

Making Plans to Stop Mass Murder Nathan Hodge The Wall Street Journal 10 May 2011 (...)

Harvard professor Sarah Sewall has pushed the Pentagon to have a plan on the shelf for responding to mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Now, with Libya as a backdrop, her efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

The U.S. has launched a high-level initiative to make the military more ready and able to respond to potential mass killings. A senior Department of Defense official said the project, which is at an early stage, would help develop "a complete set of options that the leadership can consider in the preventive area before it comes to sending in the military, or not sending in the military."

Since 2007, Prof. Sewall has led a tight-knit group of academics, policy makers and military officers lobbying the Pentagon to embrace a handbook that details, step by step, the options for sending in the cavalry to protect civilians. She and her allies are pitching the plan at conferences, in war games and at military headquarters, urging the U.S. to incorporate the lexicon and principles of genocide prevention into military planning.

The emerging doctrine is a blueprint for an interventionist foreign policy that places such ideas as

"responsibility to protect"

on a par with the principles of *realpolitik*. It falls within a broader debate in international politics, and at the United Nations, about balancing state sovereignty with the desire to protect civilians.

But on the definition of an atrocity, the atrocity handbook is agnostic, leaving it up to government leaders to decide how much killing is too much. According to the foreword, the document "is concerned with answering the 'how,' not the 'whether.'" As with the classic definition of pornography, users of the handbook are expected to know genocide when they see it. (...)

(...) In theory, the handbook can be pulled off the shelf, offering what are presented as formulas for thinking about the use of military force: when to step up peacekeeping and monitoring of a volatile situation; when to position forces as a deterrent or begin enforcing a no-fly zone; when to go in heavy with ground forces, pursuing and arresting war criminals. It even provides the organizational charts for an anti-genocide task force, which could be scaled from a modest intervention of 2,000 troops to a contingent of 25,000.

The 160-page document is heavy on jargon and acronyms that would be familiar to a military planner. A fill-in-the-blanks "strategic guidance" document for a hypothetical intervention in "Country X" outlines courses of action that include everything from sending spy planes to

document unfolding atrocities to deploying special forces to train rebels. Scenarios in the handbook underscore the value of ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), PSYOP (psychological operations) and I&W (indicators and warnings). (...)

(...) "What was clear to me in the problem of mass atrocities, genocide prevention ... is that the military didn't think of it as a responsibility, so they didn't invest any time in trying to understand it," said Prof. Sewall in an interview at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. "But that's what needed to be done in order to inform civilian decision makers."

Now military leaders such as Gen. Carter Ham, who runs the military command that led the initial attacks on Col. Moammar Gadhafi's forces in Libya, are looking to Prof. Sewall's work as a guide for the next time the U.S. feels compelled to intervene to stop a massacre. Brig. Gen. James Lukeman, a senior deputy to Gen. Ham, said Prof. Sewall's handbook was "a great tool to have" for thinking about the unique problems such a challenge posed. The current campaign in Libya, Gen. Lukeman added, was an "obvious parallel" to the scenarios the handbook describes. (...)

(...) The handbook has come in for some strong criticism. Celeste Ward Gventer, a defense expert who served in the administration of President George W. Bush, said that "alarm bells went off" when she read a copy. Ms. Gventer, who served two tours in Iraq with the Coalition Provisional Authority and as a civilian adviser to the military, said the effort looked like a way "to try to force this [mission] into the military's toolbox ... 'Here's your manual, don't worry about whether you want to or should do this, but here's the How.' " Joseph Collins, a professor at the National War College, questioned whether the military should be reorganizing around a new type of conflict when it is coping with insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan and bracing for a budget crunch at home. (...)

(...) But Ms. Sewall's ideas are taking hold. The Army Operating Concept, a document that envisions how the Army will fight in the next decade and a half, says that the service "must be prepared to conduct mass-atrocity response operations" as one of its core tasks.

Asked about the Libya intervention, Prof. Sewall gave measured praise to the Obama administration, saying that "some aspects" were "exemplary," including the speed of the response. But she said it was an operation conducted without the proper "foresight and consideration." (...)

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