

Jochen Hippler

The United Nations and the Slow Death of Humanitarian Interventionism

Military interventions have a long history both prior to and during the Cold War, and even at the turn of the decade it was not apparent that they might no longer be undertaken in the future. Justifying these interventions on „moral“ grounds, or on the grounds of international law, or as „selfless“ acts was also nothing new. In this way, Soviet intervention in Hungary, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan were officially presented, not as acts of super-power politics or imperial domination, but as acts of „solidarity“; while the USA fought for „freedom“ in Vietnam, for international law in the Gulf War, and liberated (non-existent) hostages in Grenada. Even the suppression of Czechoslovakia by fascist Germany in 1938 was justified by the attainment of self-determination for the Sudetenland Germans. Classic European colonialism was seen as a civilizing and therefore humane act as well as a religious and Christian duty. Similarly, the official reason for the colonization of the Philippines by the USA was to bring democracy to the Filipinos.

Interventions always require legitimacy, and wherever possible the intervening powers claim altruistic justifications as they have always done. To quote Lyons and Mastaduno: „Great powers frequently articulate their particular interests in the language of universal principles in an effort to persuade others to accept them.“

Whether interpreted narrowly or widely, „humanitarian“ justifications for interventions are not a new phenomenon, and do not in themselves give rise to a debate on „Humanitarian Interventionism“. What distinguishes the debate is the coupling of three specific elements: the historical moment - namely the end of the Cold War; the thesis that humanitarian considerations do not only have a legitimizing function, but are in fact the real reason for interventions; and finally the central role of the UN in ensuring that measures necessary for humanitarian reasons are not undertaken individually by the great powers but by the „World community“, thereby preventing the abuse of power.

The Starting Point of the Debate.

Following the end of the Cold War and as a result of the second Gulf War, the status of the United Nations was greatly enhanced. The paralysis of its Security Council caused by the mutual blockades of the super powers had disappeared, thus enabling the organization to „act“ for the first time since the beginning of the Cold War. Moreover, at roughly the same time intensive discussions on „humanitarian interventionism“ began. In situations of human catastrophe, the „world community“ would no longer stand aside, but intervene as mediator

and arbitrator. If that were not enough, humanitarian intervention would be necessary as a final resort against massacres and genocide, or in order to impose international law.

The peculiarity of the discussion on interventionism had two aspects: the first of which was the moral dimension. Without this, a debate on humanitarian interventionism would have been impossible; without „humanitarian“ considerations the discussion would have been reduced to questions of the usefulness and feasibility of interventions in general. Only through the moral argument could the debate on intervention around the world (mainly the Third World), become a discussion on „humanitarian interventionism“. The second was that, „humanitarian intervention“ had to be multilateral, and provide an alternative to the indifference of the community of nations towards humanitarian catastrophes and the imperial and unilateral policies of the great powers. Humanitarian interventionism was closely associated with the UN: the „World community“, the „Community of Nations“ would realize it through and within the framework of the United Nations. The achievement of human rights and the upholding of International Law were the proclaimed aims, even though other aspects of International Law, such as the territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of frontiers, the principle of non-intervention and so on, would have to be bent or broken in the process.

The tendency towards re-interpreting International Law in this context, has been particularly clearly articulated by Judy Gallant:

„Sovereignty should not be viewed as an absolute but rather as a flexible concept capable of restrictions and exceptions. Similarly, non-intervention must function as a relative precept that can be overridden by humanitarian concerns when atrocities rise to an intolerable level.“

Winrich Kühne called for the following: „The basic principles of International Law and UN statutes, such as the law on non-intervention and the right to self-determination need to be further developed or critically re-examined.“

The conservative British magazine *The Economist* candidly summed up the political aspect of the discussion in a nut-shell: „Nobody wants to amend the rules in a formal way. But they can be stretched. The most effective, and the most acceptable, way of stretching them is to play the humanitarian card. The right to „intervention“ raises hackles. But the right to „assistance“? A much less dangerous concept. Yet the one can lead to the other, especially when peace-enforcers are drawn in to protect the assistance and the assistants“.

