

## Editorial

**The “Responsibility to Protect” and the Agenda of the Imperialists**

During the past year Prime Minister Paul Martin has been advocating that the United Nations adopt a policy of intervention based on the principle that a state has a “responsibility to protect” its citizens. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has also endorsed this concept and is pushing for its adoption at the current special summit of the UN. Currently, the charter of the UN allows the organization to intervene militarily only to stop military aggression by one state against another or to preserve the peace between two states if both states invite the UN to do so. The adoption of Martin’s “responsibility to protect” policy would broaden the mandate of the UN and allow it to intervene militarily in situations where a state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens from harm or where a state is inflicting harm on a section of its own population. In effect, this

means that the UN could intervene in any situation of civil strife or civil war, either to assist the existing state to suppress an insurgency or to assist insurgents to overthrow the existing state. Any decision on intervention would remain, as it does now, with the Security Council and not with the General Assembly.

Of course, the concept that a state should protect its citizens is nothing new. In fact, it is the underlying premise of the “social contract” that defines the modern nation state, although throughout modern history virtually every state has been guilty of violating this premise at one time or another. The failure of the American state to protect its citizens from the ravages of hurricane Katrina is a case in point. Nor is the practice of intervention in the internal affairs of

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**Nature, Society and the Legitimacy to Rule**

Humankind cannot prevent hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanoes. However, it can minimize the damage caused by the forces of nature. Since hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, with devastating consequences for their residents, particularly in New Orleans, the overwhelming opinion is that the U.S. government at all levels failed to adequately protect the lives and property of the people in the path of the hurricane.

Why was the richest country in the world unable to protect the lives and property of its citizens? This question is bothering a lot of people. The United States has the materials, scientific-technical knowledge and the expertise to build levees, retaining walls and flood control systems that could

have withstood the hurricane. It has the vehicles, trains, airplanes and boats that could have transported people from danger ahead of the hurricane. It has safe areas of refuge in neighbouring states that could have harboured all of the people in the path of the hurricane. Very few countries in the world have the same advantages when their populations are facing a natural disaster. Yet the people in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama were almost as defenceless as people in poor countries.

New Orleans had long known that it was highly vulnerable to flooding and a direct hit from a hurricane. The U.S. federal government had been working with state and local officials in the region

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since the late 1960's on major hurricane and flood relief efforts. When flooding from a massive rainstorm in May 1995 killed six people, the U.S. Congress established the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project (SELA). Over the next 10 years, the Army Corps of Engineers spent \$430 million on shoring up levees and building pumping stations using SELA funding and \$50 million in local aid. But at least \$250 million in crucial projects remained to be done.

Hurricane activity in the Atlantic Basin has increased dramatically in recent years. The 2004 hurricane season was the worst in decades and the entire New Orleans delta is continuing to subside, so the danger of flooding is increasing. Yet, this spring the U.S. federal government made the steepest reduction in hurricane and flood control funding for New Orleans in history. Because of the proposed cuts, the Army Corps of Engineers imposed a hiring freeze. Officials said that money targeted for the SELA project — \$10.4 million, down from \$36.5 million — was not enough to start any new jobs.

In recent times, governments have made the central focus of their policies the making of maximum capitalist profit by the monopolies. In pursuit of this aim, successive governments in countries like the United States, Britain and Canada have made the cutting of public spending, along with privatization, the main plank of their policy. In previous times, governments had been willing to give guarantees of public well-being, at least in words. In fact the idea of guaranteeing the public well-being could be said to have come into being with the rise of capitalism and the very development of the modern nation state. The very fact of taking on the responsibility to run a national economy embracing an entire population implied a responsibility for the nation's welfare, even though the ruling class was reluctant to embrace this idea and provide that guarantee.

In the late nineteenth century this took the form of major public works; in the post-Second World War period it took the form of the "Welfare State". Even though the motives behind this development were more to stave off socialism and make profits for the monopolies than concern for the working people, it meant that the state was openly declaring itself responsible for the well-being of the people.

Trudeau's "Just Society" was a similar expression of the attitude of the ruling class at that time.

Now, however, the governments justify their policies of public spending cuts by claiming that society has no obligation to provide the means or guarantees for the well-being of the members of society. They say that people must fend for themselves, that the burden belongs to individuals and their families. However, in a modern highly integrated society, with large scale production, families clearly cannot provide education, health, employment, culture, and all that is needed on their own. In the modern age people are born to society and society must provide all the necessities at the highest available level for every member of the society, irrespective of wealth, position, national background, gender, lifestyle or any other characteristic. If a system is such that those in power are unable or unwilling to meet this obligation then the only conclusion is that the system no longer meets modern requirements and must be overthrown and replaced with one that will.

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sovereign states anything new. This has been a hallmark of colonialism and imperialism throughout history and especially in the modern era. The UN, itself, has a history of committing such aggression. For example, it intervened on behalf of U.S. imperialism in Korea in the early 1950s and again on behalf of Belgian and U.S. imperialism in the Congo in the early 1960s. However, in both those situations an enormous amount of political manoeuvring was required to justify those actions and present them as falling within the mandate of the UN.

