

“The Origins of Liberal Wilsonianism: Giuseppe Mazzini on Regime Change and Humanitarian Intervention,” in Stefano Recchia and Jennifer Welsh, eds., *Just and Unjust Military Intervention* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Abstract: International relations scholars in the English-speaking world have long viewed Giuseppe Mazzini, the nineteenth-century thinker and activist, as the archetype of the crusading interventionist—someone who justified and indeed called for military intervention by powerful liberal states to spread freedom and democracy abroad. This chapter reviews Mazzini’s writings on international politics and finds that this interpretation is largely unfounded. Mazzini developed a still surprisingly topical *critique* of political regime change achieved through foreign military intervention: he was convinced that democracy had to grow internally, from a genuine domestic political struggle, and believed that self-government achieved with the help of foreign armies would not be genuine and could not be lasting. Mazzini was certainly no pacifist. He justified armed insurrection against despotic governments, and he played a key role in the European democratic uprisings of 1848-49. His ultimate goal was a reorganization of the European political order on the basis of two principles that he saw as inextricably linked: democracy *and* national self-determination. Yet, he justified direct military intervention in foreign countries only in two circumstances: first, as liberal *counter-intervention*, to re-balance the situation on the ground when outsiders had already intervened in support of the local despot; and second, as *humanitarian intervention* to stop large-scale violence against ethnic or religious minorities.

11 The origins of liberal Wilsonianism: Giuseppe Mazzini on regime change and humanitarian intervention

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Anglo-American scholars of international relations have long viewed Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72) as the archetype of the crusading *liberal interventionist* – someone who justified and indeed called for military intervention by powerful liberal states to spread freedom and democracy abroad. According to English School theorists Martin Wight and John Vincent, Mazzini was the foremost nineteenth-century advocate of “international intervention against despotic governments.”¹ In the United States, Kenneth Waltz has relied on Mazzini’s alleged “messianic interventionism” to buttress his broader claim that liberalism in international relations displays a crusading tendency and often “develops a hubris of its own.”² Taking this reading to its logical extreme, one scholar has associated Mazzini’s internationalism with contemporary “neo-conservative” ideology and related policies of forcible regime change.³ This chapter reviews Mazzini’s international thought and concludes that the aforementioned interpretations are largely unfounded. Mazzini developed a still surprisingly topical *critique* of regime change through foreign military intervention: he was convinced that democracy had to grow internally, from a genuine domestic political struggle, and believed that self-government achieved with the help of foreign armies would not be genuine and could not be lasting.

That being said, Mazzini was certainly not a pacifist. The father of the Italian Risorgimento was first and foremost a revolutionary leader who advocated and personally helped to organize popular uprisings in Italy

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¹ M. Wight, *Four Seminal Thinkers in International Theory: Machiavelli, Grotius, Kant, and Mazzini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 107. See also R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 60–1.

² K. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 103, 111.

³ M. J. Smith, “Liberalism and International Reform,” in T. Nardin and D. Mapel (eds.), *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 14–15.

and other European countries. He saw armed insurrection against despotic governments as a legitimate last resort, and he played a key role in the democratic uprisings of 1848–9. Mazzini's ultimate objective was a reorganization of the European political order on the basis of two principles that he saw as inextricably linked: *democracy* and *national self-determination*. The triumph of these principles, he believed, would not only vastly increase individual freedom and popular participation at the domestic level; it would also disclose the possibility of a more just and peaceful international order.

Mazzini was hardly a systematic political thinker, and his writings are not free of contradictions. Nevertheless, his tremendous influence on the subsequent development of liberal internationalism, and notably on what has come to be known as “liberal Wilsonianism,” warrants a detailed (re-)examination of his thought. Until recently, Mazzini's essays on politics and international relations were scattered over dozens of out-of-print and hard-to-access publications, several of which had never been translated into English.⁴ That led modern Anglo-American scholars to focus largely on a few readily available fragments of his writings, reprinted in the early twentieth century, often by militant publishers intent on inflating particular aspects of his thought.⁵

The chapter proceeds as follows. After providing some background on Mazzini's life and his impact on political events, I briefly examine his thoughts on democracy and international order – including his vision of a future European federation of democracies. The bulk of the chapter is then devoted to a detailed discussion of his arguments on violent insurrection and military intervention. Mazzini called for a “Holy Alliance of the Peoples” – a transnational alliance of Europe's revolutionary democrats – but he opposed regime change achieved with the help of foreign regular armies. He justified direct military intervention only in two narrowly defined circumstances: first, as *counter-intervention*, to re-balance the situation on the ground during a popular revolution, when troops from another foreign country have already intervened in support of the local despot; and second, as *humanitarian intervention* to stop large-scale violence against ethnic or religious minorities. Throughout the

⁴ A single-volume English language edition of Mazzini's principal writings on politics and international relations was not published until 2009. See S. Recchia and N. Urbinati (eds.), *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini's Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁵ For instance, Kenneth Waltz relies on a short and fragmentary selection of Mazzini's writings, edited in the 1940s by N. Gangulee, an Indian nationalist scholar based at the University of Calcutta. Cf. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, pp. 108, 110.

chapter, I seek to extrapolate from Mazzini's arguments some potentially useful lessons for thinking about intervention today.

Mazzini's life and the lasting impact of his ideas

Mazzini was born on June 22, 1805 in Genoa, a port city in northern Italy with an important republican past. His middle-class background (his father was a physician) allowed him to pursue advanced studies in law as well as literature, and by 1830 he had become a leading figure in the Italian patriotic struggle for national unification. That same year, at the age of twenty-five, Mazzini had to flee his homeland, with a death warrant on his head for subversive activism against Austria's imperial rule in northern Italy. He spent most of his remaining life in exile, first hiding in Switzerland and France, before more or less permanently relocating to England.