The potential or real contradictions between humanitarian considerations and International law call for the widest possible political consensus within the „World Community“, in practical terms, this amounts to a decisive role for the UN. Unilateral interventions justified by humanitarian concerns would be difficult to establish as legitimate humanitarian interventions: the intervening powers would always be able to choose between intervening for humanitarian and not intervening on the grounds of observing International Law (and other reasons too), and would thus have a free hand to choose whether or not to intervene. This made it possible to easily legitimize any form of national power politics, using either the

humanitarian or legal argument. Only the building of the widest possible international consensus, within the framework of the UN, could in principle (or in reality) prevent this danger. Kühne makes the same point.

Morton Halperin (who was subsequently appointed to an important position in the US Defense Department) and David Scheffer have summed this up :

„In most cases, unilateral intervention would violate principles of international law and establish precedents that could only lead to more lawless behaviour by governments. There is a growing realization that if military force is to be used it should be applied collectively - that collective uses of military force can be legitimate means to achieve legitimate ends. Initiatives at the United Nations and in various regional organizations are beginning to move in this direction.“

When President Clinton took office, the UN was still held in high regard and the new government in Washington declared its desire to take greater part in collective UN Operations. The American Ambassador to the UN, Madelleine Albright, spoke of an „energetic multilateralism“ that the Clinton administration intended to follow. Henceforth, the USA would undertake military measures „together with other nations instead of on its own.“ In line with this new thinking in Washington, US troops were, should the situation arise, to be deployed under UN Command (i.e. also under the command on non-US officers). Halperin’s position, quoted above, aptly sums up the rhetoric of the early Clinton administration.

Multilateralism and humanitarian interventionism reached their peak between 1991 and 1993. Three conspicuous events point to this. The first is Security Council Resolution 688, of April 1991. This justified military intervention by UN member states (in practice - the USA, France and Great Britain) in Northern Iraq, undertaken as admonishment for the suppression and massacre of the Kurds and Shiites by the Iraqi government.

The second high point was represented by the publication of the report „An Agenda for Peace“ by the General Secretary of the UN Boutros Boutros Ghali, in June 1992. Here Boutros Ghali dealt in great detail with the subject of Preventive diplomacy, Peacekeeping and Peacemaking, and put forward proposals for reforming the UN, to put it in a better position to fulfil its new tasks. He even went so far as to call for a UN task force of 80,000 troops who could be ready for action within 24-48 hours.

The third and most recent high point of humanitarian interventionism was marked by the American intervention in Somalia in December 1992, superseded a few months later by a more or less US-controlled UN operation (UNOSOM II). In all three cases particular foreign-political or strategic interests of the great powers were not apparent as reasons for intervention. The Bush administration had long refused to intervene in Northern Iraq („not in the national interest“) and was only forced into it by internal political pressure, whereas in the case of Somalia it took action in advance of similar pressure.

Since 1993 humanitarian interventionism has become increasingly unfashionable. The change in thinking was exemplified by the position of the British magazine *The Economist*. Whereas at the end of 1992, it called strongly for a further widening of the UN's role in humanitarian interventionism, in early 1995 it saw itself forced to ask „Can Peacekeeping Survive?“ and this was not a rhetorical question. This downhill trend can be verified by the reactions to subsequent crisis and conflict situations, in both structural and conceptual terms.

Experiences

It is the level of political pragmatism that cost humanitarian interventionism much of its attractiveness; in many instances, humanitarian interventionism failed entirely and paid for this failure with its credibility. The classic cases in point are Somalia and Bosnia. Going by the proclaimed yardsticks, humanitarian interventions would have been necessary in several other instances, but they were no longer considered seriously.

The UN's inability to successfully intervene in the former Yugoslavia on a humanitarian basis, in spite of the number of soldiers on the spot became a symbol of its helplessness. Rhetoric hardly ever coincided with the power and the will to push something through, „safe havens“ were declared and were then left unprotected, top politicians were branded as war criminals and then courted as negotiating parties. The question which has been posed time and again, as to why the UN and the permanent members of its Security Council had been prepared to send more than half a million soldiers to the Gulf War, but held back from conducting a military operation in Bosnia, drew our attention to the interests of the countries involved. Shortly after the Iraqi invasion, an adviser to President Bush, had in fact trenchantly outlined the USA's interests in Kuwait and the Gulf: “We need the oil. It sounds good to talk about stepping in for freedom. But Kuwait and Saudi Arabia aren't exactly democracies. If their most important export product had been oranges, then a middle-ranking civil servant from the state department would have stated our position [on the Iraqi aggression] and we would have closed the state department for the month of August.”

