

Tea with Madam Secretary, Part II

Written by Matthew A. Hill

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MATTHEW A. HILL, DEC 22 2011

And back to the interview, or not, as the case may be. This interview, as well as all the others, can serve more than one mistress or master. Data can be used to support or refine arguments that a researcher is already making or it can be used as an inspiration for new research. And in line with the premise of this project (as noted in part one) it does not have to be overtly gender focused. The very fact that one is utilising the voices of women on non-gender explicit subjects is itself an essential defining aspect of the project. In order to illustrate the utility of this interview and as an extension, this repository, I will concentrate on the case of national sovereignty versus the responsibility to protect.

The following is one of the questions I asked Secretary Albright:

In discussing the US 1994 proposal to the UN to lead a military mission to oust what you called the 'illegitimate leaders' of Haiti, you mention that 'several Latin American Ambassadors spoke against the proposed intervention on the traditional grounds of protecting national sovereignty' [Madam Secretary: A Memoir, p. 200]. Do you see the decision by the Security Council to vote in favour of a US-led military engagement as the beginning of a significant development in a movement towards protecting human security at the expense of national sovereignty?

Albright recounts how the 1990s were a transition period for states determining how to act in an international order where intra-state conflicts were damaging international stability. She suggests that after the Cold War, the role of UN peacekeepers changed from being solely the keepers to a peace between former warring groups to the makers and enforcers of peace. And Haiti was an important first example of dealing with a crisis before it tipped over and became worse. It was a case whereby the sovereign was abrogating its responsibility to protect its citizens, and a decision determined by the international community and by conditions it set and not the Haitian people. In a follow-up question on the emerging competition to the Westphalian notion of protecting national sovereignty by the responsibility to protect doctrine, as enunciated by Gareth Evans, Albright suggests that these two positions will sit uncomfortably side-by-side for the foreseeable future. She poses a number of important questions on this emerging doctrine, the details of which have yet to be fully mapped-out. For example, which agents can be legitimate enforcers of the responsibility to protect; NATO, ad-hoc coalitions? How can the doctrine philosophically combat opposition from countries that see these external forces as modern interpretations of imperial aggressive meddling of developed states with the domestic affairs of developing states?

And what this part of the interview got me thinking about is the rapid emergence of the responsibility to protect doctrine. One of its architects, Gareth Evans, spoke at a symposium on Humanitarian Intervention at the University of Wisconsin, Madison on March 31, 2006. He commented that:

On any view, the evolution in just five years of the 'responsibility to protect' concept from a gleam in a commission's eye to what now might be described as a broadly accepted international norm, creating in the process the context for a far more effective response to conscience-shocking situations than the international community has managed in the past, is an extremely encouraging story.

Can, however, the doctrine be usurped by powerful states as a framework for legitimating their own national interests? Can the language of the responsibility to protect be subverted? When does the language of protecting individuals legitimate the actions that inadvertently or 'coincidentally' change a regime? And are there any recent

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examples that could be argued in this way?

Libya comes to mind. Can my cynicism of this doctrine be applied to the case of the Libyan sovereign Qaddafi and the Libyan people?

In mirroring the language of this doctrine, in March 2011 the UNSC approved Resolution 1973 which empowered actors to impose a no-fly zone in Libya to protect civilians against what the UNSC said were 'widespread and systematic attacks' which 'may amount to crimes against humanity'.

This is a new topic of interest for me, and I would like to hear your thoughts on the arguments for and against the international community's intervention in Libya? Was it to halt a humanitarian disaster, whose national interests were served, and how did it serve them?

Take another example of the right to protect language being utilised in part h of Article IV of the 2000 'Constitutive Act of the African Union', whereby the Union has the right 'to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity'. Interestingly in part i of the same article it notes that there should be 'non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another'. Do these two not contradict each other?

And what of the differences between collective decision-making at the AU or the UN whereby states support the right to act versus unilateral decision-making? Legally different, yes, but is it morally or ethically different? Maybe not

About the author:

Matthew A. Hill is a senior lecturer in International Relations at Anglia Ruskin University. The aim of this blog is to examine US politics and pick an idea not fully-formed and run with it to see where it goes. Sometimes it will wither away but othertimes it will inspire to think about the idea further. Your input is encouraged and welcomed.