PURSUING THE GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

Principle and Practice in U.S. Foreign Policy

Edited by
Sally Steenland, Peter Rundlet,
Michael H. Fuchs & David Buckley

Center for American Progress

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A Faithful Case for Intervention
Our Common Responsibility to Protect Humanity and Prevent Atrocities

Dr. Elizabeth G. Ferris

People of faith struggle every day with the question of how to translate their spiritual values into concrete and appropriate responses to people whose lives are unprotected or endangered by their own government. This responsibility—to protect fellow citizens of the world who face death and mistreatment by tyrants who hide behind national sovereignty, and to prevent such situations from occurring—has been under intense debate since the formation of the modern nation-state.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, a more sweeping understanding has developed of how people of faith should act for the global common good in the face of civil conflicts and tyranny rooted in nation-states. One striking example of this is the interfaith advocacy being carried out through the Save Darfur Coalition (see box below).

The Darfur Campaign's Faith Interventionists

The campaign to end genocide in Darfur includes the American Jewish World Service (which founded the Save Darfur Coalition in 2004), the American Society for Muslim Advancement, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the National Association of Evangelicals. The coalition's national members include the American Islamic Congress, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, and the National Black Church Initiative.

Independent of the coalition, many faith-based organizations, such as Church World Service, Islamic Relief, Evangelicals for Darfur, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and Catholic Relief Services are taking great risks to respond to the victims of the violence in Darfur. And the emergency response arm of the World Council of Churches has worked with its Catholic counterparts to implement one of the largest relief operations in the area.

Yet responding collectively in the face of clear crimes against humanity by nation-state leaders does not come easily to the world's major faiths. The reasons: theological differences in approaches to war and pragmatic uncertainties about the nature of the appropriate response. The relationship between the global common good and the responsibility of the international community to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries in order to protect people whose lives are at risk is known as the "responsibility to protect." This concept has been the subject of intense debate in international circles over the past two decades. I was actively involved in this debate through my involvement with the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The WCC has wrestled with the responsibility to protect since the end of World War II, as it was established in the same formative years as the United Nations. And from the WCC's very beginnings, it confronted questions of when the use of force is justified. The first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 stated that:

> War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. The part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man.[1]

Christianity, like all the major world religions, prohibits taking the life of another person, compels the faithful to stand up for the rights of the oppressed, and holds that obedience to God's will is a higher calling than obedience to any human authority.[2] And the values underpinning both the global common good and the responsibility to protect have strong resonance within Christianity, whose beliefs affirm the dignity of each individual human being, stress the interconnectedness of the world's people, and call for solidarity with neighbors in need.

Since that first WCC assembly almost 60 years ago, there have been many efforts by the WCC and the international community to explore conditions in which the use of force might be morally justified. As might be expected from a body that includes some 350 member churches in all parts of the world, the debates within the WCC on particular policy issues do not always result in consensus decisions. Still, the principles behind these debates can provide helpful guidance to policymakers outside the religious community, including leaders who shape the direction of U.S. foreign policy.

Development of an Ecumenical Approach to the Responsibility to Protect

Ecumenical discussions about the responsibility to protect responded to events in the world, as theological discussions often do. During the Cold War, however, these discussions could not avoid being framed by the overarching political conflict between the West, the former Soviet Union, and the then truly communist state of China. This polarization blocked the possibility of collective action by the U.N. Security Council. The first test of a post-Cold War conflict that raised the question of the responsibility to protect was the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1990-1991.

Somalia

The dictatorial leader, Mohammed Siyad Barre, fled the country in 1991, leaving competing warlords to battle for power. The civil war, exacerbated by drought, led to widespread famine, which resulted in the deaths of over 150,000 people. Relief agencies found operating in such a violent environment almost impossible and were unable to prevent widespread casualties. Although television screens were filled with images of starving civilians terrorized by militias, international action was slow.

Many Christians, including committed pacifists, wrestled with the question of how the international community could and should respond to Somalia's humanitarian crisis when

there was no Somali government. Should the United Nations send in troops to protect the delivery of humanitarian relief? To restore order? Did the United Nations have the capacity to take on the warlords?

A seminar organized at an ecumenical peace research institute in 1992 grappled with the question of whether there was a "duty to intervene" in situations of widespread suffering. It concluded that there was a moral imperative for intervention. But participants were less clear about what form that intervention should take.

