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### **Neighbors on Alert: Regional Views on Intervention**

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"In an ideal world, the international community would be so solidly united in pursuit of peace and freedom that its resolve to halt humanitarian crises and punish perpetrators would serve as a deterrent to mass killing. Such a vision for the future could foresee a cooperative division of labor between the United Nations (UN), with its universal membership, and organizations with regional members who provide a kind of 'neighborhood watch' that gives early warning, takes preventive measures before problems become crises, and, together with the UN, takes action to protect human lives when preventive measures have failed. Unfortunately, the real world has a long way to go before it reaches the ideal."

So begins the summary report of the Regional Responses to Internal War Program of the Fund for Peace, entitled "[Neighbors on Alert: Regional Views on Humanitarian Intervention](#)." On October 14, 2003 the U.S. Institute of Peace co-hosted a [Current Issues Briefing](#) with the Fund for Peace to discuss the report and to surface issues associated with the involvement of regional organizations in regional conflicts.

Panelists included the report's author, Jason Ladnier of the Fund for Peace, contributor William Nash, and regional discussants who attended the respective regional conferences held by the Fund, which conducted its study over a course of two years: Luis Betancourt of the Woodrow Wilson Center discussed regional responses in the Americas; Francis Deng of Johns Hopkins University discussed Africa; Cambodian ambassador to the United States Roland Eng discussed Asia; and Dutch ambassador to the United States Boudewijn van Eenennaam discussed Europe. Institute Africa specialist Michael Southwick moderated the event.

#### **Hegemonophobia**

It is commonly thought that when conditions in a country become so horrific that intervention is considered, it is far more preferable for the international community to collectively take action rather than a single state actor. Views differ, however, on what constitutes conditions for intervention, and how to incorporate international law into collective action, particularly in a world in which sovereignty is paramount, and "hegemonophobia" is common.

International conventions regarding non-interference in internal affairs are often cited, suggesting why the marshalling of political will in the early stages of conflict is so difficult. When diplomacy and other nonmilitary tools fail, however, what parameters delineate that conditions are so horrific they warrant military intervention? Who can authorize it? Who should make up the forces? How should intervention be conducted to ensure long-term success?

Complicating these issues is the fact that there are distinct views from different regions, and no uniform framework worldwide for achieving consensus. Understanding these distinct views is critical to establishing a point of departure if intervention is desirable. Oftentimes even horrific conditions do not result in the appropriate response. During incidents such as in Bosnia, pressure by neighbors was catalytic

in marshalling the needed [consensus for intervention](#).

## **Africa**

The study revealed, surprisingly, that Africa is the most forward leaning region in terms of looking to its own sub-regions to take action, and that lack of resources, rather than political will, is the biggest obstacle to collective intervention.

The African Union, while serving as a voice for the continent, has limited capacity as it reorganizes and expands after its transformation as an organization from its largely ineffective predecessor, the Organization of African Unity. Although Africans traditionally adhered to a policy of non-interference, the last decades have shown them that this was unsustainable.

While their lack of capacity still necessitates resorting to external support, they tend to see "the international community as an unreliable partner," and want to assume responsibility for their regional affairs, so they increasingly resort to sub-regional initiatives.

Given the fact that Africans recognize the need for a collaborative approach, Deng suggested that regional organizations there could exert influence on governments through persuasion and, if warranted, by threatening coercive measures. He cited the case of Sudan as a good example of the collaboration needed between sub-regional organizations and the international community. The countries of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) were requested by the government of the Sudan to mediate the conflict between the government and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army. IGAD members agreed to do so on the condition that the root causes of the conflict be addressed.

Supported by a number of Western countries, the IGAD peace process initially seemed very promising, then stalled, but then more recently gained momentum with the support of the international community. It is not unreasonable to expect that if a nation's citizens are suffering and their physical safety and fundamental rights are threatened, diplomatic intercession will be employed, and then other forms of coercive pressure, especially if leadership there continues to fail its citizenry.

## **Europe**

While there are somewhat different perceptions about intervention among Europeans that stem from whether they've lived among the more stable countries, or were under Soviet influence, or suffered through the Yugoslav wars, it can be generally said that there is a reluctance to respond militarily outside of the UN framework despite a great capacity to do so.

