

Institution: University of Cambridge
Unit of Assessment: UoA21
Title of case study: Research on the History of Humanitarian Intervention
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This research, on (i) Britain's refusal to intervene militarily in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995 and (ii) the history of humanitarian interventions in general, has received considerable attention from policy makers and attentive publics. It has contributed to the questioning in British political circles of the 'conservative pessimism' which in the past often led to an unwillingness to act over humanitarian disasters. It has also contributed to the wider emergence of the norm of a 'responsibility to protect', whereby governments qualify the classical presumption of non-intervention with a degree of commitment to protect a people when it is under attack from its own government.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research was conducted by Professor Brendan Simms of the Department of POLIS at the University of Cambridge, beginning in October 1998 when he became a University Teaching Officer. He became a Reader in 2004 and Professor of the History of International Relations in 2008.</p> <p>The first phase, from 1998 on, focused on British policy during the Bosnian War, involving a thorough study of documents in the public sphere, extensive interviews with protagonists, and use of some released or leaked formerly classified documents. The results of this research were published in the monograph "<i>Unfinest Hour: Britain and the destruction of Bosnia</i>" (ref i), as well as in other scholarly outputs (refs iv,v) and disseminated through numerous journal and newspaper articles. The research demonstrated that the UK government's reluctance to use military force to end 'ethnic cleansing' against (mainly) Bosnian Muslims was not driven by any covert 'Islamophobia' but derived from a 'conservative pessimism' about whether intervention was feasible and even intellectually defensible. This mentality, associated with the general norm of non-intervention enshrined in Article 2.7 of the United Nations Charter, had been a powerful shaping force in British foreign policy from the American civil war, through the Spanish civil war to the Biafran crisis of the 1960s. Simms' research demonstrated the power of such thinking and its consequences on the ground in an area for which Britain nonetheless had accepted some responsibility. The work also suggested that this stance was proving increasingly unsustainable in a world where a humanitarian catastrophe within Europe was putting an impossible strain on alliance cohesion within NATO and the European Union, partly through the heightened concern of public opinion. It thus helped to develop an agenda with both normative and empirical dimensions.</p> <p>The second phase of the research, from c2004, involved a much broader investigation of the historical roots of the concept of humanitarian intervention, partly through detailed study of early modern and eighteenth century British foreign policy, and partly through collaboration with other scholars. This work showed that historically British policy makers have frequently had to engage with humanitarian principles in foreign policy making and indeed decisions on intervention. Their reactions have depended on which strand of political thinking, and to a lesser extent which party, was dominant at the time. Moreover, looking beyond the British case to the European continent, and contrary to widespread popular and political belief, the practice of humanitarian intervention was found to have a long historical pedigree. Indeed, it became clear that the very idea of a 'Westphalian' international system in which intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states was forbidden, is a subsequent invention by international lawyers rather than an historical fact (refs ii, iii, vi).</p>
3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Impact case study (REF3b)

- i. *Unfinest hour. Britain and the destruction of Bosnia* (Allen Lane, London, 2001), 462pp. (Bosnian and Serbian Edition: *NasramnijiTrenutak. BritanijaiunistavanjeBosne* (Sarajevo and Belgrade, 2003). Shortlisted for the BBC's Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction 2002.
- ii. *Three Victories and a defeat: the rise and fall of the first British Empire* (Allen Lane, London, 2007), 781 pp
- iii. with D.J. Trim (eds), *Humanitarian intervention. A history* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- iv. 'Bosnia: the lessons of history', in Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic (eds.), *This time we knew. Western responses to genocide in Bosnia* (New York University Press, 1996), pp. 65-78
- v. 'The End of the "Official doctrine": The new consensus on Britain and Bosnia', in Neil Winn (ed.), *Civil Wars. Special Issue on Neo-Medievalism and Civil Wars*, vol. 6, 2 (2003)
- vi. "A false principle in the Law of Nations". Burke, state sovereignty, [German] liberty, and intervention in the Age of Westphalia', in Brendan Simms and D.J. Trim (eds), *Humanitarian intervention. A history* (Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.89-110.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Professor Simms's work has served not only to inform policy-makers and parliamentarians, but also to contribute to public awareness of a crucial dimension of international politics, that of humanitarian intervention. While his work has had particular resonance in debates about the Balkans, it has also had a significant impact on thinking about the responsibilities of governments to protect their own citizens, and in certain circumstances those of other states.