So, too, was the U.N. Security Council, which authorized four different military operations over the next three years, each of which had a different mandate. The first two, UNOSOM I and Operation Provide Relief (which was in essence an airlift to move relief supplies into Somalia), were modestly successful; but the humanitarian needs of the Somalis were immense. In December 1992, at the request of President George H.W. Bush, Operation Restore Hope was launched with the purpose of establishing a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia. This was followed in May 1993 with another U.N. intervention, UNOSOM II, also with U.S. leadership, which had a more overtly political mandate, including the promotion and advancement of political reconciliation and the re-establishment of national and regional institutions.

While the warlords had allowed U.N. forces to provide humanitarian assistance, the more overt political mandate of the last U.N. operation led to fierce resistance from the warlords—and to open warfare with U.N. troops. In October 1993, U.S. troops, operating independently of the U.N. command structure, launched a military operation to capture one of the warlords, General Muhammad Farah Aidid. Eighteen U.S. soldiers and nearly 300 Somalis were killed in the firefight, leading both the United States and, a year later, U.N. forces to withdraw from Somalia. Relief organizations that had managed to function with security provided by the military now found it almost impossible to operate in the wake of the final decision to withdraw U.S. and U.N. forces, and almost all of them left the country. By 1994, Somalia was a failed state.

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Christians at that ecumenical seminar in Sweden two years earlier had largely agreed that there was a moral duty to intervene when thousands of people were dying, but it is clear that the response to Somalia fell short of what was needed. The lesson of Somalia for ecumenical discussions was that moral principles are not a sufficient guide to action; the means of intervention was as important as the principle.

The Former Yugoslavia

Even as the agony in Somalia was happening, the breakup of the former Yugoslavia led to a devastating civil war which lasted from 1992 to1995. Unlike Somalia, there were many Christians in the Balkans, and churches were challenged to engage in "ecumenical diplomacy," first to prevent the outbreak of war and then to support efforts to resolve the conflict once war broke out. Churches were particularly troubled by the use of religious imagery by political leaders in the region, and emphasized that this was not a religious conflict between Christians and Muslims or between Catholics and Orthodox.

On the political level, the international community responded with multiple diplomatic initiatives and sent U.N. peacekeepers. But the U.N. peacekeeping force found itself with a limited mandate; there was no peace to keep. In fact, the violence intensified. In the absence of a political solution, humanitarian assistance was provided in extremely difficult circumstances, but the assistance itself raised serious ethical questions.

When relief agencies helped Muslims move from areas where they were under attack by Serbs, were they contributing to ethnic cleansing? Was it morally right to provide food for hungry people while failing to prevent military attacks on them? Was the use of North Atlantic Treaty Organization military force justified to break the three-year-long siege of Sarajevo? Were Western powers using humanitarian assistance as a "moral alibi" for their failure to bring the war to an end?

Indeed, the very efficacy of deploying U.N. peacekeepers came into question when the United Nations was roundly criticized for its failure to protect people in so-called "safe areas," as evidenced by the slaughter of 8,000 men and boys in the safe area of Srebrenica in May 1995. The inability of the Dutch peacekeepers to prevent the massacre led to a soul-searching public debate in the Netherlands about the extent of their responsibility for the deaths of Bosnians under their protection. Although a government-commissioned report, released in 2002, found that responsibility for the massacre was shared between the United Nations and the Dutch government, public reaction in both the Netherlands and Bosnia was intense and divided.

The ecumenical discussions of the Bosnian war emphasized the importance of working to prevent the outbreak of war in the first place, and of continuing to engage churches on all sides of the conflict, even as their military leaders conducted operations against each other. For European church leaders, the war in the former Yugoslavia was particularly painful—after all, it was NATO, not the European Union, that intervened in the civil conflict—and renewed their commitment to develop European institutions that would be able to respond effectively to conflicts in their own region.

Rwanda

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda—and particularly the speed of the killing—took the international community by surprise. Within a few months, some 800,000 people were killed, many by neighbors using machetes and hoes. As news of the killings trickled out, the international

community seemed unable or unwilling to act. Rwanda was a small country, of little strategic interest to the West. What's more, after its experience in Somalia, U.S. interest in intervening in small, distant countries was minimal. And the United Nations, which had troops in Rwanda, had reduced its already small presence by 90 percent when the killings began in earnest.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda took ecumenical discussions to a new level because churches and the ecumenical movement were forced to confront the fact that they had been unable to prevent the mass slaughter. It was clear that the "duty to intervene" was not just a responsibility of governments and international institutions, but also a challenge to civil society and churches. It was a challenge that Rwandan churches and the ecumenical movement failed to meet—despite the warning signs of growing tension, the escalation of hate radio, and the development of plans to unleash the rampage that were evident before the slaughter began.

