this concept is 'humanity'. What this means is humanitarians strive to end human suffering wherever it may be, with the purpose of humanitarian action being to protect life and to uphold respect for all people (Bagshaw, 2012).

The altruistic motivations of humanitarians allow them to access populations that would otherwise go without aid. This is because the universal principles not only motivate humanitarians, they also serve to guide their interactions with disputing parties and the beneficiaries of aid. The principle of 'neutrality' mandates that humanitarians take no side during a conflict and, 'impartiality' serves to ensure aid is provided to beneficiaries on the basis of need without prejudice against who they are (Bagshaw, 2012). Thanks to these principles the international community has agreed that "those providing medical care in situations of war should be allowed to do so without interference" (Allen, MacDonald, and Radice, 2018, p. 144). Because humanitarians have motivations which stem from moral values, and their actions to help all are apolitical, they are able to reach those suffering even in the most precarious of situations.

A very important reason as to why humanitarians are able to provide aid to suffering populations even during the midst of violent conflict is due to the principle of 'independence'. This principle as defined by the United Nations means "humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented" (Bagshaw, 2012, p. 1). Almost all humanitarian emergencies are the result of political conflict or human mismanagement (Gibbs, 2009). Humanitarians serve as the last line of protection for human dignity when governments neglect or violate their duty as outlined by the 'social contract'. When governments fail, humanitarians step in and without any political bias they provide food, shelter, and medicine to all in need. The apolitical nature, and the purely altruistic motivations of humanitarians is the reason they are able to successfully assist those in need when governments are unable to. Their main goal, as outlined by the principles of humanitarianism is to end human suffering (Bagshaw, 2012, p. 1).

Humanitarians succeed where states do not. Despite the fact that states have immense amounts of financial, political, logistical and coercive capabilities, they are unable to assist those in need on same the level that humanitarians are. As outlined above humanitarians have one main purpose and that is to help those in need, the role for states on the other hand is significantly more complex. That is why state action differs greatly from that of humanitarians. States are constricted or empowered to provide aid due to their own geopolitical interests (Gibbs, 2009). Humanitarian intervention has gained popularity with the international community, but the motivations behind it are heavily influenced by the desires of states. As a concept, humanitarian intervention is quite different from humanitarianism.

The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention

The twentieth century proved that there was a great flaw in the world order that the 'Peace of Westphalia' had created centuries prior. The concept of 'sovereignty' gives states supreme power over their citizenry (Jokić, 2003). And with that unobstructed power there came numerous opportunities for it to be abused. The many genocides of the previous century proved that our global system of governance is fallible, those in power cannot in all circumstances be trusted to ensure the wellbeing of all citizens. Unfortunately, the concept of sovereignty had for centuries established a norm that forbade states from interfering in the internal affairs of other states (Allen & MacDonald & Radice, 2018). Genocide as witnessed in the 20th century, was almost always a domestic affair, perpetrated by a ruling government over its subjects (Gibbs, 2009). The Westphalian world order being a "system of sovereign states rather than a single world government [is why] the international community has none of the institutions usually associated with domestic law enforcement" (Bellamy, 2014, p. 6). This anarchic system gives governments supreme authority to do as they please within their own borders, unobstructed without any recourse or mechanisms for the Westphalian system to police itself. The Rwandan Genocide during the very latter half of the century took place in full view of the international community. But like many atrocities prior, the concept of sovereignty discouraged any outside state from interfering in mass murder of nearly a million innocent people (Bellamy, 2014). The Rwandan genocide was merely another instance in which the international community failed to police itself and allowed for gross violations of fundamental human rights to take place.