US interests in the Gulf War may well have been more complex than this suggests, yet it was very clear that American, British and French interests explained why humanitarian considerations remained peripheral; they explain why international law was forcibly imposed in the Gulf, while massacres and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia did not lead to any attempt to forcibly resolve the conflict. The situation in Bosnia shows clearly the fate of humanitarian interventionism when it does not coincide with the interests of the great powers.

Although it attracted less publicity, this was again the case in Northern Iraq: in April 1991, in accordance with UN Resolution 688, a safe haven for the Kurds was declared here, and maintained against Saddam Hussein's troops. However, when Turkish forces repeatedly attacked the Kurds and finally forced their way in again in March 1995 with 35,000 soldiers, and even bombed Kurdish civilian villages, the safe haven became worthless. The German news agency dpa reported:

„On Friday, the USA declared itself fully behind the Turkish invasion in Northern Iraq, thereby underlining the great and strategic importance of Turkey in the region.“

This finally made it clear that the „safe haven“ had been mainly a tactical means of coercing Baghdad, and its humanitarian aims were only carried out when they were useful as a stick against the Iraqi regime. The Kurds were not protected from Turkish attacks, and humanitarian considerations remained secondary. It was only after much hesitation and criticism in Europe that the Turkish invasion was mildly criticized.

The second traumatic experience for humanitarian interventionism took place in Somalia. An operation that began as good publicity with a stage managed landing on the beach (easier ways such as using the harbor were not spectacular enough), and was officially aimed at relieving famine in Somalia, turned into a battle resulting in both US and UN casualties. Somalia became a salutary example. It demonstrated that even the showpiece of humanitarian interventionism did not really deserve its title and ended in a bloody dead-end.

Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar are right to point out that the very premise of the operation was dubious. They are highly critical of the policies of the UN agencies before the intervention, in particular in the run up to the famine:

„Somalia has shown UN agencies for what they are: slow and cumbersome, paralyzed by bureaucratic infighting, and extraordinarily inept on the ground. The UN specialized agencies, including UNICEF and the World Health Organization, could have prevented the Somali disaster from getting out of control, but chose not to.“

A UN official in Nairobi offered this explanation for its hesitant policies: „This is Africa, not Europe, if that is any answer.“ It wasn't an answer of course, but a suggestion that a mixture of racist feelings and feasibility considerations were more important than humanitarian arguments.

The skilful and astonishingly successful efforts of the Algerian diplomat Mohamed Sahnoun, acting as a special envoy for the UN from March to October 1992, who managed to defuse the crisis in the country using a combination of emergency help, material incentives, the creation of basic political conditions, and talks and negotiations with all relevant social groups, were wrecked by UN headquarters. First, they ignored his urgent pleas for support and then publicly undermined his position until he was forced to resign. Only then was military intervention „necessary“, for political rather than humanitarian reasons, however. Having wrecked Sahnoun's efforts, the only remaining alternatives were to retreat or to use military force.

„Apologists for the United States adventure in Somalia will argue that it overcame a famine. This is wrong. It was abundantly clear at the time that the famine was almost over when the troops pushed inland from Mogadishu. One of the force's unexpected problems was counseling soldiers bewildered by the absence of masses of starving people. By the time he was forced to resign as special UN envoy in late October after publicly criticizing the UN for its slow response to the crisis, Mohamed Sahnoun was already recommending a

halt to massive food imports. Excellent rainfall meant that a good harvest was expected for January. Rain and the tenacity of Somali farmers ended the famine, not foreign intervention.“

The intervention in Somalia would have been superfluous if the great powers and the UN, who intervened belatedly, had shown their commitment to humanitarian rather than military involvement at the right time. Political and general disinterest in Somalia contributed considerably to the humanitarian catastrophe, which was then turned into a matter of European and North American domestic politics through alarming reports from relief organizations and the media. In the end, intervention was undertaken, neither for foreign political reasons, nor humanitarian reasons, but for internal political reasons, because President Bush, at the end of his term in office, wanted a final highlight in his career. The intervention clearly showed the growing influence of the media - especially that of the big international TV companies - on aspects of Western foreign policy. It was not the tragic events in Somalia in themselves that accounted for the intervention, but the public concern created by media interest in the crisis.