As early as 1831, working undercover in France, Mazzini founded the revolutionary organization *Giovine Italia* (Young Italy), aimed at promoting the patriotic ideal among Italy's educated middle classes and coordinating national insurrections. In subsequent years he attempted, not always successfully, to set up similar patriotic organizations for Germany, Greece, Spain, Russia and Poland. In 1834, while in Switzerland, he founded a new transnational revolutionary association, ambitiously called *Young Europe*, with a dozen refugees from Italy, Poland and Germany. From 1837 onwards, he spent most of his time in London, where he continued to write and publish assiduously. He also attempted to coordinate what he saw as an emergent pan-European struggle against the imperial dominion of the Habsburgs, Romanovs, and Ottomans over Italy, Central Europe, and the Balkans.⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, Mazzini ranked among the most influential European political thinkers, along with intellectual heavyweights such as Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Mikhail Bakunin and Alexis de Tocqueville. The Italian revolutionary's political career reached its zenith quite abruptly in the spring of 1849. A popular uprising in Rome against the despotic rule of Pope Pius IX abolished the temporal power of the papacy, and a constituent assembly proclaimed the revolutionary Roman Republic. Mazzini, called back to Italy, was elected as a member of the republic's "triumvirate," or three-person governing council – but his popularity in revolutionary circles preordained him to become the

⁶ D. Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 5ff. For a detailed history of Young Italy and Young Europe, see F. Della Peruta, *Mazzini e i rivoluzionari italiani: Il partito d'azione 1830–1845* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), chs. 2–3.

republic's *de facto* head of government. Under Mazzini's leadership, the citizens of Rome universally enjoyed personal and political freedoms, including press freedom, religious freedom, due process, and equality among the sexes, to an extent unequalled anywhere else at the time. But the time was not yet ripe for such radical change: Europe's conservative powers, fearing possible contagion, quickly launched a military intervention aimed at crushing the republic and reinstating the pope. In June 1849, the Roman republic succumbed to a combined onslaught of French, Austrian, and Spanish troops, and Mazzini once again had to flee Italy. Back in London, he remained an influential voice in European progressive and democratic circles until his death in 1872.⁷

Mazzini's visionary essays and pamphlets, replete with calls to action, were a source of inspiration not only for revolutionary patriots and democrats in the nineteenth century, but also for subsequent generations of progressive nationalists and anticolonial leaders, from Central and South-Eastern Europe, to Latin America, Asia, and the Arab world. There is evidence that his writings, translated into many languages, influenced notably the early Zionists, as well as Gandhi, Nehru, Nasser, and Sun Yat-sen.⁸

Furthermore, Mazzini's ideas on national self-determination and his vision of an international federation of democracies appear to have crucially shaped the world view of US President Woodrow Wilson. In 1919, while briefly in Italy, Wilson affirmed that he had closely studied Mazzini's writings and had "derived guidance from the principles which Mazzini so eloquently expressed."⁹ At the time, Wilson was seeking to restructure international politics according to liberal principles, with his famous "fourteen points" and the League of Nations proposal. The American president openly acknowledged his desire to contribute to "the realization of the ideals to which his [i.e., Mazzini's] life and thought were devoted."¹⁰ Modern liberal Wilsonianism reflects Mazzini's ideals and objectives, but also some of the tensions inherent in his thought (notably between his democratic nationalism and moral universalism), to a striking degree.

⁷ Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 75. See also Indro Montanelli, *Storia d'Italia 1831–61* (Milan: RCS Libri, 1998), pp. 77, 413–15, 444.

⁸ See the essays in C. A. Bayly and E. F. Biagini (eds.), *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830–1920* (Oxford University Press, 2008); G. Srivastava, *Mazzini and His Impact on the Indian National Movement* (Allahabad, India: Chugh Publications 1982); and Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 219.

⁹ W. Wilson, "Remarks about Giuseppe Mazzini" and "Further Remarks in Genoa," in A. S. Lind (ed.), *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton University Press, 1986), vol. 53, pp. 614–15.

¹⁰ Wilson, "Remarks about Giuseppe Mazzini," p. 615.

A democratic conception of the nation

Present-day scholars sometimes acknowledge Mazzini as a central figure of classical liberal internationalism, and as the first “liberal nationalist.”¹¹ But international relations scholars in particular have tended to underestimate the deeply democratic character of his arguments on national self-determination. To begin with, Mazzini’s conception of the nation is eminently political, or what we might today call “nonessentialist.” He did not dismiss prepolitical factors such as language, territory, and ethnicity, but he viewed them as “just *indications* of nationality” – they might facilitate the process of political association but are insufficient by themselves to legitimize national independence.¹²

“By NATION,” he wrote as early as 1832, “we mean THE ENTIRETY OF CITIZENS WHO SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE AND ARE ASSOCIATED, UNDER EQUAL ENJOYMENT OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS.”¹³ Linguistic unity thus undoubtedly matters (Mazzini appears to have viewed it as a social glue); but it is the notion of a commonwealth, or voluntary association among equals under a written constitution, that is central to Mazzini’s democratic conception of the nation. As some of the most recent scholarship concludes: “Mazzini did not believe in the nation as a primordial, natural phenomenon but as a social construction imagined by those who would create it; . . . for him, nationalism was not an end in itself but the means to another end – a democratic republic.”¹⁴

In short, for Mazzini the nation is a political project aimed at redefining the legitimacy of sovereign power. He always saw the achievement of national independence and self-determination as accomplishments of,

¹¹ On Mazzini as a central figure of classical liberal internationalism, see S. Hoffmann, *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 73, 125, 219; and A. Franceschet, “The Ethical Foundations of Liberal Internationalism,” *International Journal* 54, no. 3 (1999), p. 472. On Mazzini as a liberal nationalist, see M. Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay On Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 148–53; M. Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996), pp. 6–9; and M. Freedon, *Liberal Languages* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 212.

