SPECIAL ISSUE ON INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

International Intervention in Refugee Crises

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In 1978, there were 4.6 million refugees worldwide. Just fifteen years later, at the end of 1993, that figured climbed to 19.7 million. That same year, there were also 24 million internally displaced persons scattered among many conflict zones. That is, one out of every 130 people in the world was displaced as a result of persecution, violence, or natural disaster.[1] In the following two years, the number of refugees declined somewhat as refugees repatriated as conflicts in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique came to a close. At the same time, the numbers of the internally displaced rose.[2] The displaced have fled human rights abuses, ethnic conflict, and generalized violence. In addition, there are many others who have left their home voluntarily in search of work or basic subsistence.[3] Taking into account documented and undocumented labour immigrants, there are about 80-100 million people living outside of their countries of origin, or perhaps 1.5 percent of the entire population of the world.[4] There has been increased attention on the effects refugees, the in-

ternally displaced, and other migrants are having on host countries, both economically and from a security perspective.[5] Governments have felt increasing pressure, as a result of public backlash against immigration, to curb the influx of people.

Concurrent with these developments, there has been a resurgence of international interest in varying humanitarian crises and communal conflicts and a renewed focus on collective security, made possible by the end of the cold war. In fact, since 1989 there

have been a number of instances where the international community has intervened in some manner in ostensibly internal conflicts. In cases where the United Nations has been involved, the justification has invariably been that the conflict poses a threat to "international peace and security." Indeed, this is the language found in the UN Charter with respect to Chapter VII enforcement action. Yet, these have been, to a large extent, "internal" conflicts in that the fighting has been contained within particular state borders. However, they have had implications and effects beyond their borders. One of the most noticeable and urgent results has been the creation of large refugee flows which, in turn, have put significant strains on receiving countries or have had otherwise unwanted and destabilizing consequences.

This issue of *Refuge* focuses on this confluence of international developments—the increasing international salience of the movement of the displaced, domestic pressure to curb migration, and the increasing, albeit still ambiguous, abilities and propensity of the international community to respond in a variety of ways to humanitarian crises, including intervention. The term intervention is used here to denote a multifaceted phenomenon involving transborder forceful efforts to influence a government or the outcome of an internationally-relevant situation. It can include activities such as overthrowing a government or annexing territory by force. However, it can also include more ambiguous forceful action which may involve government acquiescence or resistance, may include the acquiescence or resistance of a rebel group, and is done by a state or international governmental organization, to address a security or humanitarian problem in a particular territory (recognizing, of course, that the two frequently cannot be separated).

Humanitarian intervention involves a situation where humanitarian aspects are the primary factors in the decision to intervene and are the main focus of the action.

The following articles examine the issues raised by international intervention in refugee crises from several perspectives and within a number of contexts. Jennifer Hyndman's article, "Neo-Liberalism and Post-Cold War Geopolitics: International Responses to Human Displacement," examines how domestic politics and neo-liberal social/economic policies drive international policies focused on preventive protection and assisting displaced persons in conflict zones, rather than as refugees in countries of asylum in the West. She looks at the specific case of Canada, providing examples of a turn toward neo-liberal policies, including cuts in social programs, which, as she points out, "will adversely affect government-sponsored refugees selected for resettlement in Canada." She then argues that this shift in domestic public attitudes and policy has occurred alongside an international shift from an imperfect humanism with respect to development, refugees, etc. toward a neo-humanism where "human development [is] qualified by the economic viability of it's subjects' pursuits." Even further, however, the emerging domestic realities have imposed a new international reality—less support for social spending at home (in Canada as well as much of the rest of the West) means that new ways must be found to ensure that those who might make claims for scarce social welfare funds, such as refugees, must be prevented from having the opportunity to do so. That is, the focus has shifted from taking in refugees to protecting potential refugees in their country of origin, thus keeping the problem "out there" somewhere.

Michael Barutciski, in his article "Refugee Flows and Humanitarian Intervention: Problems of Selectivity and Politicization," addresses two significant issues with respect to intervention—selectivity and politicization. That is, why are some humanitarian crises focused on and addressed in some manner, while others are virtually ignored by the media and the political elites, and how does the politicization of a situation affect the

reaction to that situation? He uses the international response to the conflict and humanitarian crisis in the former Yugoslavia, and particularly the role of UNHCR, as a case study, noting the disproportionate amount of resources expended on that country with respect to other countries which were experiencing similar or even more severe humanitarian crises. He argues that public opinion and the so-called "CNN effect" cannot be reliably counted on to generate the necessary response to a grave humanitarian crisis, particularly in light of how the media was manipulated, and at times consciously chose, to sway public opinion with regard to the former Yugoslavia.

"Refugees as an Impetus for Intervention: The Case of Haiti," by Kurt Mills looks at a case which "is one of the clearest cases to date of refugee flows leading to eventual intervention." He examines the resolutions emanating from the UN Security Council and the interests of the United States, which ultimately intervened to restore Jean Bertrand Aristide to power. He argues that because of the constellation of interests which lay behind the US intervention, as well as the timing of the action, the intervention had little to do with humanitarianism and everything to do with a perception of refugees as a security threat. However, the intervention may, nonetheless, prove to be precedential in providing legitimacy for future humanitarian interventions.

The last two articles both focus on the case of displaced Iraqi Kurds after the Gulf War. Kemal Kirişçi's article, "Security for States vs. Refugees: Operation Provide Comfort and the April 1991 Mass Influx of Refugees from Northern Iraq into Turkey," examines the response of Turkey and the international community to the flow of Iraqi Kurdish refugees to the border with Turkey and the extent to which humanitarianism and security concerns were responsible for the eventual creation of safe havens. He looks, particularly, at the interests of Turkey in keeping the 400,000 Kurds out, and how these interests affected Operation

Provide Comfort which created the safe havens in northern Iraq.