Peter J. Schraeder has thus summarized the results of his research on decision-making processes in Washington:

„Although originally hailed by proponents as potentially constituting the basis for a new U.S. doctrine of humanitarian military intervention in the post-Cold War international system, Operation Restore Hope in reality demonstrated the sporadic impact of U.S domestic politics in contributing to a pro-humanitarian relief foreign-policy orientation on the part of the White House.“

Schraeder mentions US relief in the famine in Marxist-Leninist Ethiopia in 1983-85, President Nixon's decision to provide relief in the break-away province of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war, and the imposition of economic sanctions against South Africa by the Congress, against the wishes of President Reagan in 1986. He continues:

„In all of these cases, including the Bush administration's decision to commit combat troops to Somalia, extensive media coverage of the event in question played an important role in generating popular interest, which, in turn, led to growing public demands for changes in U.S. policy. Indeed, if Operation Restore Hope was indicative of a new U.S. doctrine of humanitarian military intervention, it not only would be operative in Somalia, but also in a variety of other African countries - the Sudan, Mozambique, and Liberia to name only three - in which hundreds of thousands, if not millions, are similarly faced with death due to famine and ethnic and civil conflict.“

It was not so much due to the good measure of opportunism, hypocrisy and incompetence at work, that humanitarian interventionism was discredited by the experience in Somalia, but because the operation failed on just about every count. US and then UN troops were themselves responsible for countless heavy human casualties, and breaches of international law, such as the shelling of the hospital in Mogadishu in June 1993. Major General S.L. Arnold was the Commander of the US Army units in Somalia. He considered the operation

a success, but his report gives several insights into the difficulties involved. „Prior to deployment, planning was difficult due to the scarcity of both time and good information.“ This, coupled with the absence of a political headstart led to an absurd situation: „As the deployment began, missions were still unclear,“ this led to „mission creep“ a gradual change of the shape and aims of the operation because of the unique dynamics of the area. „There was no way to identify friendly Somalis from those who would throw rocks or shoot weapons.“ Despite this starting position, The Rules of Engagement, were, according to the General, „the most liberal I have ever seen for a UN-sponsored operation since the Korean conflict.“

In short, this meant that the US and UN troops had been sent into a situation of which they had no understanding, and without any clear orders for action. At the same time they were given carte blanche for their behavior. This meant that the political responsibility for the nature and objectives of the action had in practice been delegated from the civilian leadership in Washington and New York to the troop commanders in Somalia. This opened the floodgates to racist practices, human rights abuses and the unseemly behavior of an occupying army, which to a large extent arose out of helplessness in having to face a situation that was simply too complex. If it really was impossible to differentiate friend from foe, how then could casualties among innocent civilians be avoided? What had been intended as a humanitarian intervening force sent to secure food supplies, was gradually transformed in to an army of occupation, or more accurately, just another a civil war militia. The show horse of humanitarian interventionism had been turned into a useless (and to some extent brutal) army involved in civil war.

The operation had not as yet failed completely, however. It is only when there were casualties among the US troops (and these were very few) that the mood changed. The fact that Somali civilians and Pakistani and Nigerian soldiers had died for the sake of the humanitarian character of the intervention was of secondary importance, but Western troops were not to be exposed to any risks. The operation was hurriedly called off, allowing humanitarian considerations even less weight than at its beginning. The „shoot to feed“ policy had failed.

After the experiences of Somalia and Bosnia, no one considered intervening in countless other situations of humanitarian catastrophe. For Afghanistan, Liberia, Southern Sudan, Chechnia, Kashmir - and many others places suffering wars and massacres - there was no mention of necessary humanitarian intervention. Opportunism and the interests of the great powers have become the regular yardsticks of their policies, while humanitarian questions are limited to rhetoric and political symbolism.

