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The Flame of Prometheus:

Or Why Humanitarian Interventions Are Here to Stay

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Not only is there the moral obligation to intervene where a human population's inherent, immutable rights are violated, but there is also a strategic imperative too.

Once Prometheus gave the gift of fire to mankind, the Gods of Olympus punished him horribly, but they knew that his actions could not be undone.

In much the same way, humanitarian interventions are not a passing fad, but a genie that is now well and truly out of its bottle for good, to the horror of the remaining dictators in the world. There are many reasons why humanitarian interventions aren't going away any time soon.

Whilst inequality is rising globally, the world overall is also becoming better off. The number of people living off a dollar a day has fallen from 40 per cent to 20 per cent. As Maslow's hierarchy suggests, once one has his/her material needs fulfilled, one moves past materialism and into post-material values such as caring for the environment and demanding more ethical behaviour from the companies they buy from.

The world is becoming more interconnected and its citizens are becoming more aware of one another and the situations in which they live. This effect moves in two directions: the wealthier and safer become more aware of the poorer and more vulnerable and vice versa. This is driving two forces in favour of humanitarian interventions worldwide. Firstly, increased migration and media interconnectivity is leading the wealthy, secure people, to be more aware of the plight of others. This has led to an increased number of charity donations year on year (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) (whilst the average donation may have fallen by £1, an extra 1.1 million British people donated to charity in 2011 than 2010). Secondly, since technology advances have become cheaper, those less well off are more aware of the human rights and democracy regimes enjoyed elsewhere, and are coming to demand them of their rulers, as shown in the still-unfolding events of the Arab Spring/Winter and demonstrators in China.

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As much as I'm sure he would be ashamed to have realised, Osama Bin Laden has contributed significantly to the rise of humanitarian intervention. In 1996 he issued a fatwa entitled 'Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places'. This was followed up with the attacks of 9/11 in 2001, which certainly qualifies in my book as an act of war against the West.

Al Qaeda considers all Western civilians legitimate targets because, as democracies, all citizens contribute to the system al Qaeda seeks to destroy. As such, Al-Qaeda conducts the war it declared against the West specifically against civilian targets. Consequently, defending and protecting innocent civilians is now the defining objective of the War on Terror, in order to deny jihadists their strategic objective. Humanitarian interventions are a necessary tool to fight the war on terror.

What this all amounts to is that there are increasingly a number of obligations on Western governments to support those struggling for democracy abroad. Not only is there the moral obligation to intervene where a human population's inherent, immutable rights are violated, but there is also a strategic imperative too. Every instance of human rights violations permitted by the West is a blow to the spread of democracy and human rights, for how can human rights be universal, if we are not willing to universally defend them?

Modern media technologies have played the role of Prometheus, delivering the flame of human rights and democracy to the masses in the Middle East, China and beyond. It is in the moral and strategic interests of the West to ensure that that flame is not extinguished.

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