From the tragedy of the Rwandan genocide arose the pressing question of how could states themselves act "to prevent or to stop governments, organisations, or factions in a foreign state from violently oppressing, persecuting, or otherwise abusing the human rights of people within that state" (Simms, 2011, p. 1). The 1990s being the time of the American hegemon which stood unopposed in the post-Soviet era

allowed for the Americans to push the international community to amend the conditions of sovereignty (Gibbs, 2009). The international community decided to ensure that their peers could no longer abuse their unchecked power and established the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) (Pattison, 2010, p. 2). In this system, when a state fails to fulfil the obligations of the social contract to protect "their own citizens from human made catastrophe, but when a state abdicates that responsibility through either incapacity or ill will – it shifts to the wider international community" (Weiss, 200. The R2P amendment to the UN charter empowered the international community to act by using "coercive military action" in situations when civilians could be protected in no other way (Weiss, 2016).

What are Humanitarian Interventions?

Recently the international community has developed a way to self-police itself, if a state engages in actions that harm its own citizens, other states are now permitted to intervene. For the purposes of this paper, the definition of humanitarian interventions will be narrower in scope and will exclude broader aspects such as the provision of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian interventions will be defined strictly as coercive military actions undertaken by one or more states against another state to end violations of human rights (Gibbs, 2009). Interventions in recent times have taken on two forms, the first of which has been sanctioned by the UN under R2P (Weiss, 2016). The second type being unsanctioned actions undertaken by states under the justification of humanitarian intervention (Gibbs, 2009). R2P interventions are undertaken only with approval of the UN Security Council (UNSC), this method serves a legitimate way for the international community to violate the sovereignty of another state (Weiss, 2016). But the R2P method of intervention, being contingent on UNSC agreement, can be difficult to achieve (Weiss, 2016). Thus far the US led intervention in Libya stands among the only humanitarian interventions sanctioned under R2P (Weiss, 2016). That

is why unauthorised intervention undertaken under the pretext of ending human rights violations have been popular among powerful states. NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the US led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11 all contained discourses of stopping human rights violations (Gibbs, 2009). Taking the above into account, because humanitarian interventions are coercive military actions, it would be fair to also describe them as being wars.

How Does Humanitarianism Differ from Interventionism?

Humanitarian intervention is not the same as humanitarianism despite the two terms sounding similar. Humanitarian intervention being a coercive military action taken by states against another state is merely a synonym for legitimised war. Since the advent of the concept of humanitarian intervention, there has increasingly been a conflation between warfare and humanitarianism. The military actions taken against Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s were first and foremost wars undertaken to advance the interests of the USA (Gibbs, 2009). And just because these conflicts had some humanitarian aspects to them does not mean they were humanitarian interventions (Gibbs, 2009). For example, the motivation behind the war in Iraq was the "obvious strategic and economic importance" of the Persian Gulf region in which the conflict took place (Gibbs, 2009). The fact that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator merely allowed for the war to be justified "on the grounds that this was an authentic humanitarian action in defense of the Iraqi people" (Gibbs, 2009, p.10). In fact, it can be argued that the US led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan caused significantly greater humanitarian crises then the ones the invasions were purportedly supposed to stop. The US led invasion caused a complex humanitarian emergency in Iraq which was "characterised by massive bloodshed and displacement" (Wiess, 2016, p. 89). These unsanctioned military actions were merely wars conducted under the guise of humanitarian intervention.

Humanitarianism on the other hand is a significantly different concept compared to interventionism. Humanitarians don't take action to further their own political interests, they are instead organisations or people motivated by the ideals of voluntary service with the goal of providing assistance to other humans out of autistic reasons (Forsythe, 2005). Humanitarians operate independently from state actors, and have narrow objectives which have been mentioned previously. And most importantly, the key difference between the two are the means they use to bring about an end to human suffering. Humanitarians do not under any circumstances use any violence to stop human suffering. Humanitarians provide aid in the form of medicine, treatment, food, shelter, sanitation, water, education and many other necessities to those in need.

