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Doing What's Right: The Struggle of Ending Genocide Over Power

By Ximena Cury-Paco

“This is your world” is the motto the United Nations uses to voice its devotion to improving the quality of life for people across the world. Despite this being an aspiration humanity hopes to attain, the reality of many people is enduring mistreatment and exploitation by those in power. Throughout history, it has been shown repeatedly that states do not always follow through with their promises, many of which include the protection of their very own citizens. Despicable and cruel are some of the words used to describe the murder of minority groups by a government who is supposed to protect them, this is also known as genocide. Before reading any further, it is important to note that the word “state” is used throughout this paper to refer to a country. An excuse often used to justify such action is that it comes with the power the state has over the territory it rules. The state executing such practice argues it is needed to keep “order” and no other country can defy the action because it has no authority in foreign land. Such acknowledgment of the right to rule within the border of a country is known as sovereignty. Each country has the right to the norm and receives respect from all other countries as a result. Sovereignty, therefore, has become an obstacle in the fight against genocide. Many states portray themselves as willing to help prevent and stop genocidal actions, hence the creation of the United Nations (UN) which monitors the implementation of norms and rules states agreed upon respecting. Even so, states remain unwilling to risk breaking the practice of sovereignty because all states choose to respect the norm and expect others to do the same. Solving the issue of genocide becomes complex and gives little hope to those being tormented for their existence.

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States should have the right to infringe on another state's sovereignty in the case of genocide because it creates unpopularity with the public if they do not; is part of the UN's Responsibility to Protect Principle (R2P) and is a breach of universal human rights.

Citizens from a state may criticize the lack of action towards a humanitarian crisis involving the killing of innocent people. Unpopularity with the government in office will increase if the public is unsatisfied with the approach taken by their state to aid in the issue, if at all. An example where this perception is demonstrated is in the killing of over 1,000 people by the Indonesian army (as well as militias in favor of Indonesian rule) over control of East Timor, after a referendum resulted in votes in favor of independence. This massacre was viewed by UN mission officers and by various Australian media outlets on the ground. The presence of media outlets indicated that reports and news coverage about the murders were able to be broadcasted back to Australia. It is important to explain the significance of Australia in the case of the East Timor conflict since Australia helped Indonesia acquire East Timor as part of its territory after the region had just gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. Thus, international relations expert Ben Reeson notes, "This violence in the presence of UNAMET officials, and media personnel on hand to witness it, caused a public outcry in Australia for something to be done" and asserts "... public opinion within Australia was firmly in favor of intervention. The Sense of 'moral unease' at the situation and that Australia had played a part in it since 1975, was supported by vehement media coverage." Coverage of the violence allowed the Australian public to feel remorse towards the tragedy they saw, heard, or read being played out. Holding on to the guilt of helping Indonesia colonize East Timor, Australians realized that as a nation, they needed to support East Timor in gaining their independence by pressuring the Australian government to

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intervene and produce a solution to put a stop at anymore executions from occurring. In response, the Australian government got involved in the conflict. In this instance, the citizens of a state ended up being satisfied by the actions their state chose to take, which allows one to assume they would have been dissatisfied otherwise. Although this tragedy was not explicitly a genocide, it still exhibits how the public can sway the decisions made by a state towards the murder of people, which at heart constitutes the definition of genocide. Civilians become a decisive factor that government officials take into consideration when making decisions that could alter their perceptions in the eyes of the public.

Likewise, in a survey conducted by researcher Laura Silver and research partners earlier this year, Americans were asked multiple questions that dealt with the United States having a greater stance on certain issues that involved China, one of them being the violation of human rights of Chinese citizens. The research article brings up that Americans tended to bring forth the persecution of Uyghur Muslims, who are part of China's civil society but are mistreated and have had their rights stripped away by the Chinese government. The government is also accused of committing the genocide of Uyghurs. Following their research, the authors found that Americans wanted United States-China relations to be used as a method to pressure China into respecting human rights even if they respond with economic restrictions. In this aspect, Americans want their government to confront China in its disregard of civil liberties towards its very own citizens. In the eyes of Americans, regardless of if the accusations of genocide are true, other states (like the U.S) should have the right to confront China about such suspicions since it deals with the lives of people. If a country's fear-promoting action becomes a shared concern among the global community, then other states should have the ability to analyze the situation

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and act if needed. The research article reinforces the authors' findings by including the statement that "When asked whether the U.S should prioritize economic relations with China or promote human rights in China, 70% of Americans chose human rights, even if it potentially harms economic relations with China" (Silver et al. 24). By providing the percentage of Americans who agree the US should have a greater role in defending human rights. The survey adds on to the belief that the citizens of a state can agree or disagree with the efforts their state has put into opposing the practice of misusing power to attack the people of a state. Given the circumstances, public opinion ends up playing a crucial part in how states participate in international issues that deal with crimes against humanity or not if they decide to stay out. If there is enough concern expressed by citizens, states will (in addition to their judgment) make a serviceable move to impede the persecution of people.