Basic and Structural Problems of Humanitarian Interventionism

The failure of humanitarian interventionism in specific cases and the decline in its attractiveness as a concept and as a basis of policy-making should not however be solely attributed to isolated cases or to the cynicism of governments. Both have a role to play, but only a secondary one. A number of structural reasons can indeed be cited:

The interests of countries, governments, or groups of countries regularly prove themselves to be more crucial in deciding whether or not interventions are carried out than are humanitarian considerations. Military interventions- regardless of their intention - cannot usually be organized without costs or risks. Even a successful intervention burdens the intervening country's budget, and difficult or failed interventions raise the scale of costs and add even more important political costs to the problem. The loss of prestige abroad and domestic opposition are only two of the negative consequences that governments are keen to avoid. This means that as a rule, interventions are only undertaken when their advantages and chances of success substantially outweigh the disadvantages and risks involved. Which explains why national interest carries so much weight. Guenter Lewy's hope that „it should be possible to generate a spirit of disinterested altruism that will support humanitarian intervention“ is therefore as naive as it is nice. „Selfless“ interventions are only undertaken if they are also considered useful. Berdal has expressed the problem thus:

„The Bosnian and Somali cases illustrate a fundamental dilemma that is likely increasingly to confront not only US but also other troop-contributing countries: how to explain to publics at home why lives should be put at risk when there is no compelling vital or national interest involved.“

Humanitarian crisis abroad - including the Third World - can in some circumstances completely change the domestic political climate of a potentially intervening country. A combination of the media, humanitarian relief agencies, churches, private initiatives, and political groups can in exceptional circumstances see it that a particular catastrophe is taken seriously and dramatically, resulting in widespread feeling that „something must be done.“ This can give the government a domestic incentive for humanitarian intervention. At any rate, this is usually a tactical measure, which consists of exploiting a political mood in order to improve and strengthen the position and prestige of a country or government. The intervention will be aimed primarily at the needs of and effect on domestic politics (or the media) rather than at resolving the crisis in a foreign country.

The conceptual framework necessary for successful humanitarianism intervention does not exist. In the public and political debate, questions regarding complex situations where whole countries or societies are in the process of fragmentation or have already been destroyed, are often reduced to simple alternatives: should we bomb them or not? Instead of seriously trying to work out the political, ethnic, religious, tribal, ecological, social and economic factors behind a humanitarian catastrophe, the genesis of the conflict is ignored for as long as possible, thereby forcing a quick solution later. The debate and practice of humanitarian interventionism are often merely avoidance strategies, purporting to overcome crises.

The creeping realization that many humanitarian catastrophes do not have military causes and cannot therefore be solved militarily makes humanitarian interventions appear even less attractive, even from the tactical and opportunistic point of view. In the context of conventional violent conflicts, military interventions can - under certain conditions - be effective, regardless of their legitimacy. In countries and societies undergoing processes of decay and disintegration, the pre-condition required for an effective display of military power - a

clearly defined and recognizable opponent - often does not exist. I have discussed this in greater detail elsewhere. Non-intervention by the UN and the USA in Rwanda and Burundi could well be related to this realization, as well as the fact that there were limited interests. In specific operations, the intervening parties often find themselves without the necessary information and orientation and are helpless. Berdal soberly makes the point that „the ability of the UN to intervene effectively in internal conflicts was overestimated.“ This is indeed so, and to a lesser degree is also true of other coalitions of nations or of great powers acting unilaterally. The failure of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, of the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Americans in Vietnam and countless other comparable cases are all related to the fact that military superiority alone is not enough, where intersocial clashes in foreign countries are concerned. This is no incentive for future humanitarian interventions.