Interventionists act to topple regimes and liberate oppressed populations through the use of war. Humanitarians can find themselves in the midst of conflict aiding the very people that interventionists claim to waging war to protect. This contradiction was evident with the notorious Kunduz hospital airstrike conducted by the US air force against a hospital operated by the humanitarian organisation 'Doctors without Borders' (MSF) (Nordland & Mashal, 2015). In this incident the USA bombed a MSF hospital killing numerous innocent afghan civilians and hospital staff (Nordland & Mashal, 2015). States have their own political interests motivated by domestic interests and their own foreign policy objectives. It can be argued that the political objectives of a state will always supersede any humanitarian goals. Humanitarians do not have to face any such dilemmas as for their sole goal is to end human suffering wherever it may be and they will help anyone who needs help.

Who Intervenes Against Whom?

The problem humanitarian intervention faces that humanitarianism does not is the debate over who has the right to intervene and against

whom. Because of the anarchic nature of current world order, there is no global body that can police the interactions that states have with each other. This absence of a global government leaves it up to states to decide against whom intervention is conducted against. There are some key problems with states being able to decide who is permitted to conduct military actions that violate the sovereignty of other states.

The first problem with humanitarian intervention is that great powers such as the USA, Russia and China don't have to fear any other state intervening militarily in their domestic affairs because of the enormous amounts of military power that these states have (Gibbs, 2009). China for example has undertaken efforts to oppress large portions of their population. There have been reports that upwards of a million Muslim Uighurs have been imprisoned in concentration camps by the Chinese regime (Nithin, 2018), yet there have been no calls for intervention. The reason for this being China can veto any legitimate intervention in the UNSC, and they have the military capabilities to fend off large invading forces. The same can be said for middle power states such as India, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran. These countries, despite not having the influence of the veto in the UNSC do possess great military capabilities. These countries also have the ability to either fend off invasions or to make any intervention against them incredibly costly for the intervening states (Gibbs, 2009).

This leads to the second problem which is, if any country with strong military capabilities can't be intervened against then who can? Humanitarian interventions are predominately carried out against poor isolated countries, usually in Africa. Libya and Central African Republic being two recent examples. There has been immense criticism of these actions, with some referring to them as the perpetuation of colonialism (Weiss, 2016). And in addition the consequences of intervention, primarily in Libya has been the creation of an unstable state ruled by two governments and numerous rebel

groups (Weiss, 2016). Humanitarian intervention has become a way for powerful states to exert influence over the less powerful.

The last problem which was also discussed above is that states are motivated by their own self interests. Conflicts such as the Iraq and Afghan were wars justified by some humanitarian actions which were taken to aid some civilians (Gibbs, 2009). There has been an increasing trend for powerful states, especially the USA, to frame their military operations in this way. The reasoning for this stems from international law, and the UN which has reaffirmed the principle that "no state has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state" (Gibbs, 2009, p. 5). In many cases, humanitarian intervention now acts as a loophole which allows for states to circumvent the sovereignty of other states. The problem with this is that it has led to a conflation between humanitarianism and military action which can jeopardize the safety of humanitarians and can be erode their ability to act effectively.

Humanitarians and Military Interventions

Humanitarians often work in the same spaces where military forces also operate (McCann, 2014), despite the proximity, this does not mean they should work together. Humanitarians and military forces play different roles and have fundamentally different objectives. As outlined above military interventions have several significant issues, most of which stem from the motivations of states to further their own political interests. Humanitarians should not get caught up in issues related to the power dynamics between states.

Governments do not see humanitarianism to be of value solely because of its compassionate goals, instead they view it as a tool to further their own political objectives. Francisco Marcos describes the issue of government policy being that it "converts humanitarian action into an instrument for achieving distinct non-humanitarian objectives, without consideration of the impartiality, neutrality or independence of

humanitarian organisations" (Marcos, 2009, p. 1). The problem of governments conflating military action with humanitarianism was especially evident during the US led invasion of Afghanistan. Colin Powel the United States Secretary of State "commended representatives of humanitarian nongovernmental organizations for their role as a 'force multiplier' for the US government" (Lischer, 2007, p. 99). This means the US government viewed humanitarians as an extension of their military operations, with the work that humanitarians did helping them with their political goals in Afghanistan (Lischer, 2007).