¹² Mazzini, “Nationalism and Nationality,” [1871] in Recchia and Urbinati (eds.) *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, p. 65. Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for all of Mazzini’s essays cited below are from the Recchia and Urbinati edition.

¹³ Mazzini, “Manifesto of Young Italy” [1832], pp. 48–50, capitals in originals, emphasis added. Almost three decades later, Mazzini reiterated this view: “The entire Nation should legislate, either directly or indirectly. By yielding this mission into the hands of a few, you put the egoism of a single class in place of the Country, which is the Union of *all* classes.” Cf. Mazzini, “On the Duties of Man” [1860], p. 95.

¹⁴ D. Rowley, “Giuseppe Mazzini and the Democratic Logic of Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012), p. 40. See also Viroli, *For Love of Country*, p. 148.

rather than alternatives to, the message of the Enlightenment and the legacy of the French Revolution: “Free *nationhood*, or universal national self-determination, is the sole guarantee against the despotic rule of a single people over several others, just as *individual liberty* is the sole guarantee against the despotic subjection of human beings.”¹⁵ Mazzini also identified a crucial pedagogical element in universal suffrage and other forms of democratic participation: they would educate people to see each other as moral and political equals, ideally transcending the borders of their own nation. Therefore, national self-determination would ultimately promote a more universalistic conception of what it means to be human. At the same time, while Mazzini emphasized popular education and civic participation as means to virtuous citizenship and moral awareness, he appears to have underestimated the importance of domestic constitutional safeguards to protect the rights of individuals and political minorities.¹⁶ That leaves his liberalism incomplete, and has led some critics to portray him as a quasi-Jacobin.¹⁷

Mazzini never viewed the nation-state as the end point of historical progress. He simply thought that under the historical circumstances of his time, the nation-state provided the most fertile background for the development of democracy and the civic education of individuals. But unlike his contemporary John Stuart Mill, he did not view democracy and the nation-state as inextricably linked. Mill famously opined that “free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities.”¹⁸ Mazzini instead thought that *post-national democracy*, notably at the European level, was a distinct possibility for the future. Based on his reading of Italian history, he was convinced that there was nothing permanent in any given culture, language, race, or ethnicity. Different ethnicities and tribes – and thus also different nationalities – could become amalgamated over the centuries, giving rise to a new and larger political association:

¹⁵ Mazzini, “Principles of International Politics” [1871], pp. 233–4. See also N. Urbinati, “‘A Common Law of Nations’: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Democratic Nationality,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 1 (1996), 207–8.

¹⁶ In one of his early writings, he claims that “the nation’s power is unlimited” and then insists that “any restrictions brought to ... the deputies’ ultimate choice would contradict the principle of national sovereignty.” Cf. Mazzini, “On the Superiority of Representative Government” [1832], p. 51.

¹⁷ See, e.g. G. Salvemini, *Mazzini* (trans. I. M. Rawson) (Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 56–61; and B. Haddock, “State and Nation in Mazzini’s Political Thought,” *History of Political Thought* 20 (1999), 324–7.

¹⁸ J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (ed. J. Gray) (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 428.

*We do not believe in the timelessness of races. We do not believe in the timelessness of languages . . . We do not believe in the timeless impact of any given cause on human affairs . . . We believe in a sole and constant general law. Therefore we also believe in a sole and constant general objective [human freedom]; and we believe in progressive development toward this given objective, which can only be achieved by means of coming closer together – that is, through association.*¹⁹

The desired end state: an international federation of democracies

It was Mazzini's conviction that the moral progress achieved through the establishment of independent and democratic nation-states would also facilitate the emergence of a more peaceful international order based on mutual trust and solidarity among peoples. In the past, he argued, for "the old despotic rulers . . . peace was never more . . . than a mere cessation of hostilities; their pursuit of a *balance of power* was an attempt to equalize their strength, always having future wars in mind and always mistrusting each other."²⁰ But he thought that in the mid-nineteenth century, these age-old dynamics of international politics were about to fundamentally change. With democracy taking hold domestically, the traditional balance of power at the international level would soon be replaced by something radically new – a cooperative system of collective security and international federation:

These states, which have remained divided, hostile, and jealous of one another so long as their national banner merely represented the narrow interests of a dynasty or caste, will gradually become more and more intimately associated *through the medium of democracy*. The nations will be sisters. Free and independent . . . in the organization of their domestic affairs, they will gradually unite around a common faith, and they *will enter a common pact to regulate all matters related to their international life*.²¹

Mazzini expected that Europe's newly emerging democracies, faced with a hostile international environment still dominated by despotic regimes, would inevitably be drawn together. At first they would merely become "united in a *collective defense pact* against the possible usurpations of one or the other great Power."²² But over time, the experience of beneficial cooperation among democracies in the context of a security-based

¹⁹ Mazzini, "Humanity and Country" [1836], p. 55.

²⁰ Mazzini, "Nationality and Cosmopolitanism" [1847], p. 60.

²¹ Mazzini, "From a Revolutionary Alliance to the United States of Europe" [1850], p. 126.