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In fact, Rwandan church leadership either were aware of the growing danger and did not act, or else missed warning signs that should have been plain to see. I remember one African WCC colleague addressing a meeting in 1994 in tears, saying:

> We welcomed Rwandan church leaders to our gatherings, but we knew pressure was building in Rwanda. We should have pressed them, challenged them. That's what the ecumenical movement means, to challenge one another. And we didn't do that. We just smiled and accepted their comments that things were fine.

The exodus of Rwandan refugees into neighboring Zaire was swift. In the course of a week, some 800,000 refugees arrived, overwhelming local communities and relief agencies. The U.S Operation Support Hope sent troops to provide logistical support to relief agencies and provide assistance to the refugees for about six weeks. Most observers at the time credited this military intervention with saving many lives.

Churches, like many governments and civil society actors, responded generously with humanitarian assistance after the genocide and continued to assist refugees in what was then Zaire, even when it became clear that some of those receiving assistance were, in fact, the perpetrators of the violence. Humanitarian action became a response, rooted in guilt, to a tragedy which neither the international community nor the churches had been able to prevent.

Kosovo

"Humanitarian intervention" was the term used most often in the days leading up to the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo. A WCC seminar in 2000 wrestled again with the conditions

under which such intervention might be justified in order to prevent further bloodshed. There was general agreement that it was not appropriate to link the word "humanitarian" (with its connotations of neutrality and compassion) with the word "intervention," which implied military action which would always be in support of a military mission. But beyond that common ground, there were troubling disagreements.

The WCC participants did agree that sometimes military action might be needed but that the actual deployment of military force was not a humanitarian action. However, there were serious regional differences among representatives from countries in the throes of war. Some wanted immediate intervention because of their experience with the cruelty and chaos of conflict. The participant from Sierra Leone, then in the throes of war, was one such example. But others who had experienced other forms of intervention in the past, such as the participant from Nicaragua, argued that the legacy of U.S. intervention in Central America was far from benign.

There were also theological differences among those urging loyalty to Christian pacifist traditions and those arguing that "Just War" theory offered useful criteria for taking military action in certain cases. The report of the seminar outlined a series of steps that could be taken to respond to situations of widespread human rights abuse, including military force as a last resort. The report from that seminar, which was called "The Responsibility to Protect Endangered Populations," was debated by the WCC's governing body in 2001, though it was unable to endorse the document.

At the same 2001 meeting where the document on "responsibility to protect" was discussed, the WCC agreed to launch a new initiative, a Decade to Overcome Violence in which churches committed themselves to confront violence at all levels—in their families, communities, countries, regions, and the world. Many representatives, however, felt that there was a fundamental contradiction between promising to do everything possible for peace by launching the Decade campaign and at the same meeting admitting that there would be some cases in which military intervention might be morally acceptable. In light of the impasse, the issue was referred back to the churches for further theological reflection with a consensus that more work was needed around the concept of the "responsibility to protect."

This led a number of churches to engage in intensive discussions about the issue. For example, a meeting of Historic Peace Churches in 2001 produced a study paper on "Just Peacemaking," which said:

> A biblically and theologically grounded pacifism regards seeking God's justice as central and integral to a nonviolent philosophy of life...The use of violent force as a 'last resort' to secure justice creates conditions that inhibit the achievement of justice.[3]

The Evangelical Church in Germany noted in its deliberations that the concept of "Just Peace" (instead of "Just War") is central to Christian peace ethics, while the use of military force should always be a last resort. The Church of Norway's study, "Vulnerability and Security," argues that the specific contribution of the churches is to focus on the victim's perspective (Matthew 25, 35) and the service of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5, 18), both of which are at the very core of the Christian message.[4]

The evolution of the argument from "humanitarian intervention" to "responsibility to protect" shifted the emphasis to the people in need of protection rather than the political actors considering the intervention. This was very much in parallel with and influenced by discussions taking place in the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which was set up by the Canadian government in 2000 and which released its final report in 2001.[5]

Eventually, the United Nations endorsed the concept of the responsibility to protect at the World Summit of 2005, while an ecumenical statement was adopted at the WCC's 9th Assembly the following year which reluctantly left open the possibility of using force to prevent further suffering. The ecumenical conversations influenced the process leading to the U.N. statement, and deliberations at the United Nations contributed to the churches' reflection on the issue.

