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Civil wars rage in Congo, Somalia and Sudan. Thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands more driven from their homes. The prime minister of Kenya just called for foreign troops to be sent to Zimbabwe. But U.N. and African Union peacekeepers are already hopelessly outmatched elsewhere in Africa, and European promises to send troops have so far yielded nothing. There was a time when the United States might have stepped inmerica launched multiple humanitarian interventions in the 1990sut its ardor for such missions seems to have been extinguished by Iraq. Even former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who helped orchestrate interventions in Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo during the Clinton years, now says such missions "would seem impossible in today's climate."

Unless Obama's foreign-policy team has its way, that is. His choice for U.N. ambassador, Susan Rice, served on the National Security Council during the Rwanda genocide and has vowed that if she ever faces a similar crisis, she will "come down on the side of dramatic action." Vice President-elect Joe Biden called during the campaign for imposing a no-fly zone in Darfur and, a year earlier, advocated committing "U.S. troops on the ground" if necessary. And Hillary Clinton, the incoming secretary of state, was a forceful advocate of the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo during her husband's administration.

Of course, campaign rhetoric is one thing. Many analysts warn that to commit troops to a future humanitarian crisis, Team Obama would have to either pull weary forces away from Iraq and Afghanistan or cut back even further on home rest and retraining between missions. It would have to overcome the trepidation of foreign nations, which now tend to see U.S. troops as "the spearhead of regime change," says James Traub, a writer and the director of policy for the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect. ()

Meanwhile, much of the international opposition to U.S. military action is specific to George W. Bush and will dissolve come January. That's especially true for interventions to stop mass killings, which have grown much more palatable to the international community since Kosovo, Rwanda and Darfur. The United Nations recently unanimously approved the "**Responsibility to Protect**" doctrine that gives such missions international imprimatur. And as Ivo Daalder, another prominent Obama adviser, and Robert Kagan have pointed out, between 1989 and 2001 America dispatched significant military force to foreign hot spots so oftennce every 18 monthshat intervention became something of a standard weapon of U.S. foreign policy, and one with bipartisan support. ()

But post-Cold War U.S. history shows that humanitarian intervention cuts across party and ideological lines. As Kagan argues, "when there is a perceived intersection between a failed state, a potential humanitarian catastrophe and a possible risk to regional or U.S. security," the hard decision for a U.S. president isn't whether to go in, it's whether to stay out. "As a theoretical matter it's easy to say we're not going to get involved," says Kagan. "But as a practical matter, because everything has implications beyond itself, it's not so easy avoid." In

fact, it's not just difficult; if history's any guide, you might even call it un-American.

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