

Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*

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Volume 29, spring 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs29br08>

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Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Mellon, J. G. (2009). Compte rendu de [Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*]. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 29, 0-0.

Bass, Gary J. *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*. New York: Random House, 2008; Vintage Books, 2009.

Gary Bass defends the notion of humanitarian intervention from both its realist and leftist critics. Realist critics suggest, he observes, that foreign policy must invariably be predicted based on national interest, geopolitical considerations, and the pursuit of national security and power. From such a point of view, other considerations, like the fostering of human rights or the prevention of genocide, may be seen as indulgences or as diversions distracting policy-makers from genuine priorities or even as putting in jeopardy the pursuit of the national interest. Leftist critics assume, he suggests, that states invariably pursue self-interest and that any claims on the part of states to be acting on the basis of humanitarian or disinterested motives are necessarily cynical, corrupt, and self-serving. Bass identifies a convergence of such critiques of humanitarian intervention — realists asserting that foreign policy should and invariably is about power and leftists contending that states, whatever motives they may claim to be acting on the basis of, inevitably are pursuing power politics. Bass is alarmed at the perception on the part of many that humanitarian intervention was a novel innovation of the 1990s that has, by the late first decade of the current century, come to be discredited as a reckless imperialist or neo-imperialist attempt to impose values on others.

Contrary to such assumptions, Bass maintains that humanitarian intervention has a history going back at least as far as the Western European intervention in Greece in the 1820s. Bass provides an entertaining and illuminating account of the controversy arising from atrocities in Greece that eventually led to an intervention and ultimately to Greek independence. He follows that with a similarly fascinating account of the intervention in Syria and Lebanon in the 1860s, and the clash between Disraeli and Gladstone over what Britain should do in response to atrocities in Bulgaria. Finally, he examines the unwillingness of the Wilson administration to intervene in the face of the persecution of the Armenians in the First World War. Bass gives the reader fascinating portraits of figures like Byron, romantic poet and celebrity who ultimately died in the pursuit of Greek independence but who, unlike many British sympathizers with the Greek cause, did not confuse the Greeks of the 1820s with the Greeks of classical times; Castlereagh, who committed suicide in the face of mental illness and the stresses of guiding British foreign policy; and Canning, who took over guidance of British foreign policy and had to reconcile balance-of-power considerations while responding to domestic pressure to come to the support of the Greeks. Bass portrays Disraeli as fearing that intervention to help the Bulgarians might weaken the Ottoman Empire, thereby facilitating Russian expansionism and putting British control of India in jeopardy; while Gladstone approached politics and the cause of the Bulgarians with an evangelical fervor and who, with some exceptions, nevertheless was prepared to apply his liberal principles to other parts of the world, as was demonstrated by his support for home rule for Ireland. Bass argues not only that humanitarian intervention has much more of a history than is frequently assumed but, as well, that this history records instances that were either irrelevant to the pursuit of strategic interest or even at odds with apparent strategic interest. This history also records, he points out, that intervention could be constrained by multilateral agreements.

Bass relates the emergence of humanitarian intervention and support for it to the extension of the franchise and to the expansion in numbers of newspapers and their circulation. Such developments removed foreign policy as the exclusive preserve of monarchs, foreign ministers, diplomats, and generals and informed and animated ordinary citizens. He expresses concern that today's public may be shirking their responsibility of seeking information about the world in favor of obsession with celebrity gossip and showmanship masquerading as journalism. He also worries about the trends where newspapers, newsmagazines, television, and radio are closing bureaus and reducing serious coverage of foreign affairs. It is sometimes the case, he notes, that public attention follows on media coverage and that media are more likely to cover news in locales that are more accessible.