The term "responsibility to protect" is now being used in a holistic way by churches throughout the world. One hears, for example, about a responsibility to protect the environment, to protect children, to protect the people of Zimbabwe, to protect people living with HIV and AIDS, and so on. While the term is also used by many secular groups, it has a special resonance with churches who understand it in theological terms.

Core Ecumenical Issues of the Responsibility to Protect

Beyond the statements and the debates is a set of core issues that characterize an ecumenical approach to the responsibility to protect—issues that can contribute to U.S. foreign policy debates. In fact, these core issues—interdependence and human security, prevention and collective response—are not just pie-in-the-sky idealistic notions, but rather ideas that resonate with the American public and could be used by U.S. leadership in developing a new direction for U.S. foreign policy.

Interdependence and Human Security

First of all, ecumenical discussions about the responsibility to protect are based on a deeply held recognition of the fundamental interdependence of peoples and nations in the world. While national security remains the dominant principle for debates on U.S. foreign policy, many churches have largely shifted their focus to the concept of human security, which emphasizes that in our interdependent world the security of all of us is linked.

The WCC Eighth Assembly in Harare in 1998, affirmed the theological context of this shifted focus:

> We affirm the emphasis of the gospel on the value of all human beings in the sight of God, on the atoning and redeeming work of Christ that has given every person true dignity, on love as the motive for action, and on love for one's neighbors as the practical expression of active faith in Christ. We are members one of another and when one suffers all are hurt. This is the responsibility Christians bear to ensure the human rights of every person.[6]

Many in ecumenical circles argued that human security and national security are not a dichotomy. The well-being of the United States depends on a just and peaceful world, which means that our national security can be threatened by poverty and violence that is far away. And so the responsibility to protect is rooted not only in moral principles, but in our national interest.

Case in point: Darfur. When we do not protect the people of Darfur, the world is less safe and the United States is less secure. The potential is high for the Darfur crisis to spill into neighboring countries, which could de-stabilize the region, damage relationships among major powers, disrupt economies, and create resentment and despair, all of which breed violence.

The concept of human security complements the idea of the responsibility to protect. A human security approach, for example, looks at the Darfur conflict primarily from the perspective of Darfurians who have a God-given right to abundant life. In contrast, a focus on national security directs attention to the effect of policies on those in a position to intervene. Thus a U.S. national security approach to Darfur would ask: How does the situation in Darfur affect U.S. security?

The answer would consider such factors as the role of the Sudanese government in stopping terrorists who would do harm to the United States, access to Sudanese natural resources, and the regional impact of intervention. It would consider the balance between the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Darfurians with the potential harm to relations between the United States and China, which is the Sudanese government's most important economic ally. While these are important factors, a human security approach argues that they are not the central questions policy makers should consider in order to build long-term security for the Darfurians, for Americans, or indeed for the world.

The Responsibility to Prevent

Secondly, an ecumenical approach to the responsibility to protect is grounded in a clear commitment to working to prevent situations of wide-scale abuse of human rights and war. This responsibility to prevent is perhaps less glamorous than sending in troops for a quick fix, but it is rooted in ecumenical understandings of the need to create sustainable communities of peace and justice.

People of faith are called to a ministry of just peacemaking that works over the long haul to address persistent poverty and injustice and that seeks to resolve conflicts before they escalate into violence. This is the first line of defense against widespread suffering as a result of failed states and escalating conflicts. This would suggest that U.S. policymakers not only do more to address underlying issues of poverty and inequality, but that they see these efforts as a way of strengthening U.S. security, as well as the security of humanity.

The international community has devoted substantial resources over the years to developing early warning systems, but has remained weak—at times paralyzed—in developing appropriate early action. U.N. organizations, for example, sound the alarm when drought threatens a country or

region. International organizations, national governments, and non-governmental organizations have all developed systems to systematically monitor political developments which warn of impending conflicts. In today's media-driven world, we are aware not only of what is happening in Somalia and Palestine, but also of ongoing internal conflicts in Sri Lanka, Colombia, and the Central African Republic, where violence can easily escalate.

> "We need to recognize that sovereignty has limits—just as we now recognize that parental rights are limited. Parents cannot kill and beat their children with impunity anymore; so, too, governments cannot repress and kill their own people while the world stands by."