Problems of Humanitarian Interventionism Within the Framework of the UN

- unrealistic and exaggerated expectations in recent years sinking prestige
- lack of funds, low moral standards regarding payment by its members
- cumbersome bureaucracy and incompetence diminishing readiness of governments to take part in peace missions
- no troops of its own
- the choice between complex operations by dozens of units belonging to different countries and subordination to individual commanders
- every operation has to start from scratch, with no continuity of staff, administration or other preliminary groundwork
- no functioning concepts or strategies for conflicts within countries
- lack of political and financial independence from the dominant powers
- exploitation of the UN for national or imperial purposes
- lack of neutrality in certain conflict situations
- secondary position of the UN behind NATO, the EU and other alliances

The heydays of UN multilateralism are over. This was exemplified when in 1993 the Clinton administration distanced itself from its previous support of multinational and UN operations (including the possibility of allowing US troops to operate under UN command). In February 1993, President Clinton commissioned a general review of US policy on multilateral peacekeeping operations - his Presidential Review Directive (PRD)¹³. A draft circulated in July unmistakably stressed the importance of the UN and multilateral action. In the course of consultation (and as a result of the US losses in Somalia from summer 1993 onwards) little of this was left over. In January 1994, The Washington Post reported the following later version of the secret document: „The United States will never surrender command authority over the discipline and administration of American forces.“ Although this did not happen in Somalia either, it signified a denial of the UN or of any other form of multilateralism with the same rights. Today it is clear that US troops can only operate under US command (ie. not under the UN), and that its policy regarding the UN is guided by utilitarian considerations. To quote Anthony Lake, the National Security Adviser to President Clinton :

„We should act multilaterally where doing so advances our interests - and we should act unilaterally when that will serve our purpose. The simple question in each instance is this: what works best?“

In contrast to the euphoric expectations of the 1991-93 years, the UN today is considerably weakened. But the string of UN failures has not however, been the main cause of this: in Bosnia for example, not only the UN, but also the EU and NATO as well as the great powers have failed. The gradual loss of the UN's importance however, implies the same for the concept of humanitarian interventionism, since both are closely connected.

The weakening of the UN has partly to do with the fact that it is increasingly seen as losing its neutrality and as becoming an instrument of the great powers. Jeff Atkinson of Community Aid Abroad - the Australian relief organization associated with Oxfam, and with experience of several crisis situations, says:

„The United Nations in its present form does not always act in a legitimate or credible way when intervening in conflict situations. A basic problem is that it is not a politically neutral body. The dominance by more powerful Western nations, and the control of the Security Council by the Permanent Five, makes it a highly suspect instrument for authorizing military interventions in sovereign nations or facilitating peace processes.“

One of the central problems of humanitarian interventionism is that it can only function if it is credible. Its credibility depends on two interrelated factors: the irrefutable knowledge that the reasons for intervention are entirely humanitarian, and that humanitarian reasons have not simply been put forward as a pretext; and secondly, that the intervention be carried out independent of the interests of the great powers or those of the local and regional political forces. The moment UN operations - regardless of whether they are mediation, peacekeeping or humanitarian interventions - are interpreted as camouflage for great power politics, they have already failed politically. The very factor that first enabled the UN to be able to act, at the end of the Cold War - the consensus of the Permanent Five under the leadership of the USA - has since undermined its neutrality and eroded its role.

There has been no dearth of public statements suggesting the UN and humanitarian interventionism be used for imperial policies. The at the time French minister for humanitarian affairs Bernard Kouchner, demanded a „right to democratic intervention“ - in other words, a right for the democratic countries of the North to intervene in the South. The British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd went so far as to demand an „imperial role for the UN“ - this from a permanent member of the Security Council is hardly a selfless suggestion. Such suggestions may well have been sympathetically received in certain liberal academic or journalistic circles, but in the Third World they only reinforce the impression that the UN and humanitarian intervention are merely further instruments of the North's domination of the South.

Summary and Outlook

Considered a medium and organizing principle of fundamental significance following the end of the East-West conflict, humanitarian interventionism is now in retreat. Its failure in important situations, the gradual loss of the UN's significance since 1993, the disappointment of exaggerated hopes, and the step by step development of a New World Order, which continues to be guided by nationalist and egotistical interests rather than by international law and humanitarian principles, have all contributed to this.