²² Mazzini, "Principles of International Politics," p. 236.

alliance would increase their mutual trust and solidarity, thus engendering further cooperation on other issues. “Free and equal Peoples will help one another; each will be able to benefit from the resources that others possess in the pursuit of their common civilization and progress.”²³

Europe’s democracies would also increasingly set up more complex federative arrangements to put their cooperation on more solid institutional foundations. “The future Europe of peoples will be united through a *new type of federation*, which will avoid both the anarchy of absolute independence and the tyrannical centralization that results from conquest.”²⁴ Mazzini remained short on details concerning the institutional architecture of this future international federation. But he felt confident enough to predict that at the European level, the deepening bond among democracies would probably result in the establishment of a “large international democratic association” with its own parliamentary committee. Presumably one day there would also be a European Court of Arbitration to adjudicate international disputes. Mazzini’s avowed longer-term goal was to move beyond the nation-state, and “to create the United States of Europe.”²⁵

Therefore, Mazzini in many ways prefigured the modern hypothesis of a separate “democratic peace,” according to which liberal democracies do not fight against each other and are likely to establish closer associational bonds than other types of regimes.²⁶ Arguably, Mazzini expressed the idea less ambiguously than Immanuel Kant, with whom the hypothesis is now typically associated.²⁷ Enlightenment philosophers including Kant had envisioned an international covenant of peace, or pact of federation, among independent (i.e., sovereign) states, regardless of their

²³ Mazzini, “Nationality and Cosmopolitanism,” p. 62.

²⁴ Mazzini, “Toward a Holy Alliance of the Peoples” [1840], p. 126, emphasis added. This situates Mazzini squarely within what Daniel Deudney calls the “republican security project” in Western thinking about international relations – although Deudney never explicitly refers to Mazzini’s writings. Cf. D. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

²⁵ On the European parliamentary committee and Court of Arbitration, see Mazzini, “On Nonintervention” [1851]; and “Toward a Holy Alliance of the Peoples;” as well as Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 154. On the idea of a united Europe more generally, see Mazzini, “From a Revolutionary Alliance to the United States of Europe,” p. 135. For an early sympathetic discussion of Mazzini’s pan-European vision, see G. O. Griffith, *Mazzini: Prophet of Modern Europe* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932).

²⁶ See e.g. J. R. Oneal and B. Russett, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2001); E. Mansfield, H. Milner, and P. Rosendorff, “Why Democracies Cooperate More,” *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002), 477–513.

²⁷ On Kant as the forebear of modern democratic peace theory, see esp. M. Doyle’s seminal essay, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” now reprinted in Doyle, *Liberal Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

domestic regime type. Kant in particular recognized that the emergence of a “powerful and enlightened” republic (which, he thought, would by its nature be inclined to seek perpetual peace) might provide a focal point for international federation; yet he specifically required in his Second Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace that “*each nation*, for the sake of its own security” (and therefore not only republics), should join the *foedus pacificum*, or international league of peace.²⁸ Mazzini, on the other hand, more explicitly theorized the emergence of a separate democratic peace, based on an initial alliance and gradually deepening federation among democracies.

Of course, Mazzini’s arguments on peace among democracies were quite speculative and at least partially intended to buttress his revolutionary program. Nevertheless, the basic causal logic he identified comes surprisingly close to explaining the emergence of a separate democratic peace during the latter half of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Western democracies – many of them newly established – set up a defensive security alliance under US leadership, to protect their freedom and independence from what was then perceived as an inherently expansionist and despotic Soviet Union. The institutionalization of this alliance under NATO’s collective defense pact, in combination with the market-regulating liberal institutions that emerged out of the Bretton Woods agreement of 1947, promoted increasingly close inter-democratic contacts and exchanges. According to the liberal narrative, this led to growing levels of trust and cooperation, which in turn reduced the security dilemma among democracies and made war among them increasingly unthinkable.²⁹

The rocky transition: democratic revolution and regime change

As a revolutionary leader, Mazzini was interested less in theorizing the specific institutional architecture of a future federation of democracies,

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” [1795], in *Kant: Political Writings* (ed. H. Reiss) (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 104, 102, emphasis added. For further discussions, see G. Cavallar, “Kantian perspectives on democratic peace: alternatives to Doyle,” *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001), esp. pp. 243–6; S. Recchia, “Kant, la pace democratica, e la governance mondiale federale,” in S. Maffettone and G. Pellegrino (eds.), *Etica delle relazioni internazionali* (Cosenza: Marco, 2004); J. MacMillan, “Immanuel Kant and the Democratic Peace,” in B. Jahn (ed.), *Classical Theory in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Ch. 9 by A. Hurrell in this volume, esp. pp. 210–11.

²⁹ This is broadly the story told by G. J. Ikenberry in *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. ch. 5.

than in elucidating the *means* by which Europe's oppressed peoples – the Italians, Hungarians, Poles, and many others – could achieve the more urgent goal of national and democratic self-determination. Mazzini was no liberal pacifist who believed in a natural “harmony of interests” among states, like his British contemporaries Richard Cobden and John Bright, or someone who followed Kant in the belief that republican peace would naturally triumph in the long run, fostered by the “asocial sociability” of human beings. Quite the opposite, Mazzini felt impatient with long-term evolutionary processes, and believed that history could be actively shaped by the human will.³⁰