We also know that the signing of peace agreements does not mean that all problems are resolved and peace has been achieved. The newly established U.N. Peacebuilding Commission and initiatives by the U.S. government to address the urgent but often neglected needs of post-conflict societies are positive signs and should be made a priority by those seeking to prevent widespread human rights abuses. These initiatives are (and should be seen as) an expression of the responsibility to protect, which the faith community can encourage and support.

And when prevention does not work and things go wrong—as they will—we need to wrestle mightily to find the appropriate response. Intervention is a continuum and we have a vast array of possible tools to use in these cases, which include both positive inducements and punitive measures. Some of these measures, such as restrictions on visas and selective sanctions, can be implemented quickly and targeted at those responsible for widespread crimes. Others, such as the delivery of humanitarian assistance, can provide possibilities for monitoring human rights abuses and for establishing benchmarks for governments that lack the capacity to protect their citizens.

In addition, traditional means of conflict resolution, carried out by local groups, may be effective in situations where the international community cannot respond. Measures to hold perpetrators of crimes accountable for their actions are a tremendous advance of this century and can be used more intentionally to deter violence against their citizens. There are many alternatives, short of military force, which should be explored before military action is considered.

Working Collectively

A third core issue of an ecumenical approach to the responsibility to protect is the need to work collectively with other nations, international organizations, and civil society. Ecumenism itself is founded on the belief that by working together churches are able to do more than they would by working on their own. As the modern ecumenical movement developed in the same formative years as the United Nations, the parallels with the development of secular multilateral bodies are obvious.

In recent years, however, there has been an emphasis on mutual vulnerability as a basis for ecumenical relationships. Everyone is vulnerable, the argument goes, and so we must acknowledge our own vulnerability as a basis for relating to one another. Many European churches, for example, are materially wealthy while African churches are bursting at the seams with people but have few financial resources. By recognizing our mutual vulnerability, new ways of relating to one another can be forged. Working with others is not just a more effective way of working on an issue. By admitting that we need others, we open ourselves to the possibility of transformation.

What does this have to do with U.S. foreign policy? In recent years, many U.S. political leaders have been outspoken in their criticism of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. And indeed, with respect to the responsibility to protect, the record of the United Nations in intervening to save lives has been mixed. In fact, a recent study of 17 instances of humanitarian intervention since 1990 found that nine succeeded in saving lives, four failed to save lives and four had a mixed record.[7] The study concludes that those U.N. efforts were most successful when their mandate was limited. For example, in Somalia, the first U.N. mission focused on allowing humanitarian agencies to deliver needed food and relief items. And it largely worked. But when a subsequent U.N. mission broadened its mandate to include political reconciliation and governance, the United Nations was not seen as a neutral player and thus came under attack.

In Rwanda, the U.N. peacekeeping mission was an abject failure because governments of the world, including the United States, were unwilling to make a commitment to peacekeeping at a time when it could have made the difference between life and death for hundreds of thousands of Rwandans. In Bosnia, U.N. operations are generally credited with successfully delivering humanitarian assistance but their contribution to the eventual Dayton peace agreement is much less certain.

There is a tendency in today's U.S. political context to either go it alone or to first try to work through the United Nations, and if that does not produce the desired results quickly, then to go it alone. The ecumenical experience would suggest that in the continuing struggle to reach consensus on important issues—even when such discussions are long and arduous and do not have an immediate payoff—the results are more effective than when one country takes unilateral action. The desire to respond quickly must be balanced with the need to carefully consider the possible consequences of such actions.

The fact is there is considerable support, both globally and in the United States, for the United Nations to intervene in situations to protect vulnerable populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, should national authorities fail to do so. An April 2007 global poll by the Program on International Policy Attitudes, for example, found that 74 percent of Americans, 76 percent of Chinese, and majorities in most of the 10 other countries polled (Armenia, Poland, France, the Palestinian Territories, Israel, and India) agreed that the United Nations had a responsibility to intervene in such cases.[8]

In order for this potential to be realized, however, much more effort is needed to strengthen the United Nations, since it can only do what its members allow it to do. Concerning the responsibility to protect, this means working to prevent conflicts from emerging and working

with governments and civil society after peace agreements are signed. Most of all, it means devoting resources to improving the toolkit of ways in which the international community can respond creatively, rapidly, and effectively in situations of large-scale human suffering.