As a concept or principle of conflict management, humanitarian interventionism has been taken surprisingly seriously in journalistic, academic and political circles, although in political practice it has been little more than a tactical game for the attainment of domestic or external political advantages, thinly veiled by humanitarian rhetoric. As an instrument of humanitarian or imperial aims, it has had little success, because to this day hardly any practicable or effective ways of intervening in specific, difficult intersocial conflicts have been found. Its multilateral character and association with the UN only made it particularly cumbersome. Even as an opportunistic form of politics, it was put on the defensive astonishingly quickly, as it became clear that it was not without costs. Even minimal losses in personnel and material goods were not acceptable where „only“ humanitarian aims were concerned, and no national interests were going to be achieved: this is hardly surprising.

For serious humanitarian interventionism, consistent humanitarian standards must be applied, and not the opportunist criteria of a particular nation. Decision making on its use in specific cases must be withdrawn from governments (especially those of the great powers pursuing their own interests) and met by an authority such as the International Court of Law. Even its implementation should not lie in the hands of individual governments, but exclusively in the hands of the UN. At the same time, no country should provide more than 10% of the troops, and the units should be immediately integrated into one UN force which in turn should not constitute part of any one country's army. These should be trained exclusively for operations mounted for humanitarian reasons and have to reckon with severe penalties for any offences against human rights or international law. Military personnel from the great powers would have to be excluded altogether from positions of command. Such pre-conditions might win back some credibility for humanitarian interventions, and allow them to be conducted with neutrality - pre-requisites for their success. This would at the same time however, depend on the development of new concepts for humanitarian intervention in intersocial conflicts based on the experience of Mohamed Sahnoun and the failed intervention in Somalia.

In all certainty, none of this will happen, since such reforms do not correspond to the interests of the permanent members of the Security Council, who have dominated the World Order ever since the end of the Cold War. The real development of humanitarian interventionism will probably take an entirely different course: there will continue to be selective operations in response to public political pressure by societies in the North, even if these are unsystematic or haphazard. Depending on internal and external political considerations and interests, governments will either give in to or resist public pressure. As far as the interventions are concerned, the protection of the intervening government's interests will carry greater weight than the humanitarian aspects of the organization; and in order to ap-

pear legitimate, the implementation of the intervention will be as multilateral as possible or undertaken under the UN umbrella, although in practice, command of the operation will not be handed over to the UN. Governments will organize their part in the intervention so that risks are minimized, implying limits to the range and duration of operations, while the humanitarian aspects of the operations will be stressed. Finally, there will also be interventions which have little or nothing to do with domestic pressure, but will be carried out for mainly foreign political interests (such as stability, control, access, resources and so on). Where possible, even such operations will be legitimized as „humanitarian“. In almost all cases the UN's role will concentrate on seeing to political safeguards and those of legitimacy and international law, while fundamental decisions are taken and the interventions carried out by individual great powers or alliances (such as NATO).

All this suggests that since 1991-93, and in the context of a New World Order, humanitarian interventionism has developed from being a new basic principle and apparatus of international politics intended as humanitarian, into an opportunistic practice of occasional intervention corresponding to a calculation of cost and advantage. In all certainty, we will continue to have interventions claiming to be humanitarian, but hardly any „humanitarian interventions“, in the strict sense of the words, where humanitarian considerations are the real reason for a truly neutral, multilateral UN intervention, without ulterior political motives. Humanitarian interventionism has been integrated with realpolitik and absorbed into it. We have thus come full circle, and are back to the position international relations were at before the Gulf War, the Agenda for Peace, Bosnia and Somalia. Yet this is only partially accurate: the episode of humanitarian interventionism has in some respects permanently affected international politics. It has made it possible to deal ever more flexibly with international law. Whereas before it could only be bent or broken on request, on grounds of realpolitik, today there are additional „humanitarian“ reasons for doing so. International law - a modest bastion anyway - has been further weakened by the arrogance and dominance of the great powers. This will continue to be the effect when there is little left of the substance of humanitarian interventionism.

English version of article published in German as:

Jochen Hippler, Das langsame Austrocknen des Humanitären Interventionismus,
in: Tobias Debiel / Franz Nuscheler (Eds.), Der neue Interventionismus - Humanitäre Einmischung
zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit, (Eine Welt - Texte der Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden),
Bonn 1996, pp. 77-102

for sources of quotations see the German original text

Copyright 2006: Jochen Hippler