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# R2P As a Tool for Humanitarian Imperialism: The Hidden Agendas Behind International Interventions

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## ABSTRACT

*A global concept known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) aims to prevent and resolve crimes of mass atrocity by reinterpreting state sovereignty to include governments' duties to protect their citizens. R2P emerged from the international community's inability to stop genocides in the 1990s, most notably in Kosovo and Rwanda, and was formally adopted at the World Summit in 2005. But the idea of "humanitarian imperialism," in which strong nations utilize humanitarian excuses to further their geopolitical objectives, has made it more difficult to put into practice. The effect of humanitarian imperialism on the implementation of R2P is examined in this article. Under the guise of advancing democracy, human rights, or stability, strong states might engage in humanitarian imperialism.*

*The case studies of Russia's annexation of Crimea (2014) and NATO's intervention in Libya (2011) are addressed. NATO's intervention in Libya, which was originally justified under R2P as a means of preventing a massacre, soon evolved into a regime change operation, casting doubt on R2P's legitimacy and causing protracted instability. Russia's action in Crimea, which was purportedly carried out to safeguard ethnic Russians, was primarily motivated by geopolitical considerations, demonstrating the extent to which humanitarian discourse may conceal imperial aspirations.*

*Its legitimacy is compromised, and international confidence is weakened, when Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is applied selectively due to political, economic, or strategic reasons. The ability of the international community to stop crimes and defend human rights is hampered by this dynamic. The study makes several recommendations to address these problems, including bolstering global agreement, guaranteeing responsibility, fostering openness, and supporting regional approaches to interventions. The goal of these actions is to reestablish R2P's efficacy and reputation in really defending vulnerable groups.*

**Keywords:** *Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Humanitarian Imperialism, Selective interventionism, Human Rights, Genocide.*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

An innovative concept called the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) reinterprets the definition of sovereignty and the obligations of governments. It aims to provide a foundation for actively preventing and addressing mass atrocity crimes. R2P is a notion, a guiding principle, and a developing standard that is supported globally by governments and civil society. It is a way to abolish the scourge of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes from the face of the earth. R2P emerged from a century of the bloodiest wars mankind has ever witnessed and its advocates hope to make mass atrocity crimes a phenomenon of the past.

### **(A) Historical moments that led to the emergence of R2P:**

An important worldwide failure to properly intervene in the face of mass crimes is shown by the Rwandan Genocide in the 1990s. Hutu extremists perpetrated a savage campaign against Tutsis and moderate Hutus following the downing of the plane carrying Presidents Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi and Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda. The United Nations, with Belgium's help, sent troops to Rwanda, but they were not given the authority to halt the atrocities (Rwanda Genocide, 2014). Whatever the gravity of the situation, the United States was reluctant to get involved in another African crisis while still licking its wounds from the terrible experience in Mogadishu.

Despite having the authority to employ force when they finally arrived, French forces had little effect and were mostly symbolic. French military were accused of being implicated in the genocide and of not doing enough to stop the killing because of their partnership with the Hutu regime (Rwanda Genocide, 2014). Ultimately, one of the biggest genocides since the Holocaust occurred when some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed as a result of inaction on the part of the international community.

In Kosovo, mass atrocity crimes reappeared in the late 1990s. Around 400,000 people were displaced and over 150,000 Kosovar Albanians lost their lives as a result of President Slobodan Milosevic's clash with their forces in 1998. Anticipated vetoes from China and Russia made it difficult for the international community to take action through the UN Security Council. NATO retaliated by launching an ongoing air assault against the Milosevic government. NATO partners were united by a sense of humiliation for their lack of cogent strategies and clear action during the Yugoslav wars from 1991 to 1995, as a result of the prior failure at Srebrenica. But the fact that NATO intervened without consulting the UN Security Council cast serious doubt on its legitimacy. This raised serious concerns about whether it was proper and lawful to handle international peace and security issues without consulting the Security Council. Furthermore,

the objectives of NATO went beyond humanitarian concerns, casting further suspicion on the genuine reasons of the operation.

In response to serious human rights violations, there were new attempts in the 21st century to solve the detailed issues from the previous century. Over the course of several years, numerous nations participated in the writing of R2P, which culminated in the World Summit in 2005. What is currently known as R2P was shaped in part by Kofi Annan's "two sovereignties," the idea of "sovereignty as responsibility," and the ICISS report. The promise underwent several modifications during the World Summit, but overall, the world community welcomed it with open arms.