The adoption of a UN policy of intervention based on the principle of the "responsibility to protect" would do nothing to protect the people living in the imperialist countries or in those countries which fall within their spheres of influence. The most powerful imperialist countries have a veto within the UN Security Council and have demonstrated on numerous instances that they will use that veto to prevent UN intervention anywhere that it conflicts with their own imperialist interests. Thus, UN military interventions would still occur only in those cases

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# **Differing Appeals at UN 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit Highlight Gulf Between Imperialists and the Rest of the World**

There were over 100 speeches to the General Assembly of the UN during the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary World Summit from September 14-16. The summit was originally convened to deal with two main issues: Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposed reforms to the organization and the pledges made by world leaders during the 2000 Millennium Summit.

However, in the days before the Summit opened intense lobbying by the U.S. and many of its allies, along with a handful of other nations, resulted in the summit discussion document being substantially expanded, considerably watering down the importance of the few concepts originally slated for discussion. Additions included the war on terrorism, nuclear proliferation (which the U.S. had added as a way of pressuring Iran) and, at the urging of Canada and some other European powers, the interventionist "responsibility to protect" doctrine.

In his opening address, Annan urged those gathered, including 150 world leaders, heads of state or foreign ministers, to "take bold steps to remedy the challenges facing the international community, from ensuring collective action to prevent conflict and genocide to protecting human rights, promoting development and battling terrorism."

U.S. President George W. Bush, who addressed the summit on the first day, began by presenting the catastrophe unleashed upon the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama by Hurricane Katrina as proof of the interdependence of all peoples, rather than as a searing indictment of the U.S. state. He added that as nations respond to great humanitarian needs they must also actively respond to other current challenges, including "work to ease suffering, spread freedom and lay the foundations of peace for children and grandchildren." Using the summit as yet another pulpit to defend the illegal American-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, he said "no nation can remain isolated and indifferent to the struggles of

others, as threats pass easily across oceans and borders and can threaten the security of any country." He then focused on the need for all nations to unite behind the U.S. in the war on terror, and called for reforms to the UN through the elimination of corruption.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin used his speech to urge adoption of the responsibility to protect doctrine, as did British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Other world leaders, however, stuck to the original agenda of the summit and used the occasion to call for sweeping reforms and even transformations of the UN to deal with the dire poverty, hunger and disease that condemns tens of millions to death every year.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing nations, Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson also highlighted how empty the promises made at the Millennium Summit were. "Since the Millennium Summit, the developing countries have made total net transfers of over one thousand, one hundred and seventy-four point five billion U.S. dollars," to wealthy nations, he said. "These negative transfers have persisted, despite the commitments by the developed countries to increase Official Development Assistance, to reduce debt and debt-service payments, to open their markets to the products of developing countries and to encourage private investment in developing countries. While resources from developing countries flow to developed countries without impediments, the initiatives and programmes of developed countries which would transfer resources or provide access to developing countries have either been negligible, stymied in negotiations, or ringed with strict policy conditionalities."

Cuban Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcon, speaking on September 15, condemned the attempts

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to weaken the summit, reviewing the goals set at the Millennium Summit and noting “very little has been done to reach these goals.” Indeed, instead of progress on issues such as the spread of HIV/AIDS and the eradication of hunger, “there has been an outright setback.”

“That was what we needed to discuss here, today, to undertake resolute and urgent actions which would allow us to move forward. That was our obligation in this summit. But we are bearing witness to an unforgivable sham. The objective of this meeting was held hostage through tortuous manipulation. Those who fancy themselves the world’s owners do not even want to remember those promises and the hypocritical fanfare that came with them. What is worse, they seek to impose alleged reforms in the UN which only intend to subjugate the organization completely and transform it into an instrument of their global dictatorship.”

According to Reuters, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez received the loudest applause for his September 15 speech to the Summit, in which he called for a wholesale transformation of the UN. “The 21st century demands changes that are only possible with a refounding of this organization,” said Chavez. “Mere reforms are not enough...”

For the short-term, Chavez proposed four key reforms: increasing both the permanent and rotating members of the Security Council; increasing transparency in the operation of the Security Council; abolishing of the veto power currently held by Security Council permanent members; and strengthening the role of the Secretary General. He also said the UN should move away from New York.

“The original purpose of this meeting has been completely distorted,” he told the gathering. “The imposed center of debate has been a so-called reform process that overshadows the most urgent issues, what the peoples of the world claim with urgency: the adoption of measures that deal with the real problems that block and sabotage the efforts made by our countries for real development and life. Five years after the Millennium Summit, the harsh

reality is that the great majority of estimated goals - which were very modest indeed - will not be met. “

He also addressed the “responsibility to protect” doctrine being advocated by Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin. “Let us not permit that a few countries try to reinterpret the principles of international law in order to impose new doctrines such as ‘pre-emptive warfare.’ ...And what about the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine? We need to ask ourselves. Who is going to protect us? How are they going to protect us? “

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where the big imperialist powers can arrive at a consensus, that is, where their imperialist interests converge.

In practical terms Martin’s proposal would make little difference in determining whether or not the UN intervened in any particular country because the Security Council would still make such decisions and the five permanent members would still have their vetoes. However, it would change the fundamental concept of the UN from being a forum for all countries to solve their problems peacefully (however far it may currently fall from that ideal in practice) to being a military agency under the control of the Security Council. Therefore, the adoption of such a policy would be an enormous step backwards.

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