Nevertheless, Mazzini was not a warmonger who invariably called for violent insurrection, or who blindly invoked international military intervention to advance the cause of democracy and national self-determination. He insisted until the end of his days that democratic governance and national liberation had to be achieved primarily through *domestic* political struggles. Wherever possible, those struggles should be non-violent: Mazzini saw peaceful political propaganda, or the struggle for “hearts and minds” aimed at mobilizing the people for the national cause, as having both strategic and moral priority over any resort to revolutionary violence.³¹

Only where there was no freedom of speech and of the press and the establishment of democratic associations was entirely proscribed, force might legitimately be used in order to gain a position from where one's voice could be heard in the first place. Mazzini thought that those circumstances clearly applied to mid-nineteenth-century Italy, where any form of political dissent was silenced by the iron fist rule of Austria in the north, the Bourbon monarchy in the south, and the papal theocracy at the center. Therefore, Italian patriots should organize for partisan *guerrilla warfare*, by establishing a centralized revolutionary organization, and then launch limited military operations with the objective of raising the entire nation to protest. Guerrilla bands, Mazzini affirmed in one of his earliest essays, are the “precursors of the nation,” and they should “attempt to rouse the nation into insurrection.”³² Ideally, targeted acts of

³⁰ Mazzini's argument is thus compatible with the recent empirical finding that while consolidated liberal democracies may have established a separate peace among themselves, transitions to democracy are often rocky and violent. See E. Mansfield and J. Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

³¹ Among the means for rallying public opinion, Mazzini mentions politically active associations, public meetings, and popular newspapers. Cf. Mazzini, “Letters on the State and Prospects of Italy” [1839], in *ibid.*, *Scritti Editi ed Inediti* (Imola, Italy: Galeati, 1909), vol. 22, p. 166. See also Salvemini, *Mazzini*, p. 70; Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 51.

³² Mazzini, “Rules for the Conduct of Guerrilla Bands” [1832], p. 111.

violence would trigger brutal governmental repression and thus “foster insurrection in large towns and cities.”³³

Over the last century, national resistance movements across the globe (from the Jewish Irgun in British-ruled Palestine, to the FLN in Algeria, the Kosovo Liberation Army, and the Iraqi Kurds) have used similar tactics, often ruthlessly, to generate mass-popular revolt and attract international support for their cause.³⁴ It is worth noting, however, that Mazzini always called on his followers to avoid wanton destruction, and reminded them that when resorting to violence they should proceed with as much circumspection as the circumstances allowed:

We disagree with those dreamers who preach peace at any cost, even that of dishonor, and who do not strive to make Justice the sole basis of any lasting peace. We believe war to be sacred under certain circumstances. But war must always be fought within the limits of necessity, when there is no other way to achieve the good . . . No war must ever be contaminated by the spirit of vengeance, or by the brutal ferocity of a boundless egoism.³⁵

More specifically, Mazzini consistently opposed acts of terrorism against civilians (although he clearly approved of guerrilla warfare against regular armies). “We do not want terror,” he insisted, and then went on to “reject terror as both cowardly and immoral.”³⁶ In the long run, any revolutionary struggle would lack legitimacy and be doomed to failure, unless broad segments of public opinion – both domestically and internationally – were willing to support it. Therefore, the motto of revolutionary guerrilla bands should be: “Respect for women, for property, for the rights of individuals, and for the crops.”³⁷ Throughout his life, Mazzini insisted that revolutionary democrats should use violence only as a last resort, making every effort to fight “as virtuously as possible, and to conclude it [the violence] as soon as possible.”³⁸

Historically, Mazzini’s views on political violence reflect the experience of the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁴ B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, second revd. edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), chs. 2–3. On how radical nationalist and secessionist movements might deliberately provoke governmental repression, in order to trigger international intervention, see A. J. Kuperman, “Suicidal rebellions and the moral hazard of humanitarian intervention,” *Ethnopolitics* 4, no. 2 (2005), 149–73.

³⁵ Mazzini, “Neither Pacifism nor Terror: Considerations on the Paris Commune and the French National Assembly” [1871], p. 157.

³⁶ Mazzini, “Against the Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions.” See also Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, p. 9.

³⁷ Mazzini, “Rules for the Conduct of Guerrilla Bands,” p. 111.

³⁸ Mazzini, “Gemitì, Fremìti e Ricapitolazione” [1871], in *ibid.*, *Scritti editi e inediti* (Imola: Galeati, 1941), vol. 92, p. 327.

The older generation of Italian patriots had fought for Napoleon's army in Spain between 1808 and 1814, where they had experienced a fierce, well-organized, and highly effective guerrilla-type resistance by the local population. In the 1820s and 1830s, it was natural for those older Italian patriots to suggest the formation of similar guerrilla bands for the fight against despotism and foreign occupation in Italy, given their homeland's rough and mountainous terrain. Mazzini quickly made those arguments his own, and he placed guerrilla warfare at the center of his own theory of national liberation.³⁹

But Mazzini also viewed the Italian fight for national unification as part of a broader European struggle, aimed at the emancipation of oppressed nationalities from Poland to the Balkans. He had close links with the leaders of revolutionary movements in Central and Southeastern Europe and repeatedly called for the organization of a "Holy Alliance of the Peoples" – by which he meant a transnational association aimed at coordinating popular uprisings across the continent. The association's goal should be to fracture and undermine the alliance of Europe's conservative powers, which dated back to the Holy Alliance forged by Austria, Russia, and Prussia in 1815, and had resulted in repeated counter-revolutionary interventions on the Italian peninsula and elsewhere. Mazzini believed that a coordinated uprising of several oppressed nationalities (e.g. the Italians, Poles, Serbs, and Hungarians), would force each of Europe's multinational empires (Austria, Russia, and Ottoman Turkey) to concentrate on their own troubles, making it impossible for them to dispatch their armies abroad to support fellow despots. "What we need [is] . . . a single union of all the European peoples who are striving towards the same goal . . . When we will rise up simultaneously in every country where our movement is currently active, we will win. Foreign intervention [by the despots] will then become impossible."⁴⁰

*Advancing democracy and national independence through
foreign intervention?*

Notwithstanding Mazzini's revolutionary zeal, he never called on powerful liberal states to intervene militarily abroad in support of democracy and national liberation. His thinking on this matter has frequently been misinterpreted and is therefore worth discussing in some detail.

