

In the Case of Intervention

Editorial

The metaphor of the international community existing in a “global village” is an excellent one. It is a term wholeheartedly embraced by many humanitarian organizations, diplomats and media members alike. It provides a creative nuance to people’s tendency to identify international actors as plot-carrying characters on a global stage, having the effect of deflating, localizing and civilizing a world that could otherwise be described as expanding, fracturing and aggravated.

While it would be capricious to extend the metaphor too far, to see the world as a global village may provide some insight into the topic ATLIS addressed this year: intervention.

In so many circumstances—including on an international scale—to intervene is meant to be an act of charity, concern and, ultimately, good will to bring some semblance of order into what is perceived to be a chaotic situation. The foundations of international law were established on Grotian ideals that forceful interventions were only acceptable if the intervening actor’s clear and immediate intention was to reestablish order and peace where it was broken.

In fact, one of the oldest, most developed and arguably most important use of international law has been addressing the question of when, why and how intervention is acceptable and indeed necessary. The path of international enforcement and compliance theory in law is without doubt one of the most pertinent, essential and—I argue—most promising avenues for international actors to establish greater order and accountability in a world suffering too much from despotism and injustice.

There are still many arguments and questions facing the ‘international law regime’—as are expected at any level of law. Indeed neo-realists and factions of other theoretical frameworks don’t see the merits or efficacy of such a system at all. And this is where, I suppose, the idea of a global village may help.

Regardless of one’s theoretical basis or political camp, there is no denying this is a world where intervention by a wide assortment of actors towards one another, under innumerable pressures and motivations, occur. Terms of what is acceptable, achievable, legal, and what lies in the gray area, are defined by policies, treaties, resolutions, informal agreements and contracts that can all act as case sources for international lawyers to argue the ‘legality’ of each intervening act.

By the same methods of adopting what is deemed ‘legitimate’ by society, do jurists of any village create laws to provide order. Insert into that village a community of such complexity and diversity that it may only exist on a global scale, and intervention merely becomes one more method of interaction between villagers that is undertaken to sustain a communally beneficial status quo.

The position of international law may then be argued to be the yardstick by which intervention between actors is regarded as either in the interest of maintaining and establishing order, or not. By this account intervention may be regarded just as the likes of Grotius, Kelsen as well as the United Nations Charter espoused; an act only accepted “to preserve international peace” in this global village.

This journal volume has been compiled to display and address some of the many actors, methodologies and circumstances that make up this increasingly momentous global phenomenon of intervention. The question this editorial wishes to ask is whether the examples of intervening action discussed here uphold legal standards or, if one is not sold on the place of international law, whether the kind of interaction seen in these examples is the kind we’re willing to accept in a civil township, of which we are all members. The arguments and issues published in this journal are not inert intellectual exercises, but concrete facets of our world that we must engage with. After all, as we know is the reality of any village, everything can become everyone’s business.

Sasha Van Katwyk
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