The testimonials cited in Section 5 from senior practitioners inside and outside the UK provide clear evidence for the claim that Simms' research has had impact in policy-making circles. For example the ex-Australian Foreign Minister and Founder of the International Crisis Group says that 'Brendan Simms's book, and the debate that it generated, contributed enormously to the perception among policy-makers in Europe and beyond that terrible errors had been made in the Balkans, and to their determination to ensure that experience was never repeated' (**Source i**). The ex-British Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina (1996-8), and then senior member of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for ex-Yugoslavia, talks of 'a significant practical impact' which continues through debates with 'immediate operational significance' such as Libya and Syria, a view supported by a senior military intelligence officer (**Sources ii and iv**), while a former speechwriter to David Cameron reports that *Unfinest Hour* had been read by the prime minister and 'at least one other influential cabinet minister'. It 'had been such an influence on the Prime Minister in his approach to intervention abroad, especially in the run-up to Libya and with its indictment of Conservative inaction' (**Source iii**). Professor Simms is regularly invited to give talks at parliamentary committee meetings, conferences, and seminars at the Foreign Office on the conflict in Bosnia, on the British response, on humanitarian intervention generally and on the associated doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect. He has also spoken to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the Ministry of Defence and the RAF's Air Warfare Centre at Waddington. His edited volume on *Humanitarian intervention: a history* was launched in the House of Commons in April 2011 just after the start of the Libyan war, an event chaired by Gisela Stuart M.P. (Labour) and attended by more than one hundred people including many MPs and ministerial advisors (27.4.2011). The research also led to his participation in the following panels where academics have the opportunity to influence defence thinking:

- Member of the Strategic Advisory Panel, Chief of the Defence Staff, 2010-13.
- Member, Military Education Committee, Cambridge University, 2004-10.

The work of Professor Simms has not only been influential in the realm of government and policy making, but has also been a key reference in public debates about both the Bosnian tragedy and

the balance-sheets of humanitarian interventions (**Sources i and ii**). Since publication the first output from his research, the book *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*, has been regularly referred to in newspaper articles and commentary on all sides of the political spectrum in regard to British policies in Bosnia (**Sources v, vi and viii**) and was warmly received in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. Largely as a result of this work Simms was included in the *Guardian's* "top 300 British intellectuals" from 7 May 2011 (**Source vii**). In 2012 he participated in a panel on Britain and Europe at the Hay Festival, attracting a large general audience, speaking there again in 2013 when he also spoke at the Edinburgh and Cheltenham Literary Festivals.

He has been interviewed by the BBC 4, Sky Muslim Channel, Channel 4, BBC World Service, RTE, and numerous Balkan radio programmes and written numerous articles and reviews on Bosnia and humanitarian intervention for the *Evening Standard*, *Independent*, *Independent on Sunday*, *London Review of Books*, *New Statesman*, *Observer*, *Spectator*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. On the occasion of the outbreak of the Libyan war in 2011, which coincided with the publication of his edited book *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, he took part in a discussion on BBC 4's 'News Hour' with Professor Mark Mazower of Columbia University on humanitarian intervention (27.4.2011).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- i. **Testimonial**, ex-Australian Foreign Minister and Founder of the International Crisis Group.
- ii. **Testimonial**, ex British Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina (1996-8) and then senior member of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for ex-Yugoslavia.
- iii. **Testimonial**, former speech-writer to David Cameron. Email backing up his original article in the **Daily Mail**, 20 May 2011. (Link: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1368023/Libya-David-Camerons-battle-Gaddafi-desert-despot-define-him.html>).
- iv. **Testimonial**, senior military intelligence officer at the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters (Northwood).
- v. **The Daily Telegraph**, 15 March, 2011. Simon Heffer cites and refers to the article of Brendan Simms in the *New Statesman* of that week in his article "We don't have the luxury of an interventionist foreign policy" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/simonheffer/8384180/We-dont-have-the-luxury-of-an-interventionist-foreign-policy.html>).
- vi. **Labour List**, 18, March 2011. Sunder Katwala quotes Brendan Simms' article in the *New Statesman* What's your foreign policy, Mr Cameron? <http://labourlist.org/2011/03/cameron-deserves-credit-over-libya>).
- vii. Brendan Simms included in the *Guardian's* list of 'top 300 British intellectuals' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/may/08/top-300-british-intellecutuals?intcmp=239>).
- viii. When talking about the intervention in Libya, David Cameron referred several times to "the lessons of Bosnia" in public statements. Examples are a statement at a press conference in Brussels on 11 March 2011 (Link:<http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/press-conference-in-brussels/>) and a statement in the House of Commons on 18 March, 2011 in which he states: "It seems to me that we have to learn both the lessons of Iraq, by proceeding with the maximum Arab support and being very clear that there will be no army of occupation, and the lessons of Bosnia and not stand aside and witness a slaughter." (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110318/debtext/110318-0002.htm>)