Difficult Issues Involved in the Responsibility to Protect

Discussion of the responsibility to protect raises a number of difficult issues, including the issue of national sovereignty. How do we as the international community protect people under assault by their own government? Which cases warrant intervention? And who should decide when protection is needed? Although these are all thorny issues, theological principles suggest ways of addressing them.

National Sovereignty

Sovereignty is the big stumbling block in the debate over the responsibility to protect, both within the ecumenical movement and in broader international discussions. Sovereignty is the right to exercise exclusive political authority over a certain area or population. Initially, sovereignty was understood as the domain under the control of a sovereign, such as a ruler or king. But the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 established the modern nation-state system based on sovereignty and its corollary principles of self-determination, the equality of states, and non-intervention by states in the internal affairs of one another.

The universal respect for sovereignty has some clear positive consequences. It reduces the use of force between nations and increases the predictability of relationships. It also affirms the right to self-determination and serves as a moral defense of small, weak nations from the interference of more powerful states.

Respect for sovereignty is a bedrock of international relations. In fact, the 1948 International Convention Against Genocide is the only case of international law in which the international community has accepted the legitimacy, indeed the duty, to disregard the sovereignty of a given state in order to prevent a crime against humanity. This is the reason most governments in the world are hesitant to use the term "genocide" in describing a situation; under the terms of this convention, they are obligated to take action to prevent genocide and to punish its perpetrators.

But sovereignty in today's interdependent world must have a different character than in bygone eras. Transnational threats—whether tainted pet food or terrorism or avian flu—cross international borders with frightening speed and ease. Decisions by governments on "domestic" issues have consequences far beyond their borders. U.S. policies on subsidies to our farmers or on automobile emissions, for example, might very well have a greater effect on the well-being of people in other countries than many U.S. "foreign" policies.

In a global village, the borders among nations are breaking down, with serious consequences for sovereignty. But just as importantly, the emergence of universal human rights norms and standards since World War II puts limits on the freedom of governments to do whatever they want

to their own citizens. In 1991, then-U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar highlighted this when he said:

> It is now increasingly felt that the principle of non-interference within the essential domestic jurisdiction of states cannot be regarded as a protective barrier behind which human rights can be massively or systematically violated with impunity. The fact that in diverse situations the United Nations has not been able to prevent atrocities cannot be accepted as an argument, legal or moral, against the necessary corrective action, especially when peace is also threatened.[9]

We need to recognize that sovereignty has limits—just as we now recognize that parental rights are limited. Parents cannot kill and beat their children with impunity anymore; so too, governments cannot repress and kill their own people while the world stands by. Today civil-society campaigns challenge the notion that the governments of Sudan or Burma are free to violate the human rights of their citizens with impunity.

Christians have lived for a long time with the tension between living in this world—and accepting the authority of their government—and living in accord with God's will for their lives. There have been many times when Christians, because of their faith, have resisted authority and turned to civil disobedience, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. Similarly, many Christians argue that in the face of evil—as occurred in Rwanda or Nazi Germany—the principles of sovereignty must give way to a greater good: protecting life.

Protecting People Under Threat

A second difficult issue has to do with the nature of the action taken to protect people under threat. Although there is universal recognition and acceptance that the international community has a responsibility to prevent deadly conflict, most of the debate about the responsibility to protect has focused on the use of military force. The International Commission's impressive work on the responsibility to protect includes many pages of possible actions that can be taken in response to a state's abuse of its citizens, but most attention has focused on when a military response should be initiated.

Yet intervention can be seen as a continuum. It can include both positive and coercive components that encompass such actions as: fact-finding missions, promises of new assistance or withdrawal of assistance, diplomatic demarches, disinvestment or economic sanctions, monitoring by human rights monitors, police action, deployment of military force, and many other actions.

Many progressive-minded policy thinkers are quite comfortable advocating for conditionality in foreign aid to countries such as Burma in protest of its repressive regime. And certainly the disinvestment campaign was a factor in bringing about regime change in the apartheid government of South Africa. Unfortunately, some of the "nonviolent" measures can cause as much civilian suffering as military force.