The final article, "Humanitarian Intervention as Practices of Statecraft: Re-Crafting State Sovereignty in Refugee Crises" by Nevzat Soguk, argues that "humanitarian interventions are not undertaken merely to alleviate the sufferings of people under duress such as refugees." Rather, as Kirisçi also argues, state security interests frequently intrude. Beyond this, however, such interventions are used to shore up state sovereignty, rather than undermine it as humanitarian intervention is frequently portrayed. That is, by intervening in northern Iraq, the allies appropriated the refugees in such a way as to reinforce the hierarchy of citizen/nation/state found in traditional articulations of sovereignty. Humanitarian action does not, then, signify humanitarianism but rather basic statist activities.

What is to be concluded? Refugees have become a significant international phenomenon in recent years, and this has not been lost on the international community. Yet, the responses to this crisis frequently have had little to do with humanitarianism. A backlash against immigration, cuts in social spending, and a perception of refugees as security threats, have combined with a newly interventionist international community to create situations where forceful military action has been taken in the midst of refugee crises. However, it is not necessarily concern for refugees as persons-in-need which has been at the heart of such intervention and refugees have not necessarily been the main beneficiaries of such actions. Rather, humanitarianism has frequently taken a back seat to traditional security concerns. ▨

Notes

1. Gil Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security*, (London: Brassey's for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992): 9; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1993): 1–2; Refugee Crisis Worsening, UN Says, *The Gazette (Montreal)*, [Online], (November 10, 1993): F8, Available: Nexis. When the UNHCR book was completed it recognized 18.2 million as refugees. However, by the time it was released a couple of months later, in early November, the number had increased by 1.7 million, half of which occurred almost overnight as a result of the attempted coup in Burundi in late October.

2. According to UNHCR, there were 14.4 million refugees and approximately 30 million internally displaced persons at the end of 1994. UNHCR, *The State of The World's Refugees: In Search of Solutions,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 40, 248.

3. However, if one needs to leave one's home just to survive, it is hard to see how this is "voluntary."

4. UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection,* p. 40.

5. As Weiner notes, the increased movement of people across borders is forcing a reconceptualization of what security entails. See Myron Weiner, "Security, Stability and International Migration," in Myron Weiner, ed., *International Migration and Security,* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993): 1–35. On the relationship between refugees and security see Loescher, and Reg Whitaker, "Refugees: The Security Dimension," prepared for the conference *Organizing Diversity—Migration Policy and Practice: Canada and Europe,* (Berg en Dal, Netherlands, November 8–12, 1995). ▫

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grams on Women in Managua, Nicaragua," unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of Geography, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 1993.

15. M. Hayes, 1994, op. cit. p. 31.

16. C. Mouffe, "For a politics of nomadic identity" in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (eds) G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis & T. Putnam, NY/London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 105-13.

17. UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solutions,* Oxford/NY, Oxford University Press, 1995, and K. Prager, "The Limits of Peacekeeping", *Time,* October 23, 1995.

18. UNHCR, 1995, op. cit.

19. Ibid. p117.

20. It is worth noting that immigrants to Canada draw on fewer financial supports from government than the native born population. "Using the native born as a bench mark, we find no evidence that immigrants pose an excess burden on Canada's transfer programs. They are less likely than natives to participate in the UI [unemployment insurance] and SA [social assistance] programs upon entry to the country ..."; cited from "The Receipt of Transfer Payments by Immigrants to Canada," working paper, M. Baker & D. Benjamin, Department of Economics, University of Toronto, April 1994.

21. Bill Frelick, 1993, op. cit.

22. Head Of Fundraising Services, UNHCR, Geneva, interview, October 24, 1994.

23. Ibid. On the Former Yugoslavia: "you may have had generally recognized borders ...and a lot of people crossing those borders with a fear of war or persecution; there were a lot of people displaced *within* these borders, and then persons displaced across borders that nobody recognized; and then you had persons displaced *within* borders that nobody recognized; and then you had persons who weren't displaced at all, but were sitting being shelled to death in Sarajevo, and all of these people fell under the action of UNHCR, and nobody really cared. It's a big change from the years of the 1980s."

24. B. S. Chimni, "The Meaning of Words and the Role of UNHCR in Voluntary Repatriation," *International Journal of Refugee Law,* vol. 5, no. 3, 1993, pp. 442–59. p. 459.

25. Excerpts from a statement by High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, UNHCR, at the Roundtable on "Refugees: Challenge to Solidarity," New York, 9 March 1993.

26. James Hathaway, "Introduction to the Law of Refugee Status," lecture presented at Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, June 23, 1994.

27. Bill Frelick, 1993, op. cit. p. 7.

28. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Cleveland/New York, Meridian, 1958.

29. C. Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity,* Concord, Ontario, Anansi Press, 1991.

30. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Cotton and Iron" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures,* (eds) R. Ferguson, M. Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, & C. West, New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991, pp. 327-36, and N. Fraser, "Women, Welfare and Politics" in *Unruly Practices,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

31. L. Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture" in *Recapturing Anthropology* (ed.) R.G. Fox, Santa Fe, School for American Research, 1991, pp.137–62.

32. M. Weiner cited in UNHCR, 1995, op. cit. p. 188.

33. UNHCR, 1995, op. cit., p. 162. Emphasis added.

34. UNHCR, 1995, op. cit., pp. 154, 255.▫