### **(B) Humanitarian Imperialism:**

Intersecting the domains of international relations, humanitarian intervention, and imperialism is the complicated and contentious idea of humanitarian imperialism. It alludes to the employment of geopolitical or imperialist ambitions disguised as the advancement of democracy, human rights, or stability in order to further imperialist goals.

The origins of humanitarian imperialism can be found in the colonial era, when European powers used the justification of bringing progress, civilization, and Christian ideals to "backward" nations to justify their expansion and dominance. Under the guise of helpful involvement, this colonial rhetoric frequently covered up political oppression, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation. With the growth of humanitarian groups fighting for the defense of human rights, the averting of tragedies, and the advancement of democracy and the rule of law in the 19th and 20th centuries, the idea attracted fresh interest. Opponents counter that strong nations have frequently used these admirable goals as justification for military actions, regime shifts, or geopolitical maneuvers that further their own strategic objectives.

Jean Bricmont's *Humanitarian Imperialism* is both a historical account of this development and a powerful political and moral critique. It seeks to restore the critique of imperialism to its rightful place in the defense of human rights. It describes the leading role of the United States in initiating military and other interventions, but also on the obvious support given to it by European powers and NATO. It outlines an alternative approach to the question of human rights, based on the genuine recognition of the equal rights of people in poor and wealthy countries.

## **II. WHEN NOBLE INTENTIONS MASK HIDDEN AGENDAS**

Humanitarian action seeks to avoid and enhance readiness for the occurrence of man-made

crises and natural catastrophes, as well as to save lives, relieve suffering, and uphold human dignity during and after such events. In the post-Cold War era, the topic of intervention more especially, selfless, liberal intervention has come back into focus. Since the early 1990s, interventions both in terms of their forms and their justification have taken many different shapes, but they have all typically included some reference to the claim that an individual's human rights supersede their state sovereignty. For the reasons that state sovereignty is fundamental, powerful actors use cosmopolitanism as a tool to impose their will on weaker ones, and intervention's morality is compromised by applying double standards, critics reject intervention in all situations.

#### **(A) Selective Interventionism:**

The decision to interfere in a humanitarian crisis is frequently affected by political, economic, or strategic interests rather than only humanitarian considerations. This phenomenon is known as selective interventionism, and it is a controversial area of modern international relations. This strategy has resulted in a skewed and uneven application of the principles of international intervention, raising serious concerns about the real motivations underlying such acts. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) theory was created to stop crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, but selective interventionism has often tainted its use. Rather than consistently adhering to humanitarian ideals and human rights, powerful states with a great deal of influence over world affairs frequently decide when and where to act in order to further their own goals.

Countries sometimes decide to get involved in conflicts when they have political allies or when the resolution could have a big effect on their geopolitical position. In order to guarantee that the intervening country may have influence over the political environment that follows a conflict, for instance, interventions may be more common in areas where a strategic political alignment can be established. In lieu of attending to the humanitarian needs of the impacted population, this may lead to interventions being motivated more by the desire to impose sympathetic administrations or to uphold regional stability in favor of the intervening force.

An important additional component influencing selective interventionism is economic interests. Intervention is frequently more likely in resource-rich regions or along important trade routes. Nations have the ability to use humanitarian justifications to shield their acts from criticism while gaining access to important natural resources like minerals, oil, and gas. The humanitarian language used to justify the action may obscure its underlying purpose, which is commercial in nature.

### **III. CASE STUDIES**

#### **(A) NATO Intervention in Libya (2011):**

Libya saw a massive uprising against Muammar Gaddafi's rule at the beginning of 2011, coinciding with the Arab Spring. Gaddafi's soldiers forcefully put down dissent during the protests, which soon turned into a civil war. UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973 was passed in reaction to the worsening situation and accusations of crimes against humanity. It gave member states permission to take "all necessary measures" to safeguard people in Libya who were in danger of attack.