Military interventions are a result of political decisions, but marshalling political will is difficult in Europe. A militating factor may be that Europe's institutions are undergoing integration. Some would point to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to illustrate that a political definition of Europe is more useful than a geographic one.

Europeans are generally cautious about empowering regional organizations to intervene militarily without the approval of the UN Security Council because regional powers there are often too close to their national agendas. Van Eenennaam challenged the view that Europeans see the United Nations as the sole source for legitimacy for collective action, and suggested that in fact international organizations could be better employed to "do what they are best at." He favors the concept of a quick deployment force for early intervention, but noted that this idea has surfaced without success three times at the United Nations.

## **Asia**

In Asia, there is a recognized need to do more to strengthen organizational capacity for internal crisis and

emergency response, but Asians generally place a high value on sovereignty. Somewhat reserved about talking about their neighbors, they tend to prefer instead quiet diplomacy.

Because of a great mix of government systems, ethnic identities, economic approaches, and variety of religions, there is a tendency for Asians to overlook neighbors' problems. Cost considerations of a regional intervention, particularly when the crisis involves a state with a strong military (such as the monumental famine in North Korea), are a factor; added to this is the consideration that any action in the region, particularly in North Korea, would be circumscribed by the influence of the United States, China, Russia, and Japan.

Generally tending to focus on internal issues, Northeast Asia is probably the most dominated by power competition and realpolitik. These countries are generally proud of their progress on human rights and democratization. Given the presence of strong militaries and nuclear weapons, they recognize the need for more regional dialogue, though the region overall has not experienced failures as in Africa by the United Nations and regional organizations. Still, Eng said, the United Nations would be considered a tool of last resort. He noted that Asia is still in the process reshaping its regional organizations.

### **Latin America**

As in Asia, there is a recognized need to do more to strengthen organizational capacity to address internal crises and emergencies; but unlike other areas of the world, there is a tendency to think that the issues that plague the region (corruption, small arms and drug trafficking, abject poverty, urban crime) are not likely to be solved by military force, especially from outside.

Highly valuing sovereignty, Latin Americans tend to refrain from meddling in their neighbors' affairs. Likewise proud of their progress on human rights and democratization, they tend to think that crises of the magnitude requiring military intervention "just don't happen in Latin America."

Additionally, the history of the U.S. role in the Western Hemisphere is a significant sore spot nearly universal to Latin Americans. Intervention is a "bad word," and intolerance for unilateralism helps further the case for strengthened regional capacities. Bitencourt cited an information vacuum among the public that militates against consensus-building, and suggested that good citizen education would be necessary to gain support for any potential intervention. For leaders to simply cite citizen security and act without popular consensus is unacceptable because such a course would too closely resemble the record of the United States in the region.

### **United Nations**

All the panelists, and most of the participants in the two-year study, agreed upon the importance of the UN Security Council playing a role in many aspects of an intervention (decision, coalition-building, etc.), but recognized its inherent weaknesses. A better relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations would help to fashion better international architecture for intervention, and would go far to identify capacities, strengths, and weaknesses of regional organizations.

This would make the United Nations and international organizations better prepared to bolster regional efforts. Realpolitik and the realities of great power competition often create conditions and results different from what a state would produce left to its own devices or left to the mercy of its neighbors. There is sensitivity regarding self-interested manipulations by great powers, to wit: "Don't play us off each other now, just when we are coming together regionally, economically, etc," noted Deng. Previous failures can be great tools if seen as lessons learned for the future.

### **Conclusions**

Given the diversity of interests, developing new international architecture for military interventions

intended for humanitarian reasons will be a lengthy process, long-term success will be hard to come by, and in the interim, genocide could still happen. Still, the good news is that there is decreasing tolerance for gross human rights violations, massive displacement and loss of life, and threats to international security. This has produced increased recognition of the need for coalitions of the willing.

Regional actors are best placed to address "root and brute causes" on a preventive level, and they may be more in touch with what would be a preferable strategy, for example "exit state rather than exit date." As in any cooperative and collective endeavor, transparency will be critical to the process, one that engages regional organizations more fully and bolsters the success rate of their efforts, rather than dictating to them how intervention should be done or utilizing them to further other ends.

## Of Related Interest

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