³⁹ F. della Peruta, "La guerra di liberazione spagnola e la teoria della guerra per bande nel Risorgimento," in *ibid.*, *L'Italia del Risorgimento: Problemi, momenti e figure* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997), pp. 11–29.

⁴⁰ Mazzini, "Toward a Holy Alliance of the Peoples," p. 121.

To begin with, Mazzini unambiguously condemned the foreign imposition of democracy (or other social and political arrangements) as morally unacceptable. Such blatant international paternalism, he argued, would violate the principle of popular sovereignty and be incompatible with each nation's fundamental right to freely determine its own governance structures:

If a people were to impose their own solution to the specific social problems of another country, they would thereby commit an act of usurpation. It is the same as if an individual or a school of thought were to impose their own model on their brothers . . . they would thereby commit an act of tyranny and violate the central belief of Democracy, the dogma of collective sovereignty.⁴¹

Therefore, supposing that the people of a country freely decided to set up an undemocratic government for themselves, liberals and democrats abroad might condemn the decision but should abstain from any forcible interference: "Foreigners do not have a right to forcibly intervene against a People that were to . . . establish a tyrannical regime."⁴² Each people ought to be left free to find their own path to collective self-governance, proceeding at their own pace and relying on their own cultural background and historical experiences. "The nation alone has the inviolable right to *choose* its own institutions, to *correct* them and *change* them when they no longer correspond to its needs."⁴³

But Mazzini went considerably further: he claimed that even where a despotic government is upheld by foreign imperial domination, and local intellectuals and parts of the local public proclaim their desire for democracy and national independence, rising up in protest, direct military intervention by foreign regular armies to aid the insurgents would be unwarranted. Moral and political solidarity from abroad; financial and material assistance; and even the contribution of foreign volunteer militias – all should be welcomed. But direct intervention by foreign regular armies was another matter. Mazzini's argument against regime change and national liberation achieved with the help of foreign armies is largely prudential or consequentialist in nature, derived from his reading of history and his republican political philosophy.

⁴¹ Mazzini, "Against the Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions," p. 140.

⁴² Mazzini, "On the Duties of Man," p. 97.

⁴³ Mazzini, "On the Superiority of Representative Government," p. 50. Michael Walzer has made a similar argument as to why it would be wrong for outsiders to impose liberal democracy on a country that lacks a strong indigenous democratic tradition – even if it could be done nonviolently. Cf. Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States," in C. Beitz et al. (eds.), *International Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 234.

First, Mazzini was diffident of the maneuverings and intentions of powerful states capable of intervening militarily abroad – even liberal and democratic ones. History, he believed, teaches that governments deciding to intervene in foreign revolutions are, at best, driven by mixed motives, regardless of their proclaimed intentions. Consequently, many such interventions have merely substituted new despots for old ones, without any real benefit to the local population. Second, Mazzini's democratic republicanism requires that each people develop its own *ethos* of liberty, by fighting for it without the help of foreign armies and actively participating in its sustenance and progress day after day. "Liberation" achieved through foreign military intervention would be only a chimera – ultimately unsustainable – and most likely resulting in either prolonged tutelage by outside powers, or a rapid slide into anarchy and civil war as soon as the outside troops left. Therefore, Mazzini reminded his compatriots over and over again that their revolutionary war for national liberation and democracy "*must be exclusively Italian*, fought with our own forces and without any foreign intervention on our own soil." Italy, he went on, "must fight her *own* war," so that, like other nations struggling for their own freedom and independence, it will "acquire a genuine liberty that will not be bound to any fate other than her own. Otherwise she will be . . . a satellite of France," or of other powerful states.⁴⁴

Finally, Mazzini thought it would be important for any nation's self-esteem that its members think of themselves as having achieved self-government and independence largely through their own bravery and domestic political struggle. In the absence of such a shared national understanding, the revolutionary movement itself could end up discredited, and pockets of violent resistance might persist for generations to come.⁴⁵ Summing up, then, Mazzini was unambiguously opposed to regime change achieved through foreign military intervention. Oppressed peoples struggling for democracy and national independence, he thought, should "not look for liberty at the hands of the foreigner."⁴⁶ We might thus speculate that, in more recent times, Mazzini would have applauded the largely home-grown "velvet revolutions" that overthrew Eastern Europe's despotic communist regimes in 1989, as well as the popular uprisings of the 2011 "Arab spring." But he would probably have opposed direct military intervention to support local insurgents in

⁴⁴ Mazzini, "For a truly national war" [1859], p. 147. See also Mazzini, "Letters on the state and prospects of Italy" [1839], in *ibid.*, *Scritti editi e inediti*, vol. 22, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Mazzini, *Note autobiografiche* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 127.

⁴⁶ Mazzini, "Manifesto of Young Italy," p. 36.

Iraqi Kurdistan, Kosovo, or Libya, on grounds that foreign intervention is usually harmful to self-determination in the long run.

