

# AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

*Madeleine Albright on democracy-building and intervention*

GJIA: In the 1990s, what was different about the U.S. approach to humanitarian intervention? That is, did the end of the Cold War change when and where the United States chose to intervene?

ALBRIGHT: The Cold War clearly solidified blocs. Also, I think we paid less attention to what was going on inside each country because we wanted them to be on our side. We did that, and so did the Soviets. In that regard, I think that there was a different approach to how we looked at countries individually. We also saw the Communist bloc as monolithic for a long time and therefore we did not see differences within those countries. We also shut our eyes to some of the issues that were going on within countries that were "on our side." After the end of the Cold War, I think that as a result of a real explosion in the information revolution, we also knew a great deal more about what was going on inside each country. What I would call the "CNN factor" in many ways opened up areas and made it harder for a country such as the United States to avert its eyes.

GJIA: Increasingly, humanitarian aid workers are being targeted in conflict situations. Right now, there is a big debate in the development world about militarizing aid missions in

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order to protect the workers and ensure that the aid is distributed properly. What is your take on this?

ALBRIGHT: First of all, I think that aid workers are in a unique position of really trying to help these people. One of the issues that was much talked about when I was involved was whether aid workers' neutrality is an issue. Ultimately, aid workers have a job to do, and I think that it is important for us to remember that, in the end, it is all about people and their suffering. I happen to think that it is appropriate for the military to provide security for aid workers. It is very hard to ask people to go in and put themselves in a completely insecure situation. Some-

almost every instance of international intervention. Given these circumstances, do we need a new strategy of humanitarian aid?

ALBRIGHT: I think we have to keep our eye on the ball, which is the suffering of the people involved, many of whom are completely innocent and just happen to be in the way of conflicting priorities of leaders or various political groupings. So, I do not agree with the idea that aid perpetuates conflict. Conflicts are perpetuated for other reasons, mostly to do with the leadership circles that would not be taking the responsibility of feeding their people under any circumstances. Take, for example, Saddam Hussein, who

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times, though, it is difficult to marry the two—like in Sudan, for instance—where it may not be possible to really protect them. And many aid workers are kind of modern-day missionaries, who think—and rightfully so—that they have something they have to do nonetheless, and they sacrifice a lot.

GJIA: There is some evidence that aid perpetuates conflict by helping not only the innocent civilians but also the warring parties. And, on the same note, some argue that by giving aid, donors are removing the responsibility of civilians from the shoulders of the sovereign nation or the warring party, allowing them to invest their resources exclusively in the conflict, which can prolong the fighting. Such dilemmas emerge in

could care less about his people, and if there were not assistance being given, nothing would be done for them. So, I think he is one of the good examples of this. I believe that there probably are different ways to structure assistance. People often feel that aid does not go to the right people, or it gets diverted, or it is corrupted or something like that. I think there always are reasons to look at ways to change how assistance is given, but I do not think that one could argue, at least I cannot argue, that it perpetuates conflicts.

GJIA: What are some specific suggestions you would make to restructure the way we distribute aid to prevent the different parties that are actually causing the conflicts and hurting their own people from

manipulating the more genuine and benevolent efforts of the international community?

ALBRIGHT: Something that has to happen—and Iraq may show the difficulty in this—is separating the program from the political leadership so that aid is given to nongovernmental organizations or international bodies or somehow so that they do not get credit for it. But this is very hard to do, even under the best of circumstances. Let's take a place like Burma, where Aung San Suu Kyi told me that she was concerned that some of the assistance coming in through the UN was in fact helping to support the regime. On the other hand, she could see that the presence of UNICEF or UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] was actually helpful to the people. There are no very good, clear answers to this. I think the best thing to do is to separate it out so that it obviously does not go through the political leadership. It is better if aid is distributed through NGOs or international organizations.

GJIA: Some observers believe that had the United States supported putting a moderate-size contingent of U.S. or international troops into Rwanda early in the killing process, genocide may have been precluded. Others think that at the stage when such an intervention would have been effective, we could not gauge that the killings were actually a government-sponsored campaign of extermination. How did you, and how would you say a leader in general, resolve this kind of problem: of gauging intentions, and gauging what the U.S. or international mandate for action should be, when the potential consequences of inaction are so grave. Essentially, what are the ethical

dilemmas of leadership where you have a limited amount of information and you have to make important decisions?