The NATO-led intervention in Libya, justified under R2P, is often cited as an example of humanitarian imperialism. While it prevented an imminent massacre in Benghazi, the intervention quickly morphed into a regime change operation. This has led to long-term instability and has been criticized as an example of Western overreach, undermining the credibility of R2P. Although the intervention was successful in overthrowing Gaddafi's government, it also caused protracted unrest and civil war in Libya. There have been subsequent challenges for the nation, including factional violence, a lack of authority, and the emergence of extremist organizations, raising doubts about the intervention's long-term humanitarian benefits.

#### **(B) Russia's Intervention in Crimea (2014):**

Crimea, a strategic peninsula in the Black Sea, has historically been inhabited by Tatars, Russians, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups. In 1954, Crimea was administratively transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union. Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, Crimea remained an autonomous republic under Ukrainian sovereignty. Tensions escalated in late 2013 when then-President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject an association agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia sparked widespread protests in Ukraine, known as the Euromaidan protests. Yanukovich fled Ukraine in February 2014 after violent clashes in Kyiv, leading to a change in government. In February 2014, Russia, led by President Vladimir Putin, sent its military to Crimea in reaction to the political unrest; at first, they were dressed as "little green men." Important military and governmental locations around the peninsula were taken over by these troops. In March 2014, Russia went on to annex Crimea and incorporate it into the Russian Federation. Russia was isolated and diplomatic sanctions were imposed as a result of the annexation's widespread international condemnation.

Russia used the excuse of defending ethnic Russians and maintaining regional stability in the

face of political unrest in Ukraine to defend its action in Crimea. International criticism of this reasoning for undermining Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity was leveled.

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle emphasizes the international community's responsibility to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. In the case of Crimea, Russia's actions were perceived as exploiting R2P-like rhetoric to justify actions driven primarily by geopolitical calculations rather than genuine humanitarian concerns.

#### **IV. IMPACT OF HUMANITARIAN IMPERIALISM ON EXECUTION OF R2P**

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) theory challenges conventional ideas of state sovereignty and holds that when states fail to protect their citizens, the international community must step in to stop acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This theory represents a paradigm shift in international relations. Nonetheless, there is some debate about this idea. R2P can be used by powerful states as a humanitarian pretext to legitimize intrusions into weaker countries, violating their sovereignty. States may become resistant to this erosion of sovereignty and become resentful of it, which will make them see R2P negatively. Such responses have the potential to erode international cooperation and discourage governments from participating in international processes intended to stop crimes and advance global security.

Imperialist interventions frequently place short-term political or strategic objectives ahead of long-term stability and post-conflict rehabilitation. The intruding powers may leave behind areas tainted by chaos and instability once these goals are swiftly attained. Due to the "responsibility to rebuild" not being met, the duty to Protect (R2P) theory is rendered ineffective, resulting in increased suffering and conflict in the impacted areas. Inadequate efforts to stabilize the country following Muammar Gaddafi's ousting led to ongoing violence, political fragmentation, and humanitarian crises; this dynamic is best illustrated by the aftermath of the Libyan intervention, underscoring the vital importance of sustained international engagement in rebuilding war-torn societies.

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 demonstrated the country's long-standing geopolitical and strategic interests in the area, especially with regard to the vital naval port in Sevastopol, which enables major power projection in the Black Sea and other areas. The action was taken in reaction to what was seen as a danger to Russian influence as Ukraine shifted its relationship with the EU and NATO, upending Russia's sphere of influence. Russia's primary motivation for the intervention was self-interest, even if it made an effort to defend its actions on humanitarian pretexts, such as defending communities that spoke Russian. Human rights

breaches and significant civilian displacement particularly against vulnerable populations were brought on by the annexation. This case study demonstrates how regional instability and international norms can be undermined by geopolitical objectives that take precedence over humanitarian concerns.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) theory, which was developed to stop mass atrocities and reframe sovereignty around the duty to protect populations, has serious obstacles in its application and legitimacy due to the idea of humanitarian imperialism. This essay has examined how strong nations frequently use humanitarian excuses to further their geopolitical objectives, undercutting the R2P tenets. Examples of how interventions can deviate from humanitarian objectives and cause protracted instability and mistrust among nations include the NATO intervention in Libya and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The enforcement of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in a selective manner due to political, economic, or strategic reasons undermines its credibility and makes efforts to stop crimes and protect human rights globally more difficult. In order to tackle these obstacles, it is imperative to foster international agreement, encourage regional collaboration, hold interventionists accountable, and guarantee transparency in the decision-making procedures.

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