

The long overdue sight of Radovan Karadzic in The Hague facing trial for genocide is a useful reminder of wars past. In 1995, after three and a half years of killing, an American-led NATO bombing campaign helped stop Karadzic's atrocities and turned the Bosnian Serb leader into a fugitive. But do the humanitarian interventions typified by America's interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo have a future? Even as Darfur bleeds, Iraq has become a grim object lesson in the dangers of foreign adventures. The former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright recently wrote that any of the world's necessary interventions in the decade before the invasion [of Iraq] in places like Haiti and the Balkans would seem impossible in today's climate. (...)

Humanitarian intervention, in other words, is not the property of the United States or the generation of liberal hawks who championed Balkan interventions in the 1990s. For better or worse, it is best understood as an idea that's common to the big democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. Canada has promoted the principle of an international **responsibility to protect** endangered civilians. Europe has a fresh crop of foreign ministers who, following their 19th-century predecessors, support humanitarian intervention: Bernard Kouchner of France argued for delivering aid to cyclone victims in Myanmar by force if necessary, and David Miliband of Britain championed the faltering United Nations-African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur on a February trip to Beijing. And in Berlin, Barack Obama won German cheers and applause by saying, "the genocide in Darfur shames the conscience of us all." Of course, the real test will come when George W. Bush is gone and Americans and Europeans have to turn those cheers into policy. It's not at all clear that European publics are outraged by abuses in Darfur the way they were once outraged by massacres in Greece, Syria and Bulgaria. When the next president takes office, America will still have troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and will inevitably be more eager for European soldiers to deploy in Afghanistan than in Darfur. In August 1992, a promising presidential candidate named Bill Clinton said, "if the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide. As the Rwandans found out, it's easier to state historical lessons than to apply them."

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/magazine/17wwln-lede-t.html>