Increasingly military tacticians are using humanitarianism as a part of their strategies during times of war (Lischer, 2007). This can be very problematic for humanitarians who rely on warring parties to view them as being impartial, independent and most importantly as neutral bodies (Lischer, 2007). These values allow humanitarians to achieve their goals and it provides them with security in the most insecure parts of the world. It is important that the actions that military powers take not become conflated with the actions of humanitarians. Working with invading military forces, places the universal values of humanitarianism in jeopardy. And when the universal values of humanitarianism begin to erode, so does their ability to carry out their work.

Dangers to Humanitarians and Humanitarianism

In order for humanitarians to have the ability to fulfil their objective of providing aid to those in need, they must rely heavily on universal principles such as neutrality and independence. These values allow humanitarians to adopt 'acceptance' as an approach to reduce the risks to their safety and security. This strategy relies upon "relationships with community members, authorities, belligerents and other stakeholders to provide consent for the presence and activities of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), thereby reducing threats from

these actor" (Fast, Freeman, O'Neill, and Rowley, 2015, p. 1). In this approach if humanitarians are accepted by multiple feuding parties in a region, they are most likely going to be able to carry out their mission in relative security.

If humanitarians were to start working with states engaging in interventions against other states this would defy the principle of neutrality. The problem with the interventions as discussed above is that they are coercive military actions. If Humanitarians were to start working with militaries, not only would they be taking sides during a conflict, they would be directly engaging in it as well. Humanitarian intervention has been known to cause more problems than it solves and humanitarians should never be the instigators of violence. Humanitarians stand to end human suffering not to create more.

In addition, if humanitarians were to work with military powers to wage war against sovereign states, this would be detrimental to the universal principal of impartiality. Working with interventions would inhibit humanitarians from providing aid to the very people that the military powers are attacking. This would be detrimental to the ideal of humanitarianism.

Once these two universal principles are compromised, humanitarians would cease to be humanitarians. They would merely be tools of powerful states to exert political influence over weaker states. when the ability for humanitarians to be regarded as impartial volunteers disappears so will any acceptance by disputing parties. Working with military interventions leads to humanitarians opening themselves up to the risk of being perceived as agents of states. This is something that humanitarians go to great lengths to avoid because once acceptance disappears violence can end up being directed their way. As outlined in the 2014 aid worker report, humanitarians must be careful even with the technology they use, with the use of drones carrying the risk of being mistaken by beneficiaries as being military or spy tools

(Stoddard, Harmer, Ryou, 2014). Humanitarians go to great lengths to uphold the universal values. If they start working with humanitarian interventions, it would damage their acceptance and ability to provide aid and it could also lead to increased dangers.

Conclusion

When governments fail to protect their citizens from harm, humanitarians play a crucial role in reducing human suffering. They are motivated by universal values that transcend politics and divisions caused by race, religion and creed. Humanitarians are motivated by the ideals of voluntary service and strive to help those who need help the most. Their purely altruistic motivations should never be conflated with those of governments and state actors. Countries are motivated by their own political interests and have increasingly been using humanitarianism to carry out their military goals abroad. Humanitarian intervention is a distinct concept from humanitarianism, and often intervention leads to the complex emergencies that humanitarians try to aid. Conflation between the action of humanitarians and military powers is a serious issue. Not only does conflation erode the universal principles of humanitarianism, it also hampers the ability of humanitarians to carry out their work, and it increases the dangers for them while working in politically instable regions of the world. Humanitarians should strive to ensure their independence and neutrality by not working with military interventions against other states. Humanitarianism has the core goal of alleviating human suffering wherever it may be, they should avoid at all costs becoming paws of states used to fulfil foreign policy objectives. Humanitarians must uphold their values so they can stand with those suffering when states will not.

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