Mazzini's arguments to some extent resemble those of his contemporary John Stuart Mill, who affirmed that "the only test possessing any real value, of a people having become fit for popular institutions, is that they, or a sufficient portion of them to prevail in the contest, are willing to brave labor and danger for their liberation . . . The liberty which is bestowed on them by other hands than their own, will have nothing real, nothing permanent."⁴⁷ It is worth noting, however, that although Mill opposed military intervention to support a people struggling against "merely domestic oppressors," he was actually willing to countenance such intervention in support of national resistance movements – that is, in "the case of a [European] people struggling against a foreign yoke."⁴⁸ Mazzini stopped short of that, largely because of his skepticism about the motives of foreign interveners and his worries about the impact of foreign intervention on the patriotic movement itself.

*Understanding Mazzini's strong rhetorical critique
of "nonintervention"*

While Mazzini opposed direct military intervention in support of regime change and national liberation, he certainly did not think that powerful liberal states should take a hands-off approach to such matters. Quite the opposite, he believed that liberals and democrats everywhere have a duty to assist their less fortunate brethren abroad. He thus repeatedly voiced strong criticism of international "nonintervention," by which he meant the traditional Anglo-American policy of isolationism and aloofness in the face of popular uprisings on the European continent. "The absolute nonintervention doctrine in politics," he wrote in 1845, "appears to me to be what indifference is in matters of Religion, namely: a disguised atheism. It represents the negation of all belief, of all general principles, of every mission of nations on behalf of Humanity."⁴⁹ Taken out of its context, this pathos-laden critique of "nonintervention" might be interpreted as supporting the view of Mazzini as a crusading interventionist.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Mill, "A Few Words on Nonintervention" [1859], in G. Himmelfarb (ed.), *Essays on Politics and Culture* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 381.

⁴⁸ Mill, "A Few Words," p. 383. For a discussion see also Ch. 12 by M. Doyle in this volume, pp. 267–8, 279–80.

⁴⁹ Mazzini, "Foreign Despotism to Civilize a People? Italy, Austria, and the Pope" [1845], p. 181.

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Andrew Arato for encouraging me to clarify this point.

Yet behind Mazzini's verbose rhetoric, there is a coherent argument for an activist but largely peaceful foreign policy on the part of liberal Great Powers that stops short of direct military intervention in all but the most extreme circumstances. His argument, in short, is that the most powerful liberal nations of his day – notably England and what he saw as an increasingly self-confident United States of America – ought to have “interfered” in the affairs of foreign countries, by offering their moral, diplomatic, economic, and perhaps even indirect military support (in the form of arms shipments, logistical assistance, and intelligence) to democratic movements on the European continent. Towards the end of his life, Mazzini increasingly hoped that significant help in the cause of democracy and national liberation might come from the United States. He believed that after the victory of Union forces in the American Civil War, the United States could – and indeed should – help European democrats to successfully face the huge challenges that still confronted them:

You [the United States] have become a *leading* Nation. Now you must act as such . . . you must feel that to stand aloof would be a sin . . . You must then help your republican brothers . . . morally, and materially if needed, whenever the sacred battle is being fought and you have the ability to effectively inspire and support those who toil and bleed for truth and for justice.⁵¹

When writing for liberal and progressive audiences in Britain and the United States, Mazzini sought to appeal to not only their moral convictions, but also their enlightened self-interest. He therefore acknowledged that in the short run, British and American support for popular revolutions on the European continent might result in increased political turmoil; but he quickly added that in the longer run, a rapid triumph of democracy and national self-determination would clearly benefit the liberal Great Powers. Popular uprisings against despotic rule were likely to occur with increasing frequency, spurred by the accelerated pace of social and economic change. Withholding international support for those revolutions would merely prolong a bloody European conflict that the forces of democracy were bound to win no matter what: “Those who are openly hostile to our movement or give us at best lukewarm support should know that they will only prolong the crisis with all its attendant damage. The governments have tried everything from seducing the masses to scaring them – all in vain. God sides with the peoples.”⁵²

⁵¹ Mazzini, “America as a Leading Nation in the Cause of Liberty” [1865], p. 221. See also H. R. Marraro, “Mazzini on American Intervention in European Affairs,” *Journal of Modern History* 21, no. 2 (1949), 109–14.

⁵² Mazzini, “Toward a Holy Alliance of the Peoples,” p. 121.

Britain and the United States should therefore have strongly supported the Italians, Poles, Hungarians, and other European peoples struggling for democracy and national self-determination – but usually without direct military intervention. Mazzini was willing to justify direct military intervention only under exceptional, narrowly defined circumstances – either to offset previous counter-revolutionary interventions by despotic states, or in the face of genuine humanitarian emergencies. Even then, he believed that foreign intervention should be limited in both time and scope, so as not to distort the process of domestic self-determination.

Liberal counterintervention

Mazzini, following prevailing doctrine at the time, accepted the international use of force as a means of individual and collective self-defense. Faced with external aggression, he argued, the peace-loving nations should bond together to confront and defeat the evildoer: “Like the members of a family, the nations should support each other against aggression. They are called on to fight such Evil whenever it manifests itself.”⁵³ But Mazzini went beyond this traditional understanding. He also justified military intervention to “defend” a people struggling for liberty, when regular troops from a foreign country have already intervened on the side of the local despot. In the face of such blatant “co-operation of despots against peoples,” he affirmed, the principle of nonintervention ceases to be valid, and the world’s liberal nations are justified and possibly required to intervene in turn, to re-balance the situation on the ground:

If the government of a state is despotic and if the people ... resist that government, carry on a war of the press against it, and at last, in spite of police and military force, defeat it; then ... the decision is final ... But should the government of a neighboring despotic state, either invited by the vanquished party or fearing the contagion of liberal ideas in its own territory, invade the convulsed state and so interrupt or repeal the revolution, then the principle of Nonintervention is at an end, and all moral obligation on other states to observe it is from that moment annulled.⁵⁴

The goal of counterintervention is to allow popular self-determination to take its course, by “mak[ing] good all prior infractions of the law of Noninterference.” If the rule of nonintervention is to mean anything, Mazzini insisted, “it must mean that in every state the government must deal directly and alone with its own people.”⁵⁵ Mazzini developed his

⁵³ Mazzini, “Principles of International Politics,” p. 227.