Economic sanctions, for example, often have serious negative effects on the health of the civilian population, as evidenced in the cases of Cuba, Iraq, and Serbia.[10] Often they hurt ordinary citizens more than the policymakers. In response to this, the World Council of Churches in 1994 developed criteria for determining the applicability and effectiveness of sanctions, which note that "any resort to a coercive strategy must aim at the reconstruction of peaceable and humane relationships, take great care to avoid or minimize suffering of the general populace or any innocent groups, and avoid causing more harm than good."[11]

When and Where to Offer Protection

A third difficult issue has to do with the selectivity of intervention. The international community responded to the civil war in Bosnia, but not to the wide-scale suffering in Chechnya. It responded to the struggles of minorities seeking self-determination in Kosovo, but not to those in Tibet or Kurdistan. The brutal Taliban regime was allowed to continue to repress its citizens—until suspicions that the country was sheltering al-Qaeda gave rise to military intervention after September 11, 2001.

As long as intervention is perceived as being selectively implemented, it will be seen as politically motivated. The perception among many churches in the global South is that the national interests of the powerful will always trump the global common good. But people of faith have lived with the tension of living in an unjust world for 2,000 years and longer and have had to make choices about when to act and when to be silent. It is not possible to respond to every human rights violation, for example, but it is a greater sin to stand by and do nothing.

Ecumenical principles suggest that the scale of the violations and the possibility that taking action will make a difference have to be constantly assessed. Moral outrage is a necessary but not sufficient condition for action.

The Role of the United Nations

A fourth difficult issue has to do with the role of the United Nations. Of course, it does not have a perfect track record in protecting vulnerable populations. While the ecumenical community has been one of the United Nation's strongest supporters, there is a perception, particularly in the global South, that it is the tool of the powerful and without structural reform can never serve as the true collective voice of the world's people.

U.N. authorization of military intervention does not guarantee moral justification or success. But in spite of its shortcomings, the United Nations is the global governance system that we have, and we should devote far more political, human, and financial capital to ensuring that it lives up to the very high expectations with which it was created.

However, we also need to consider ways of including civil society in our institutions of global governance. Today, civil society groups as diverse as the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, national human rights commissions, labor unions, women's organizations, environmental activist groups, and professional associations are on the margins of the world's decision-making

structures. But the reality is that civil society is the source of much of the world's creativity and conscience.

There are also debates about whether it is legitimate for states to intervene in the absence of U.N. Security Council action. Consider Former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's words on this topic:

> To those for whom the greatest threat to the future of the international order is the use of force in the absence of a Security Council mandate, one might ask—not in the context of Kosovo but in the context of Rwanda—if, in those dark days and hours leading up to the genocide, a coalition of States had been prepared to act in defense of the Tutsi population, but did not receive prompt Council authorization, should such a coalition have stood aside and allowed the horror to unfold?[12]

If the United Nations is unable to act, are there situations where it is morally justifiable for others to take up this responsibility? If so, what are the conditions—and limitations—on such actions? Is intervention only a tool for powerful governments? Can regional institutions be supported and equipped to play a more significant role in preventing conflicts and in protecting people when violence emerges in their regions? Can world leaders, for example, provide tangible support to African Union forces which are struggling to prevent further killings in Darfur?

There are no easy answers to these questions. But the collective struggle to discern the morally right and politically possible response to situations where people are in peril make possible the collective, effective exercise of the responsibility to protect. Today, this is one of the most fundamental questions U.S. foreign policymakers, concerned faith leaders, and U.S. citizens now face. It goes to the heart of who we are as a people and as a member of the community of nations.

Toward U.S. Foreign Policies that Affirm the Responsibility to Protect

The global common good is rooted in our basic human interdependence. For better or worse, our fate as individuals and as a nation is linked with others. And so, we need to work with other countries and with other global institutions in pursuit of a higher common interest. Our vision of sovereignty needs to change.

First and foremost, the United States needs to make a sustained commitment to peace-making and to peace-building once conflicts have been brought to an end. Second, we must respond to conflicts before they become tragedies and find creative ways to address the grievances that lead to conflict, in that way moving toward real reconciliation.

But when prevention is not successful and there is large-scale loss of human life, the international community needs to respond. The response needs both to be based on principles and to be pragmatic. Military intervention should only be used when other means have failed and when there is a reasonable chance of success. Although it is perhaps more morally satisfying to act only on the basis of principles, we need to recognize the reality that intervention will be inconsistently

applied. There are cases in which taking action to protect a beleaguered minority could pose a major threat to the security of humanity, such as in Chechnya or Tibet.

