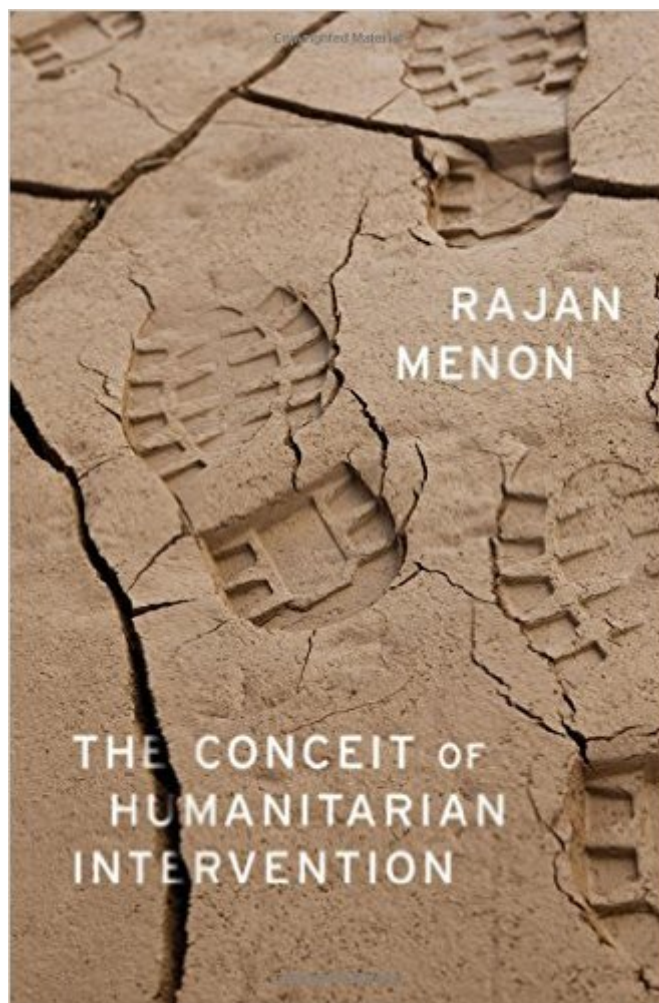


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# The Conceit Of Humanitarian Intervention



## Synopsis

With the end of the Cold War has come an upsurge in humanitarian interventions-military campaigns aimed at ending mass atrocities. These wars of rescue, waged in the name of ostensibly universal norms of human rights and legal principles, rest on the premise that a genuine "international community" has begun to emerge and has reached consensus on a procedure for eradicating mass killings. Rajan Menon argues that, in fact, humanitarian intervention remains deeply divisive as a concept and as a policy, and is flawed besides. The advocates of humanitarian intervention have produced a mountain of writings to support their claim that human rights precepts now exert an unprecedented influence on states' foreign policies and that we can therefore anticipate a comprehensive solution to mass atrocities. In *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention*, Menon shows that this belief, while noble, is naïve. States continue to act principally based on what they regard at any given time as their national interests. Delivering strangers from oppression ranks low on their list of priorities. Indeed, even democratic states routinely embrace governments that trample the human rights values on which the humanitarian intervention enterprise rests. States' ethical commitment to waging war to end atrocities remains episodic and erratic-more rhetorical than real. And when these missions are undertaken, the strategies and means used invariably produce perverse, even dangerous results. This, in no small measure, stems from the hubris of leaders-and the acolytes of humanitarian intervention-who have come to believe that they possess the wisdom and wherewithal to bestow freedom and stability upon societies about which they know little.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When a people group is being oppressed or is suffering persecution or even genocide, the global community sometimes calls for humanitarian intervention. But what are the limits? What are the guidelines? Is it even practical, possible, or effective? In *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention*, City College of New York professor Rajan Menon argues that "the terms of peace and justice proffered by humanitarian interventionists withstand neither ethical nor practical scrutiny." Menon reviews instances of humanitarian intervention (and lack thereof) in the late 20th and 21st centuries, including in Libya, Grenada, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, and elsewhere. Those who call for humanitarian intervention claim a "commitment to transnational moral responsibility, human rights, and justice," yet Menon is cynical about the purity of the motives, at least in practice. The inconsistency with which the principals of intervention are applied show the poverty of the argument. The doctrine of "responsibility to protect" (R2P) provides cover for a wide array of government interventions, but "despite its egalitarian allure and homage to justice, in practice R2P will simply reinforce existing hierarchies." Menon cynically dismisses much intervention as self-serving: "Governments will engage in humanitarian intervention when it serves their interests or when the price that they expect to pay is tolerable." Even the International Criminal Court has proven ineffective, or at least severely limited. The countries who agree to its terms don't really need it, and the countries that need to be policed don't agree to it, and it is subject to political biases.

Rajan Menon's new book, *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention*, launches a timely and compelling argument against a dominant line of thought lying behind so much of modern American foreign policy—humanitarian intervention—or liberal interventionism. We are, of course, well familiar with Republican and neocon readiness to go to war, but the reality is that many Democrat Party leaders have been no less seduced into a series of optional foreign military interventions, with increasingly disastrous consequences. Hillary Clinton is today one of the leading exponents of the idea, but so are many of the advisors around President Obama. Menon's book constitutes essential reading for anyone troubled by the ugly character of so much of the international scene these days, and yet dismayed by its exploitation by policy-makers who cloak invasion, power projections and military operations in the garb of humanitarian effort. Here is a cogent critique of the recent decades of US foreign policy misadventures in which our military has become the primary instrument of US policy—and justified in the name of humanitarian goals. We rarely get to hear these arguments so clearly presented. In rejecting the premise of liberal interventionism—Menon is not exercising some hard-minded, bloodless vision of policy—quite the

opposite. He is deeply concerned for the wellbeing of peoples and societies abroadâ ”who are often among the primary victims of such liberal interventionism. He argues not as an isolationist but rather as an observer who has watched so many seemingly well-minded interventions turn into horror stories for the citizens involved.

With a historianâ™s scrupulousness, Menon draws on lessons of humanitarian interventions -- from the Ottoman Empire to East Pakistan, Cambodia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, Darfur, and Syria -- to call into question âœcosmopolitan sentimentâ • and âœethical commitmentâ • often used to justify such interventions. Menon shrewdly exposes the hypocrisy of humanitarian interventions by showing that states only intervene to save people in other countries with their practical goals in mind; and if such intervention would compromise national (read: economic) interest, they would, at best, issue a public condemnation of mass murder. To that end, Menon cautions against selective use of humanitarian interventions, lest they create opposite effect: mistrust and cynicism of âœrescuedâ • people, and worse yet, increased violence by the perpetrators. To further prove his point, Menon provides numerous examples when advanced democracies turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed in other countries, and continued to do business with â “ and openly support â “ dictators, who under different circumstances (read: in weaker countries) would have been good targets for deposition and invocation of R2P. Make no mistake â “ this book is NOT against humanitarian interventions as a way for the concerned international community to stop mass-killings and protect human rights. Instead, Menon urges the interventionists and cosmopolitans to carefully consider the price innocents pay from unintended (and ill-intended) consequences of such humanitarian pursuits, and put their money where their mouths are â “ if they are indeed concerned with the preservation of human lives in other countries, deeper commitment and allocation of all necessary resources should follow.

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