Peoples under Threat 2013 Minority Rights Group International 10 July 2013

 Minority Rights Group International (MRG) released its 2013 Peoples Under Threat (PUT) global index on 10 July 2013, highlighting countries were communities are at greatest risk of mass atrocities. The annual ranking seeks to serve as an early warning tool for the protection of civilians, created by compiling data on known indicators to genocide and mass political killings. MRG engages in statistical analysis of the PUT data that is then presented in a briefing. In the context of the report's findings that half of the states that have risen in this index also have experienced foreign military intervention, MRG raises questions of the potential harmful effects of the use of force within the framework of RtoP.   Foreign news reports of a whole community under violent attack in another part of the world quickly prompt the reflection: what should we do? In the Western media, the question is rarely posed without quickly leading to calls for armed intervention. (…)   The 2013 release of the
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index highlights the need to question this set of assumptions (…). Firstly, in those country situations of most concern in 2013, where the threat of genocide or mass killing is greatest or is rising most quickly, foreign military intervention is not the exception but the norm. (…) the great majority of countries where the threat of mass killing is acute or killing is ongoing have been subject to armed intervention, in some cases on several occasions going back a decade or more.

Secondly, there is a complex causal relationship between civilian security and armed intervention in practice. While it is possible that foreign military action may halt an episode of mass civilian killing or decrease its intensity, it may also prolong or intensify killing, or even initiate a conflict where there was none before. In some cases, it may end one conflict, but start another; or have the effect of shifting violence away from one people or population group onto another or others (…).

This year's release illustrates starkly, however, just how little we know about the efficacy of international action to prevent atrocity. It underlines the urgent need to track the consequences of any foreign military intervention, to ensure that intervention does not do more harm than good.

At least half the states that have risen most significantly in
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in 2013, and eight out of 10 of those most at risk, have been subject to recent large-scale or systematic foreign military interventions. (…)

At least 93,000 people are now estimated by the UN to have been killed in Syria's conflict. This is the third year in a row that Syria has risen in the index, and previous fears expressed in
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that whole communities would become at risk of sectarian killings are sadly being increasingly realized. In June 2013 the US announced for the first time that it would provide direct military support to Syrian rebels, joining a long list of other states that are already engaged in supporting one or other side in the war, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia and Iran. (…)

The government of President François Bozizé of the Central African Republic had benefitted from military support from both neighbouring Chad and from France over the years, but he was finally overthrown in a rebellion in March 2013. Victorious fighters of the Séléka alliance have been responsible for a wave of human rights abuses, tens of thousands of people remained displaced and the humanitarian situation in the country has deteriorated markedly in one of the world's forgotten crises.
(…)

At the head of the
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table are those country situations where peoples are at greatest risk. Somalia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo have all been subject to multiple military interventions by both foreign armies and by inter-governmental organizations, over the course of decades. (…)

In Darfur in Sudan the joint UN/African Union peace-keeping force (...) scaled back (...) with the implementation of the Darfur peace agreement. Conflict between rebels and the government continued, however, and included attacks by the Sudanese air force and by government-backed militias on civilians in IDP camps. A set of humanitarian crises continue to unfold on both sides of the border with the newly- independent state of South Sudan. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile in Sudan, the Sudanese armed forces were responsible for indiscriminate shelling of villages in their campaign against the Sudan Revolutionary Front, an alliance of existing rebel groups. (…)

Foreign military intervention lies at one end of a spectrum of possible international engagement and it is instructive first to consider peaceful means of influencing a state's human rights performance. (…)

Emerging from relative isolation over the last two years, Burma/Myanmar has made tentative moves towards democratization, most visibly in the appointment of a civilian government and the release from house arrest and election to Parliament of the opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Burma has accordingly fallen in the index this year, although it remains in the top 10. In addition to widespread human rights violations associated with renewed conflict in Kachin state, inter-community violence has caused the deaths of hundreds of Muslims, particularly Rohingya in Rakhine state. Dam construction and other major development projects across the country

have drawn a huge increase in international investment, but have themselves created further concerns for indigenous and ethnic minority communities who fear displacement and the loss of their livelihoods. (…)

Beyond international oversight and the provision or withholding of aid, a range of other means are available to the international community to seek to modify a state's behaviour. These include, but are not limited to, diplomatic pressure, litigation before international tribunals or the International Court of Justice, suspension or expulsion from international organizations, severance of diplomatic relations, economic sanctions, arms embargoes, international prosecutions of military or political leaders, and travel bans or asset freezes.

The use of a number of these tools is illustrated by the response to inter-ethnic violence in Kenya (…). Intense diplomatic pressure (…) led to a set of power-sharing accords, mediated by former UN Secretary- General Kofi Annan. (…) A new general election in Kenya in March 2013 passed off relatively peacefully, but resulted in the election as President and Deputy President of two men with outstanding ICC indictments for crimes against humanity for their role in the 2007-8 post-election violence. Kenya rose sharply again in the
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table this year.

Both Kofi Annan and his successor as UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, described the Kenya mediation as the first application of the new norm of 'responsibility to protect' (R2P). (…) This responsibility was to be discharged through 'appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means' but, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations, also through taking collective action, 'in a timely and decisive manner', through the UN Security Council. (…)

It should be stressed that even if there is a correlation between military intervention and a subsequent rise in the level of threat to civilian population groups, it cannot be assumed that one causes the other. (…) But it does underline the need for more research. (…)

As the threat of mass killing continues to be faced by peoples around the world, there is an urgent need for reliable data on the consequences as well as the causes of military intervention, to ensure that civilian protection is improved in practice.

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  Also see:⬜ _[Risk of mass killing rises in African countries following foreign military intervention](#)_