ALBRIGHT: Of all the issues that I dealt with, the one in Rwanda was the most troubling and searing in terms of knowing what the effect ultimately was and that the international community did not take action. Yet, *ex post facto*, it looks a lot clearer than it did at the time. The situation needs to be set in the context of what was happening in other parts of the world—what was happening in the Balkans, what had happened in Somalia, and Haiti. One of the hard parts of being a policymaker is that very rarely do you have only one decision to make. Also, very rarely is the decision made in one big step; it is usually incremental. On Rwanda, it was a highly complex situation with the government, the Hutus and the Tutsis power-sharing, creating various problems even before anything was visibly happening. The forces that were in there were basically powerless. Even if we had decided that we needed to send in a peacekeeping force, it could not have happened fast enough to stop the killing. So there are a lot of "ifs."

I went to Rwanda and saw the killing fields, which, in this case, were churches. The role of the Church was just terrible; going to the women's jail and seeing nuns there was one of the most shocking things for me. So I think it was like a volcano that exploded so rapidly and the plans had obviously been laid earlier. I actually do not think we could have stopped it—though, in many ways, I would feel better if we had tried more. It was one of the more difficult episodes because I was an "instructed ambassador," as it is called, and I did not like my instructions. I got them changed a

little bit, but, no matter how much I would have gotten them changed, there was no force ready to go in that could have gone in there quickly enough. One of the issues that people need to think about is how you can have forces that are ready that can deal with something like this, without giving the UN an army, which I am opposed to.

GJIA: Moving on to the issue of democracy promotion. First of all, what defines a democracy? Does the United States have a moral obligation to help countries democratize; if so, what can Western nations actually do to promote democratization? Finally, what is the United States's national interest in democracy promotion?

ALBRIGHT: When we started the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the early '80s, and I was the vice chair, we had very interesting discussions about what defines a democracy. A lot of people said elections, and that may be true, but not totally, since many of the dictatorships have elections, and they vote themselves in by 99.9 percent or whatever. One of the things that I think defines a democracy is the existence of a legitimate opposition party that actually has the possibility of winning the second election. So, there must be a loyal opposition that has a voice and has a structure that allows it to function, whether it is within a recognized legislative branch or in a power-sharing agreement or something like that. So there are many ways to define democracy, but, practically, that has been a very useful kind of criterion for me.

Some say that democracy is just a Western thing, and I do not think it is. For me, democracy is never an imposition; it is a choice. What has to happen is that West-

ern democratic nations can help to promote a climate that allows for that kind of choice. It is my belief that we actually are all the same, and that, given an opportunity, people will choose to make decisions about their own lives. It begins with people deciding which crops to plant, or which school to send their children to, or how to run their neighborhood. The more that they make those decisions, the more they want to make them on a higher and higher political level. That is what I believe. I have a very special view of the United States. We are a special country and I used to say that we were an indispensable country, and I believe that; I just do not believe that we are indispensable alone. That is a distinction that I would make between myself and the people that are in power now. So, I think that we do have an obligation, because of everything that we have, to try to help other countries have the climate where democratic choice is possible.

Now, in order not to just be viewed as a goo-goo, I think that it is in the U.S. national interest because we know that democracies do not go to war with each other, and that the United States is much more comfortable in an international system where other countries are democracies. It is not simple, because just look at our problems with Europe, but we are not afraid that they are going to shoot us. I also think that it is in our national interest to see countries where people are working freely within their systems and are not discontent and looking for ways to overthrow their governments or to go outside of them, as the discontented act now.

GJIA: What concrete steps would you propose that Western nations take to promote democratization?

ALBRIGHT: There are a lot of different ways of doing it. The National Democratic Institute of which I am Chairman of the Board, is one avenue. It basically provides the technical assistance for democracy and, at the invitation of countries, goes in and helps them set up their campaign without choosing a side. So, helping the electoral process is one way. Assisting countries to develop legal systems is another, because ultimately the rule of law and choosing the right judges is important—also helping countries develop an educational system is a way too. There are endless ways, without

law, and maybe you will get fake or rigged elections if you try to put the institutions in too early.

ALBRIGHT: Well, I think that we have to be aware of what is going on in these countries and tailor our programs a little bit, but I do not think we should talk down to them. I am often asked to list the things that I am proudest of, and actually there are quite a few, but one is the thing that we did in Warsaw in the summer of 2000: the Community of Democracy. It showed that, first, there are certain elements that are general to democracy, but

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## I happen to believe that pressing for human rights is central to American foreign policy.

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determining the content, to provide the structure and the process for countries to have all the institutions that are a part of democracy. This includes a free press, an educational system, an election system, a judicial process, and legislative and executive branches. So, we can look at everything that we have here in the United States that can then be transmitted through government programs, through nongovernmental organizations, or exchange programs. Other democratic countries also provide models, and NDI brings all these experiences together.