What would be the components of a U.S. foreign policy that affirms the global common good through the responsibility to protect? The following six actions, drawn from the core moral principles of the ecumenical approach of the responsibility to protect as laid out above, offer concrete methods for turning principle into pragmatic action. These actions would not only improve human security through appropriate responses to wide-scale human rights abuses, but would also enhance the standing of the United States in the world and increase our national security.

- **Respect the sovereignty of other nations.** The United States needs to work with global and regional organizations in cases in which sovereignty is being used as a cover for human rights abuses. The ecumenical movement has consistently defended the principle of sovereignty, seeing the integrity of states as essential to peace and security. But governments of weaker countries need to be assured that the exercise of the responsibility to protect will not serve as an excuse by the powerful to intervene in the weaker countries' domestic policies. By working collectively and transparently on these issues, suspicion of the intentions of the powerful may be assuaged.

- **Help multilateral institutions respond to mass violations of human rights.** The United States needs to be creative in its commitment to shaping effective multilateral institutions so that they can respond appropriately and quickly to prevent mass violations of human rights. The toolkit of options and the continuum of intervention need to be recognized, studied, and enhanced. In particular, we need to know more about cases that have worked, to understand the broad effects of different kinds of sanctions, and to consider how regional bodies can play a more effective role. And in cases in which military action is needed, the United States could take a leadership role in supporting regional initiatives and in providing the United Nations with a standing rapid-deployment force to enable a timely collective response.

- **Accept international standards.** The United States needs to be willing to consider the application of international standards to the United States. When the U.S. government announces that it will not be subject to the International Criminal Court or ratify basic human rights instruments (such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child), not only is the international system weakened, but our nation's standing in the world (and our national security) suffers. The United States is not invulnerable. In recognizing its vulnerability and being willing to open itself to the standards agreed upon by the international community, the United States could gain a greater moral standing in the world.

- **Recognize the responsibility of power.** Because of its position as the world's sole superpower, the United States is in a leadership position. But leadership for what? In a national debate on the U.S. role in the world, we should not shy away from reclaiming the moral high ground. Much U.S. power comes not from its armies and consumers, but from the values of freedom, democracy, equality, and participation. This is what other countries admire—or

used to admire before President George W. Bush turned this moral equation on its head by trumpeting these core values to support the unilateral U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent mismanaged occupation of the country. By affirming these core values and joining them with a commitment to the global common good, we can again play a leadership role in creating global systems that ensure vulnerable populations are protected.

- **Build a domestic constituency in support of the global common good.** The responsibility to protect and the responsibility to prevent are not only part of our nation's historical heritage, but are evident in public life today. The incredible group of former Peace Corps volunteers, the surge in popularity of study abroad programs, and the outpouring of support for initiatives such as Habitat for Humanity represent a yearning of Americans to engage with their communities and the world. With presidential leadership and vision, a constituency could be developed that would support U.S. political leaders to sustain preventive measures and make difficult moral choices when prevention is not successful. The faith community is particularly well-placed to mobilize support for these actions.

- **Support the independent role of civil society**. Civil society currently plays a crucial role in protecting vulnerable people; this role needs to be affirmed, encouraged, and at times, challenged. Non-governmental organizations, for example, are increasingly called on to protect civilians in conflict zones, and assistance is linked to protection. Thus, providing assistance to displaced women may prevent their being abused or turning to prostitution to feed their children. Churches have a responsibility to protect by working with communities, by taking actions to prevent the outbreak of violence, and by sounding the alarm when there are signs of serious abuse.

Conclusion

Engaging the issue of the responsibility to protect raises many questions on different levels: political, economic, moral, theological, institutional, and personal. The answers to these questions and the nature of the discussions will have consequences not only for our children in the near-future, but for the more distant future of everyone living on this planet. The stakes are very, very high.

In this chapter I have outlined the pathways taken by concerned Christians in search of answers to these questions. But I would like to conclude with some observations of how the responsibility to protect is inexorably linked to the global common good.

Working for the global common good means being willing to challenge established notions of political life in favor of bold actions to prevent the deaths of those who are weak. And working for the global common good requires a collective response when natural disasters bring devastation, when wars break out between countries, or when a government refuses to, or is unable to, protect its own citizens.

While the international community has developed a means of responding collectively, albeit imperfectly, to victims of natural disasters and to inter-state conflicts, there is less consensus about the responsibility to intervene when people suffer at the hands of their own government.

We need to build that consensus, both in the United States and abroad, and then act on those agreed-upon values. Humanity demands nothing less.

Endnotes

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