Moreover, failing to respond to genocide breaks the UN's Responsibility to Protect Principle (R2P) which holds states accountable for taking (or not taking) the initiative in preventing and/or stopping such a crisis. According to political scientist Raimo Vayrynen, the purpose of global governance is "collective actions that establish norms and institutions for the purpose of dealing with multilevel problems" (qtd. in Leonard 145). The role of states in the international community is of assisting one another when a significant problem needs to be taken care of. By taking this definition into account, genocide would be a conflict requiring states to agree in producing rules and procedures that must be followed when dealing with such cases. Countries, consequently, have welcomed the act of having another country intercede if the country that initiated the conflict continues to harm its citizens. Sovereignty is respected due to the rules and procedures established by states dictating how global governance is played

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throughout. Just like sovereignty is a concept all countries have agreed in respecting, so too are the norms and rules they agreed in enacting, which includes the involvement of states in cases of mass murder of civilians. The annual UN report always makes the notion of the states' duty. A United Nations report points out, "At the 2005 World Summit, all states Members of the United Nations committed to protecting populations from genocide... since then, there has been progress in advancing both the conceptualization and operationalization of the responsibility to protect" (United Nations 2). States have lent themselves to partake in the efforts to prevent and combat concerns of genocide and other crimes that endanger people. In a way, states cannot be called out for transgressing on the rights of another state if the second state is clearly carrying out an act against humanity. Holding a country accountable in this matter would double up the pressure of states to act against mass murder as the UN already expects them to regardless of whether it breaks the customary practice of observing a state's right to rule. Not only does the UN look upon various states to act in a manner of solidarity and compassion towards civilians in need of urgent help, but so do the very own states who established and continue to validate the system overseeing international norms and practices. It is the states themselves who eventually hold one another accountable in the case of responding to tragedies and because of this concept, they should have the right to overstep the boundary of power each state claims to have.

Above all, the murder of civilians, let alone on a mass scale, contravenes universal human rights, and is considered specifically a crime against humanity. The cost of losing innocent lives is incomparable to any other kind of loss when considering moral standards. American sociologist, Amitai Etzioni, brings up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in that, "...this declaration did not include enforcement mechanisms, it gave voice to the

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growing normative consensus that states have an obligation to respect human rights-an obligation that is simultaneous with, and perhaps even overrides, the right to sovereignty” (8). The declaration constitutes the belief of human rights states already share and should therefore discern that it will contradict their right to rule. In line with the UDHR, civilians’ rights are validated without enforcement; but if broken by a state, other states have the right to intervene since it is a norm that was readily accepted by all actors. In other words, trespassing the boundaries of unilateral actions of states is justifiable when it is meant to stop the violation of human rights a state is complicit in doing. Law scholars, Kevin Gray and Kafumu Kalyalya believe “the ICC has been empowered to prosecute the gravest of international crimes by relying on the same system whose rights it seeks to limit” (60). The International Criminal Court (ICC), an international structure who runs findings and indicts people suspected of committing a felony, acquired the power to investigate cases involving crimes against humanity by states. One could argue that states themselves granted permission to the ICC to practice authority over crimes they can commit. The creation of the court further supports why intervening in the act of genocide is needed: it is against the “law.” States can bring up an instance of genocide up to the ICC and see if their suspicion is viable for the sake of helping those being murdered. If the global community regards human rights highly, then such rights should precede sovereignty when it comes to the level of importance of states’ responsibilities. By these beliefs, states should then permit a breach in their right to rule if they are found guilty of harming their citizens. Additionally, states should utilize the structures they created to access (if an intervention is needed) cases of genocide when brought forth for examination, which in most instances ends up being cited as the appropriate step taken by a state.

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On the contrary, anti-imperialists and anti-globalization activists argue that intervening in another country's affairs might open the door, in the future, to the abuse of such "power of intervention" in order to conduct a form of "modern colonialism." A state deeming what is acceptable or not can be perceived as an act of disrespect to a second state since it implies that the second state's rule is illegitimate, and any state can apply its rules to the territory. Activists fear that enacting this principle of protection would benefit superpowers (states that have high economic or military potential) largely because it would allow them to attain economic or social gains for their states. In this scenario, the powerful force of a hegemony (a state that has an economic and societal influence on the world) and its capability of having a substantial impact on the societal and governmental functions of other states, is then a reasonable concern. No nation wants to lose its cultural or ethnic practices/beliefs that have centered its life for years. Still, a state's justification for intervening relies on its relevance to the issue at hand. A state carefully determines whether it is worth stepping up to a conflict since it could put at risk the relationship it has with the second state. In International Relations, states value sovereignty as they fear if they proceed to defy another state's right to rule, they (the other state) may do the same to the first state; this is known as reciprocity. Again, with this notion, it is safe to assume that states will honor and not misuse the power of being capable of intervening in a foreign crisis demanding a speedy response. Bertrand de Jouvenel best describes the most ideal interpretation of sovereignty in the international field by stating "... people often understand that sovereign will as being an absolute authority, but they also understand that even such absolute authority is subject to constraints of morality" (qtd. in Etzioni 7).

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Without state intervention in horrific acts against humanity conducted by other states, mass atrocities would be considered an “acceptable” course of action. Lack of punishment for acting aggressively towards civilians implies that a state has the right to treat its citizens however they see fit, despite it being atrocious because it is part of their sovereignty. Comprehending sovereignty this way would lead to the rise of authoritarian practices as the murder of people would technically be considered a proper method of keeping them under control. The Responsibility to Protect Principle, in this view, presents hope for humanitarian justice because without it, crimes against humanity would go unseen and “permitted” in fear of losing power. Skepticism from civilians about granting states the power to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states is rational due to its possible repercussions. Nonetheless, overcoming such unappealing outcomes is immeasurably more workable for countries to find a solution than dealing with the loss of life, which cannot be forgotten so simply. Leaders and other government officials must once and for all decide whether they value life more than power or the opposite. Only then will it clearly determine where human rights stand as a priority for a state; the greed of power will be put to the test.

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