GJIA: Do you think that we are keeping the right time frame in mind? I know a lot of criticism comes from the fact that some of our aid programs and some international economic institutions' programs are linked to having elections within a certain timeframe. Do you think that maybe these timeframes are too short? It takes time to develop the rule of

also that democracies needed to help each other when they are under stress, and it is important to look at best practices in terms of what has worked in one place or another. I think that, sometimes, conditionality on aid can be both useful and harmful at the same time, so it is hard to generalize. For instance, in Yugoslavia, we conditioned our aid on their turning over a number of indicted suspects to the war crimes tribunal. And it worked! They are going to do it. It also worked on March 31, 2001—it is what really led to the arrest of Milosevic. So, there are times that setting dates on things works. There are other times when we do expect too much and in some ways undermine what we are trying to do by making things happen too fast. One of the things that I have been interested in is what I call "post-euphoria democracy," where people thought it would happen very quickly, whether in Central or Eastern Europe, or in Latin

America, and because there was no democracy dividend to ordinary people, they got discouraged with democracy. So, I think it has to be done on a paced basis, and you cannot have a cookie-cutter approach.

GJIA: On a different tack, what do you think of the idea that there is an inherent contradiction in the way that the United States pressures countries like China and North Korea to reform their human-rights records and increase certain liberal aspects of their regimes, while largely turning a blind eye to human-rights violations and religious persecution by the governments of countries like Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia? How do you think that this contradiction can be reconciled in terms of government policy?

ALBRIGHT: Again, you cannot just have the same approach everywhere. There are people who think that focusing on human rights is a "moralistic" foreign policy and that it is too soft. I think it is a very realistic approach because we understand that when human rights are honored a country is stronger, and, if you look at it purely from a *realpolitik* point of view, it enhances regime stability. It may not in the transition process, but it does ultimately make for more stable regimes, and that is in our national interest. I made it a point during my tenure in government to raise human rights issues wherever I went. It might not have been a message that everybody wanted to hear, and I might have not made it as equally publicly in each country. However, when I went to Uzbekistan, for instance, I met with the human-rights groups. When I met with President Islam Karimov, I told him that I thought they had a lousy human-rights

record and that the way that they were dealing with their Muslim population was going to ultimately hurt them. And when I went to Saudi Arabia, I made it a point to talk about women's rights. So, I did not let resistance stand in my way, but I do think that, again, there has to be a realistic approach to what can and cannot be done. You have to look at each country individually without losing your principles, and I made it a point of always making ours very clear, even if they did not want to hear them.

GJIA: Finally, what role do you believe the United States should play in Afghanistan in its transition from Taliban rule?

ALBRIGHT: First of all, I applaud what President Bush did, and I think he responded properly after September 11, although it was pretty evident what had to be done. I certainly supported the bombing campaign and what was done about fighting terrorism. What has to happen though now is that we cannot just win the war, we have to win the peace. I know that there is kind of a sense that nation-building is a four-letter word. However, it is very important for us to understand that the structure of Afghanistan, which never was very firm, has been totally destroyed, and that we need to help the transition government try to figure out how to rebuild institutions and reconnect with the people, and that can only be done with American assistance programs. I also think that we need to have a larger peacekeeping force there, and that it would not hurt if the United States were a part of it instead of the way that it has separated itself. Also, the peacekeeping force needs to have a larger mandate than just Kabul; it has to be throughout the country. The other

part that I have disagreed with totally is this sense that the military should do only military things. Wherever I traveled with the American military, whether it was in Haiti or in the Balkans or wherever, they liked doing things to help the population—rebuilding schools and helping to protect people and children if they went to school. Somehow the press always finds the one soldier who misses his mother, who wants to come home and does not think what he is doing is very military. The people I met thought that helping the local population was valuable. The American military these days is still the toughest fighting force in the world—we proved that. But we can also be a humane force on the ground and try to help in the transition process, because I think, again from a purely *realpolitik* approach, we cannot afford to have another vacuum in Afghanistan. So, I think we should play a very active role there. We spent *millions* of dollars

bombing them, so I think we can spend some in putting them back together. Although, I have to tell you, I am reading a book about Afghanistan called *The Great Game*, and it is the most complicated part of the world. It is unbelievable. It is amazing and horrendous in terms of its climate and its geography and topography, and it has been crossed and crisscrossed, and people have been murdered there for hundreds of years, so it is very, very hard to understand. I never underestimate the difficulty of these things. I think one of the problems when you have not dealt with a situation first hand is that it all looks much simpler, but there are many, many dimensions. I think the people back at Georgetown who know me will agree that I believe in a very activist American policy because that is what makes America and Americans the safest—not just sitting back and letting the rest of the world worry about itself.