## State, Society and Humanitarian War

Military interventions since the end of the cold war have often been justified as humanitarian. But, as both experts in international relations and others have noted, that justification requires deciding whether we should give priority to state sovereignty or the rights of individuals. In the best-case scenario, nations intervene in other sovereign nations to prevent despotic leaders from violating human rights; however, the nice-sounding ideal of "humanitarianism" can easily become a pretext for interventions that have little moral justification.

"Humanitarian" reasons had special relevance in the post-9/11 "war on terror" since coalition partners in Afghanistan believed they were fighting Al Qaeda to protect Americans and others from additional terrorist attacks and to prevent the Taliban from abusing Afghanis. In Iraq, the United States and United Kingdom did not act in self-defense but conducted a preemptive strike in the mistaken belief it would prevent Iraq from causing harm to others through weapons of mass destruction. Are humanitarian interventions ever justified? What about when the premise is mistaken? In international law, instructs Richard Falk, the United Nations was designed to act as the negotiating body that exerts a "bright yellow light of caution". He argues that the UN should be empowered to check whether an intervention is based on a false pretext of humanitarianism, or conversely, when the doctrine of non-intervention allows the world community to ignore a true humanitarian crisis such as genocide.[17]

For Japan in the past these norms governing the ideal of "humanitarian intervention" were especially important because they suggest conditions under which Japan can constitutionally play a role in international military interventions. Moreover, given Japan's commitment to uphold the ideals of the United Nations as part of its own campaign to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, it was significant that the nation followed America's lead in rejecting the United Nations in order to invade Iraq.

Two selections from *The Asia-Pacific Journal* call attention to Japanese concerns about "humanitarianism." **Shirakawa Toru, in "Invasion in the Name of Humanitarian Aid: The U.S. in Afghanistan"** observed and interviewed American soldiers in Afghanistan and discovered that humanitarian aid and violence are hard to separate and that the soldiers have many motivations for joining the military, and are often driven more by ambitions for overcoming class obstacles rather than patriotic spirit or humanitarianism. He is troubled by the fact that humanitarianism is not more actively promoted on the ground in Afghanistan.

[17] Richard Falk, *The Costs of War: International Law, the UN, and World Order after Iraq* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 152.

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