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INTRODUCTION

INTERVENTION

For twenty years, intervention has been the most extravagant and noble, ambitious and dangerous element of Western foreign policy. The U.S. government has spent over three trillion dollars; more than a million soldiers have been deployed from over sixty countries. Many lives were saved in Bosnia through intervention; many lives were lost in Iraq through intervention. The Iraq intervention brought a million demonstrators into the streets of normally quiescent London, enflamed the suspicion and anger of hundreds of millions of Muslims, and toppled a European government. Intervention transformed the training, doctrine, and reputation of the wealthiest and most powerful military in the world. It took the United States, the United Nations, and the United Kingdom to

a new pinnacle of international reputation and confidence and then heaved them into a humiliating mess.

Over the last two decades, intervention has been described, explained, and criticized by political philosophers, civil servants, human rights activists, journalists, development workers, film-makers, and ten thousand consultants. Parliamentarians from Edinburgh to Rio now refer confidently to the "Chapter VII resolutions," "no-fly zones," "the experience of the Kurds," and "the responsibility to protect." But the basic questions about intervention remain unresolved. People who cannot name four cities in Libya can deploy four arguments against or for an intervention there. These are the same arguments that crippled our response to Bosnia and Rwanda, emboldened us in Kosovo, and drew us deeper into the indignities of Iraq and Afghanistan. They were used in the 1960s for Vietnam, the 1920s for Mesopotamia, and the 1860s for Afghanistan. And they still provide little help in understanding those actions which we dub, so euphemistically, "intervention."

Intervention—from the Latin *intervenire*, means roughly "to come between." *Inter*/between does not reveal where you are, who or what is around or beside you, or the nature of your relationship with these people and things.[1] Often, the word has a neutral sense of just being somewhere (as in the word *interspersed*) or of bringing things closer together (as in *interweave* or *interconnect*). The other half of the word intervention—*venire*—doubles the ambiguity. It is not clear how you are coming: running, walking, or driving in a Humvee. But when *come* is attached to a preposition (such as *come between* or *come across* or *come by*), it often carries a sense of arriving accidentally.[2] And in its basic form *come here*—*come* implies welcome, an invitation from the person toward whom you are moving.

There are other words with which we could have defined our

advents and adventures in Kosovo and Iraq. We could have said we had simply *gone in*—using the Latin-derived word *invaded.* Or if we wanted to convey the sense of not simply being *in there* but *between*, we could have specified the action with the Latin words for *act between* or *go between*, *place between*, *throw between*, *speak between*, *break between*, or *strike between*: *interact*, *intercede*, *interpose*, *interject*, *interdict*, *interrupt*, *interfere.* But just as we don't call ourselves invaders, so too we don't call ourselves interferers or interlopers.[3] Instead, we choose to cloak our action in a Latin word, which, even if translated, admits to nothing more than coming into a new relationship. It is silent on our right to be there, on whom we are meeting, on what exactly we are doing. But it implies that our movement may be gentle, driven by force of circumstance, and welcome.

But in truth, when we intervene we are there neither by invitation nor by accident. We are not passively present. We advance soldiers and we drop bombs and we fight to separate different parties. We have chosen to go in against the wishes of the sovereign government.[4] In short, we are not just interveners, not just "coming betweeners," we are also interlopers and interferers.

The two essays on intervention in this book emerge from a course and a study group that we each respectively led at the Harvard Kennedy School in 2010–11. But they are not academic essays on intervention—such as are written by lawyers, philosophers, human rights activists, and professors of international relations. We are not trying to debate the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello* with the schoolmen, or challenge the think tanks with a statistical analysis of two hundred years of interventions and charts derived from the Tsarist Russian operations in Bulgaria in 1877 and the Americans in Haiti before the First World War; nor are we offering a legal interpretation of Chapter VII

of the UN charter. We do not engage with the Marxists who criticize intervention as a form of economic colonialism and as a thin pretext for strategic bases, or the old conservatives who portray it as an illegal and dangerous challenge to the "Westphalian system." These are all important perspectives, but they are not the purpose of these essays.