This book will appeal to both specialists and general readers. Whether or not one shares the author's belief that Western powers should from time to time be prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of protecting the defenseless thousands of miles away, one will find his depiction of the human drama of history to be fascinating. There is an understandable and appropriate dread of loss of life and sustainment of injury among young men and women in the service of their country. From a moral and political point of view, governments struggle to justify even limited losses in the name of possibly saving the lives of faraway people who most in the country undertaking the sacrifice will never meet. The temptation is to take the view that such distant people will always be fighting among themselves and to focus on instances of corruption to allege that all sides in such conflicts are equally in it for themselves. In hindsight, the temptation is always to bemoan the lack of response after the fact. One can then debate the likely effects of earlier or more strenuous responses in places like Bosnia, Somalia, or Rwanda. Bass is

concerned that the currently prevailing opinion seems to be that humanitarian intervention represents a short-lived fad from the immediate post-Cold War era which has been rejected as either dangerous or disingenuous. He does point out caveats and cautions but is ultimately concerned that current opinion may be inclined to rule out humanitarian intervention when it can be successfully undertaken in favor of standing by as atrocities take place, unless there exists some other geopolitical justification for intervention. Certain to be thought-provoking, this book is highly recommended.

James G. Mellon graduated from Dalhousie University and has taught at Mount Allison, Dalhousie, and Saint Mary's Universities.

Newman, Michael. *Humanitarian Intervention: Confronting the Contradictions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Much has been written about the subject of humanitarian intervention in the decade that followed the 1999 Kosovo intervention; and as we move toward the 10-year anniversary of the now well-known *Responsibility to Protect* doctrine drafted by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001, one wonders whether anything new can be said about this important topic. Michael Newman's new book, *Humanitarian Intervention: Confronting the Contradictions*, attempts to make sense of the voluminous literature on humanitarian intervention by advancing a fundamentally critical examination of the various international policies on this subject by examining their impact on those states where humanitarian emergencies are most likely to occur — that is, on developing and so-called “transitional” states.

Newman's main argument is that the various military interventions in recent years have had only limited success in bringing about an enduring peace in those states that were targets of such interventions and that this is because of the overly narrow conception of “humanitarianism” under which most advocates of intervention operate. Thus, the author's main purpose is to advance a broader notion of humanitarianism that not only addresses the various acute and “conscience-shocking” crimes that we normally see as being grounds for humanitarian intervention but that also addresses the problems of global inequality and poverty. In this sense, Newman seeks to take a more macro approach to the problem of human suffering that avoids the all-too-common tendency to only address these problems *after* gross violations of human rights have manifested themselves.

Newman's method in this study is to draw on the existing literature “rather than contributing original research into specific cases of humanitarian intervention” (p. 6) and is therefore best described as a broad survey of the topic that aims to “re-think” it, rather than one that addresses specific concerns arising from its practice. The first two chapters consist of broad reviews of well-known legal and normative arguments about the topic that prevailed both during and after the Cold War. This is followed in chapter 3 by a discussion of the conditions under which humanitarian intervention is said to be permissible, wherein the author concurs with the widely held view that the criteria for intervention should be highly restrictive. Yet this is where he begins to make his own contribution to the debate — that is, by arguing for his broader notion of humanitarianism that includes the structural causes of the human suffering at issue. Chapters 4 and 5 seek to flesh out this broader notion of humanitarianism by examining, respectively, the effects that neoliberal economic institutions and the trend toward political democratization have had on human welfare in the states of the global South and the shortcomings of the international governmental regimes that are established after the combat phases of humanitarian interventions have ended. According to Newman, these shortcomings reinforce the need to adopt a wider notion of humanitarianism, which the author subsequently does in his final chapter by endorsing the ideas of human security and the famous “responsibility to protect” doctrine. In sum, Newman argues that this broader notion of humanitarianism can provide a basis for human protection by not only providing legitimacy for using military force in truly emergency situations of human suffering but also by addressing issues of poverty and inequality, which are the root cause of the emergency situations that humanitarian intervention typically seeks to remedy.

Newman's book is mainly a discussion of topics that have already been the subject of much scholarly inquiry and is therefore not a groundbreaking work in the same vein as, for instance, Nicholas Wheeler's *Saving Strangers* (2000). It nevertheless makes a welcome contribution to the debate by incorporating insights from other areas of humanitarian studies into the discourse on humanitarian intervention that seek to get at the root causes of human suffering, rather than just addressing emergency situations, by which time the international community has