

## The Perry Doctrine

*In 1984, President Reagan's secretary of defense, Caspar W. Weinberger, called for sharp restraints on use of US forces—"the Weinberger Doctrine." The Clinton Administration, taking office in 1993, had a different idea. It thought that US power could and should be used for purposes other than major war. In a formal departure, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry in 1995 declared the military would be used not only to protect vital interests—the Weinberger view—but also to protect sub-vital interests, as in Haiti and Bosnia, and for purely humanitarian purposes. He rejected the idea that small interventions inevitably escalate into something much bigger. This was contradicted by subsequent US experiences in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.*

**T**oday I believe there are basically three different cases in which we may use our armed forces. ... The first category is when our vital national interests are threatened. Our second category is when important, but not vital, national interests are threatened. The third category is when a situation causes us deep humanitarian concern. ...

A threat falls into this first category of vital interest if it threatens the survival of the United States or key allies, if it threatens our critical economic interests, or if it poses a danger of a future nuclear threat. ...

Our confrontations with Iraq these past few years involved our vital national interests. Indeed, they involved all three of the threats which I mentioned. They were a threat to key allies; they were a threat to critical economic interests; and a future nuclear danger.

In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia. It verged on controlling all of the gulf's oil, which amounts to two-thirds of the world's proven reserves. Control of that much oil would allow a hostile state to blackmail the industrial world and threaten the health of the world economy, and the revenues from that much oil would allow Iraq to renew—and to renew with vigor—its plans for building a nuclear bomb. So in 1990 we knew that our vital interests were at stake. ...

The political and the ethical questions are ... even more difficult in the second category, when we have important, but not vital, interests at stake. These cases are more difficult because we have an obligation to weigh the risks against the interests involved and because the threats are not always clear-cut. ... Our use of force must, therefore, be selective and limited, reflecting the relative importance of the outcome to our interests.

We have a range of options here, from using US military assets for logistical operations to using US combat forces. The decision of what to use, whether it's a C-130 transport or an Army combat division, will reflect the costs that we are willing to pay to achieve the outcome that we want. ...

Bosnia is [a] case where important, but not vital, US interests are threatened. ... The atrocities perpetrated by the Serbs, in particular the ethnic cleansing, are abhorrent. Therefore, some say that America has an ethical obligation to solve the Bosnian tragedy by entering the war on the side of the Bosnian government.

We have rejected that advice, because America does not have enough at stake to risk the massive American casualties—and they would be massive—as well as the casualties to other parties

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"Keeper File"

and civilians that would occur if we participated in a wider war. Therefore, that course is unacceptable. ...

Doing nothing is unacceptable, too. ... It is a tough ethical decision to stand aside when we perceive that evil is being done, but we have decided to not commit US combat troops to Bosnia to end the war. The cost in American lives, not to mention the cost in Bosnian lives, would be too great, especially when weighed against the limited US interests at stake. But we have decided to commit US military forces to the region to prevent the spread of the war, to limit the violence, and to mitigate human suffering. ...

In spite of these efforts, nobody can feel satisfied from an ethical standpoint about Bosnia. The cases where we weigh our interests against our risks are, by their very nature, ethically unsatisfying. ...

Under certain conditions the use of our armed forces is appropriate [in the third category, humanitarian intervention], and in other conditions it is not appropriate. ...

The civil war in Rwanda was a human catastrophe of massive proportions, yet intervention of US forces would not necessarily have been effective but certainly would have involved very large casualties. Like many other nations, we decided to concentrate on using diplomatic tools until the military and civil contact exhausted itself. Those diplomatic tools proved ineffective. ...

At that point and under unique conditions we were able to act. ... Only the US military could conduct a massive airlift over long distances on short notice to bring in the specialized equipment needed to relieve its suffering. And we did. ...

The lesson learned from Rwanda is that there are times when we can, and we should, intervene in humanitarian crises. But Rwanda also gave us a set of criteria which we use for looking at future humanitarian issues.

The first of those is if we face a natural or manmade catastrophe that dwarfs the ability of normal relief agencies to respond. The second test is if the need for relief is urgent and only the [US] military has the ability to jump-start the effort. Third, if the response requires resources unique to the military. And finally, if there is minimal risk to lives of the American troops. Rwanda met all of those tests. ...

Choosing the right thing to do in a chaotic world is not as simple as some may think, particularly when it comes to using military force. It's not merely a matter of asking our heart. We also have to ask our head. ■