Nor do these essays focus on the ethics of intervention. We both agree that there are certain occasions—such as genocide—that can justify an international intervention: that such horror can impose a form of duty on "the international community," and that state sovereignty need not confer total immunity. There may be countries that are too powerful to be tackled (China, for example), but this does not excuse non-intervention in East Timor. We agree with the philosopher Michael Walzer that there are occasions when the international community should remain for as little time as possible after an intervention, not to create a democratic, pluralist, liberal, or (even) capitalist government, simply a non-murderous government; but that in cases of mass extermination (such as in Cambodia), deep and enduring ethnic tension (such as in Rwanda), or total state failure, there is a case for the interveners not to leave too rapidly.[5] In other words, we accept the basic intuitions of many interveners around the world, and a worldview that seems to permit, for example, the intervention in Kosovo, even without the full legal sanction of the UN Security Council, and provides an account of our presence in East Timor and Cambodia. And we are comfortable with Bill Clinton's motto from 1995:

> We cannot stop all war for all time but we can stop some wars. We cannot save all women and all children but we can save many of them. We can't do everything but we must do what we can.[6]

Our aim is to understand, not as academics, but as participants in the interventions of the last twenty years, what makes interventions work and fail.[7] In these essays we are not interested in whether we have an abstract moral right or even duty to intervene, but whether and how to intervene in a particular country at a particular time. This is a practical question which rarely interests philosophers.[8] Perhaps they feel it is not their subject. Perhaps it seems inconceivable that there is any war that we couldn't win, provided we invested enough time and money. Or perhaps—as the philosopher Bernard Williams suggested[9]—there is something in the nature of ethics, its inheritance from Kant, that makes it very difficult to incorporate practical ideas of success, of context, and of luck into moral judgments.[10] Whatever the reason, the philosophers' arguments, about our moral obligations and on our theoretical interests, have not prevented our grand failures. The question of whether and how to intervene in Libya or Afghanistan is not fundamentally a question of moral philosophy. It is not a question of what we ought to do but what we can: of understanding the limits of Western institutions in the twenty-first century and of giving a credible account of the specific context of a particular intervention. Hence, our unapologetic focus on narrative—on the history of events, decisions, and individuals.

We have firm opinions on which interventions worked and which didn't. Others will disagree. Some, for example, today believe that Bosnia is teetering on the edge of collapse; others argue that Kosovo was an illegal, reckless, and unnecessary action. Some believe that the decision to invade Iraq will be vindicated by history; others that it became a success with the "surge" of 2006. Many believe that the problems in Afghanistan were caused by "the light footprint" of 2001, that the deployment of more international troops was essential, that it may still

redeem the situation—and if it doesn't, it will be only because they came too late. We disagree with all these views. Both these essays assume that Bosnia and Kosovo were successes; that Iraq was from the very outset a humiliating mess; and that Afghanistan slowly became a failure. We do not have the space in these essays to argue against the contrary views.

Each of these essays is driven by the contrast between our particular experiences on the ground and the rhetoric of "the international community" (shorthand for the foreign institutions and individuals involved in an intervention, applied, often confusingly, to everything from the United Nations to nongovernmental organizations and the U.S. military). Gerald began his career in Bulgaria in 1994, moved to Bosnia in 1996, and has continued to work in the region for the last fifteen years. The dominant international theory in Bosnia was that success had been due to a large foreign troop presence; that Bosnia was weakened by the international failure to confront war criminals and militias early and decisively; that it was endangered by elections held too early; that it was saved by charismatic foreign nation-builders with clear plans and almost limitless power; and that it is still dangerous. This theory had a decisive influence on the way the West has conducted interventions from Afghanistan to Iraq.

But Gerald's work in international organizations in Bosnia and Kosovo and his research as the director of an independent think tank (the European Stability Initiative, or ESI) convinced him that this theory of what did or did not work in Bosnia was misleading. ESI's detailed research revealed the surprising ignorance of the international institutions about the environment in which they operated, and highlighted the unintended consequences of their actions.[11] Some of his essays, such as one which argued that successive High Representatives in Bosnia

had established a regime of enlightened despotism similar to that of utilitarian imperialists in nineteenth-century India–in Gerald's words "a European Raj"–created controversy.[12] His research ultimately convinced him that many of the lessons of Bosnia were almost exactly the reverse of those apparently "learned" by "the international community." The role of foreign troops in 1996 had been misunderstood–and what has often been perceived as their weakness, paid off. There were also positive effects of holding early elections. Delaying the confrontation with war criminals and allowing them to contest elections (while simultaneously strengthening the international war crimes tribunal) was surprisingly effective. The unlimited powers of international administrators soon created more problems than they solved. The most important institution in stabilizing the Balkans turned out to be one that was long considered one of the least impressive: the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). And despite the pessimistic prophecies of some foreign analysts, Bosnia has been secure since 2000. Thus, Gerald concludes Bosnia was a success, but not for the reasons given by much of the international community.

Rory's first foreign posting, as a young British diplomat, was in Indonesia, and finished with the referendum for independence in East Timor in 1999. His second was in the Balkans, where he was convinced that the international community should have intervened earlier in Bosnia and that the Kosovo intervention had done some good. He still had a positive impression of intervention when he traveled through Afghanistan in 2002. But when he was posted to Iraq, his view changed. He arrived believing that the U.S.-led coalition could create a more stable, prosperous Iraq, but he soon realized that he was wrong: it should never have invaded. He returned to Kabul in 2005, convinced that the West should not send more troops to

Afghanistan, and found it very difficult to persuade anyone of this.

Rory has sought to describe how he and others were so wrong about Iraq, and why still others persisted in getting it so wrong in Afghanistan. Why had he—and others—been convinced that such interventions could work? Why did it take so long to acknowledge that they could not? Why did it take so long to withdraw? And what did this suggest about how we should do these things in the future?

Gerald's essay, therefore, is about a triumph misdescribed and misunderstood; Rory's is a story of failure, of a failure to acknowledge failure, and of the dangerous belief that failure is not an option. One essay explains how we got intervention right; the other, why we so often get intervention wrong. These different accounts reflect different temperaments, prose styles, backgrounds, education, and experiences. Rory warns against the almost irresistible—mesmerizing—pressures that lead to doomed and humiliating over-intervention; Gerald carefully records how international institutions misinterpreted an intervention which nevertheless worked.

Given these different perspectives, how could we teach together, still less write a book together? The answer is that these essays, which have their roots in our common experience of the Balkans and were developed through joint research at Harvard, ultimately reflect a single worldview. We both believe that it is possible to walk the tightrope between the horrors of over-intervention and nonintervention; that there is still a possibility of avoiding the horrors not only of Iraq but also of Rwanda; and that there is a way of approaching intervention that can be good for us and good for the country concerned.

THE DOMINANT POSITIONS FOR AND AGAINST INTERVENTION

Some people, of course, argue that one should never intervene. A few believe that states should be entirely free to do whatever they wish within their own borders. But more commonly the arguments against intervention are prudential. They are neatly listed by Professor Albert Hirschman as arguments from "jeopardy," "futility," and "perversity": an intervention will be dangerous (for the West or for the locals), or it will achieve nothing, or it will achieve exactly the reverse of what it intended (that is, create a more dangerous and unfriendly regime).[13] Such arguments can be bolstered by the language of medicine or commerce ("first do no harm," "it's none of our business," "we're broke"). Or even culture. Thus the Irish public intellectual Conor Cruise O'Brien said in 1992, "There are places where a lot of men prefer war, and the looting and raping and domineering that go with it, to any sort of peacetime occupation. One such place is Afghanistan. Another is Yugoslavia after the collapse."[14] These arguments ignore not only the strong moral and instrumental justifications for intervention but also the fact that intervention has in the past worked well: most notably (but not only, Gerald argues) in former Yugoslavia.

Our essays, therefore, are directed not against intervention, per se, but against two theories which seek to offer a universal formula for success in intervention. They are "the planning school" (epitomized by RAND Corporation's *Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*), which prescribes a clear strategy, metrics, and structure, backed by overwhelming resources; and, second, "the liberal imperialist school" (epitomized by Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative in Bosnia), which emphasizes the impor-

tance of decisive, bold, and charismatic leadership. Each derives from and shares the language of business and military strategy. Each proposes a clear, confident, and unambiguous recipe for success in intervention.

Liberal imperialists in particular like to portray the country into which they intervene as terrifying and tragic: a rogue state, a failed state, a threat to its neighbors or a threat to our credibility. It is a place where "failure is not an option." They generally claim that the cause of this tragedy is "ungoverned space": ravaged by destructive indigenous forces (extremists, militias, corrupt governments) and shattered by predatory neighbors and international neglect. They assert that the end to this tragedy lies in "governance," "the rule of law," and the other elements of a state. And that there is a path to this end through a decisive and well-planned international intervention (with generous resources, a coherent strategy, coordination, staffing, communication, accountability, research, defined processes, and clear priorities).[15]

Both schools are deeply optimistic. But they are not optimistic about local capacity: the local population is often portrayed in a negative light—as criminals or victims. Instead, they are optimistic about "the international community" and its ability to measure, quantify, or define the problems; its ability to make informed plans, predictions, and decisions; and its power and capacity to implement successful programs. "The international community" is assumed to be highly likely to succeed, provided only that it has the right strategy, resources, and confidence. In the words of an eminent British general, intervention "is doable if we get the formula right and it is properly resourced."[16]

The credit for any success is, therefore, given to the heroic foreign intervener. Thus when in Iraq the deployment of more troops around Baghdad was followed by a decrease in violence,

a strong causal connection was made. The drop in violence, according to the international community, was the result almost entirely of the foreign surge: not the internal features of the Iraqi government, Iraqi politics, or the region.

The international community is generally less willing to take responsibility for failure. Thus, in Afghanistan, when the deployment of more troops into Helmand Province in 2006 was followed by a spike in the number of insurgent attacks, no causal connection was made. The insurgency, according to the international community, had apparently not been caused by the foreign surge: instead it had been caused almost entirely by the corrupt Afghan government, fragmented Afghan politics, and provocation from the region, particularly Pakistan.

PRINCIPLED INCREMENTALISM / PASSIONATE MODERATION

Our two essays reject the models of heroic international planners and heroic international leaders on the grounds that they rest on a mistaken view of "the international community" and its interaction with local society. We argue that the foreigners who comprise "the international community" are usually much weaker than they imagine. They are inevitably isolated from local society, ignorant of local culture and context, and prey to misleading abstract theories. "The international community" often lacks legitimacy and local support because it is amorphous, unelected, and foreign (although the degree to which these institutions are perceived as foreign can depend on the context). Local political leaders are often far more competent and powerful than the foreigners think. Local institutions are far more resilient than the international theories (which treat post-conflict societies as blank

slates) suggest. Local and regional factors tend to be far more important determinants of success than foreign analysts acknowledge. International attempts to impose foreign will through overwhelming force—or ever more absolute legal powers—tend to make the situation worse not better.

All interventions are intrinsically unpredictable, chaotic, and uncertain and will rapidly confound well-laid plans and careful predictions. The uncertainty in intervention is much more profound than the uncertainty in domestic policy (and the kinds of uncertainty which "business/management" models were designed to address). The Federal Reserve has difficulty predicting the consequences of a 0.5 percent rise in interest rates, even though thousands of civil servants have performed such relatively minor adjustments many times before, in a highly stable society and with the benefit of a century's worth of data. But an intervener has none of those benefits of stability, trained staff, or data, and the changes that they attempt to implement are far more profound. No one can predict what will happen in an intervention in which foreign armies topple a head of state, or turn society on its head.[17]

The international institutions that are part of the intervention are burdened and often crippled by the inherent problems of any bureaucratic institution in a foreign country.[18] At home, mechanisms exist to prevent civil servants from wasting public money and ignoring citizens. Politicians cut budgets and set up inspections and performance indicators; the media and civil society criticize; and the electorate can dismiss the government. Not so in an intervention, where the international community is often awash with money and lacks the time to develop a complex system of inspections or performance indicators, and where there is neither robust civil society nor media, nor fair elections to encourage accountability. International organizations whose

legitimacy rests on their supposed superior knowledge of what is good for a society, and how to achieve it, also find it hard to admit to any mistakes.[19] In the twenty-first century, as Rory argues, these problems are exacerbated by the extreme isolation of international lives, their surreal optimism, and their abstract jargon.

As Gerald argues, the international policy-makers seem often unable to recognize or use the real strengths in local society and, therefore, are reluctant to delegate. They underestimate the intelligence and competence of local politicians and overlook their ability to compromise with their armed opponents. A sustained intervention, therefore, often prevents local leaders from taking responsibility; it does not put pressure on politicians to settle with their enemies, or broaden the kinds of deals they could offer. Instead, it sometimes strengthens the legitimacy and popularity of insurgents.

Interventions are crippled by the political aims of the intervening governments, which change continually. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the goals lurched from toppling the old regime and leaving; to nation-building; to improving security through a surge; and then back to withdrawal. Sometimes all of these views exist simultaneously, as Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. diplomatist, later observed about Vietnam, the Balkans, and Afghanistan: "People sit in a room, they don't air their real differences, a false and sloppy consensus papers over those underlying differences, and they go back to their offices and continue to work at cross-purposes, even actively undermining each other."[20] The problem is not that interveners adapt objectives in the light of changing conditions, which would be a good thing: they change their priorities independently of the local context.

International policy-makers have rarely articulated consistent views on how the security and interests of the West relate to the

interests and rights of Iraqis, Yugoslavs, or Afghans (when they managed to do so in the Balkans after 1999, holding out a credible vision of a future integration of all Balkan states into the European Union, they dramatically increased their influence).[21] They lurch from a narrow to a broad definition of democracy, from an idea of democracy as elections to an idea of democracy as a liberal, stable, human rights–respecting, Western-friendly state. They then appear surprised that a simply elected government has none of the qualities of a "thick" established democracy. International policy-makers always have a muddled and half-understood picture of the country before intervention, perhaps an equally muddled and half-understood picture of their own society in the West, and some generally doubtful guesses about how to get from one to the other.

Finally, an intervention is not simply inherently unpredictable or chaotic—it includes dangers that would be unimaginable in a domestic context or in another sphere of life. Of these, the greatest is a widespread insurgency. In Kosovo, as in East Timor, Bosnia, and Sierra Leone, the local populations have mostly assumed that our failures were due to incompetence rather than malice. In Iraq, however, the population was not prepared to give us the benefit of the doubt. Many Iraqis assumed we had come to steal the oil, crush a potential rival, or stamp on Islam and Arabia. Twice in 2005, eighty to ninety percent of the voters in southern Iraq elected Islamist parties that had an anti-Western agenda, implemented conservative social codes, and kept armed militias. Most of the population disliked the U.S.-led coalition simply because it was the U.S.-led coalition. Neither development projects nor more flexible infantry tactics were going to turn that around.

All these factors contort and corrode the goals of the intervening powers. "The international community" ends by oscil-