⁵⁴ Mazzini, “On Nonintervention,” p. 217.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

case for liberal counterintervention against the backdrop of Europe's political reality at the time: since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Europe's despotic powers (mainly Austria, Russia, and their smaller vassal states) had been openly supporting each other, including through repeated military interventions aimed at crushing popular uprisings that threatened to overturn the status quo.⁵⁶

Thus for instance, liberal Britain should have first threatened and then if necessary launched a counterintervention on Italian soil in the spring of 1849, when France led an international military expedition to crush the revolutionary Roman republic. As Mazzini recalled with his characteristic pathos in a letter to a British friend: "Ah! If you had in England, condescended to see that the *glorious* declaration of non-interference ought to have begun by taking away the French interference in Rome! How many troubles and sacrifices you would have saved us."⁵⁷ Mazzini seems to have understood that even progressive British opinion might have viewed a general duty of counterintervention as exceedingly onerous and potentially destabilizing. He therefore sought to persuade his readers that in most instances, the credible *threat* of counterintervention by a powerful liberal state would suffice to deter despotic regimes from intervening in the first place. "It would not be necessary," he insisted, for the British "government to plunge itself into a revolutionary crusade, which no one dreams of invoking . . . It would only be necessary to tell the European despots in a firm and calm voice, so as to be heard by all: 'Stay at home now, and let not your action overpass your frontiers! . . . If you interfere for evil, we will interfere for good. Then God will judge.'"⁵⁸

In the twentieth century, arguments for liberal counterintervention were often used during the Cold War, for example in attempts to justify US intervention in Vietnam as a "legitimate response" to previous military interference by the North Vietnamese regime.⁵⁹ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the competitive interventions characteristic of the

⁵⁶ Mazzini may also have been influenced by the arguments on counterintervention developed by Italian patriots and constitutionalists in the late eighteenth century. See M. Isabella, "Mazzini's Internationalism in Context," in Bayly and Biagini (eds.), *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism*, p. 49.

⁵⁷ Mazzini, "Extract from a Letter to Peter Taylor" [1860], in E. F. Richards (ed.), *Mazzini's Letters to an English Family, 1855–1860* (London: John Lane, 1922), p. 236.

⁵⁸ Mazzini, "The European Question: Foreign Intervention and National Self-Determination" [1847], p. 195. A similar defense of liberal counterintervention can also be found in Mill's essay *A Few Words on Nonintervention*, published only a few years later.

⁵⁹ Michael Walzer discusses, and rejects, counterintervention as a justification for US military operations in Vietnam in his *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 97–100.

Cold War have become less frequent, and arguments about counter-intervention are nowadays rarely used to justify military interference abroad. Nevertheless, Mazzini's argument on counterintervention might be interpreted as more generally justifying liberal intervention in civil wars, where the leading oppressors are openly supported by outside powers. For instance, evidence of direct military support for the Bosnian Serbs by the Yugoslav National Army during the Balkan wars in the early 1990s arguably justified limited NATO intervention on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims. Contemporary international legal scholars recognize that "international counterintervention on behalf of either party to a civil war is probably lawful, provided that it is limited to neutralizing a prior illegal intervention by another state."⁶⁰ But this limited conception of counterintervention as a balancing act, which Mazzini endorsed, offers scant guidance for policy today: if followed, it risks prolonging bloody civil wars, by preventing any of the local parties from scoring a decisive victory.⁶¹ In cases like Bosnia (or more recently Syria), marked by large-scale ethnic cleansing and massacres of civilians, Mazzini himself would probably have justified a more decisive use of force aimed at *imposing a settlement* – albeit on a different, humanitarian rationale.

Humanitarian intervention

Mazzini's reasoning on humanitarian intervention is quite tentative, and he wrote down his thoughts on this matter fairly late in his life, mainly in the 1850s and 1860s. Sovereignty and nonintervention, in his view, are valuable as principles of international society insofar as they afford each people the necessary space to freely determine their political institutions and more generally the direction of their own society. Therefore, Mazzini appears to have envisioned humanitarian intervention as a true exception – justified only when large-scale killings of civilians empty the concept of self-determination of any meaning. That makes Mazzini's argument much more modern than the writings on humanitarian intervention of earlier natural-law thinkers like Vitoria or Pufendorf, who lacked a strong conception of national sovereignty and remained indebted to medieval notions of a universalist *Res publica Christiana*.⁶²

⁶⁰ D. Wippman, "Change and Continuity in Legal Justifications for Military Intervention in Internal Conflict," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 27 (1995), 435–85.

⁶¹ Recent scholarship suggests that when outsiders intervene in civil wars, they should decisively support one of the local factions to achieve a lasting settlement. See R. Betts, "The Delusion of Impartial Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 6 (1994), 20–33.

⁶² See e.g. the chapters by William Bain and Richard Tuck in this volume.

For Mazzini, a twofold consideration dictates concern for large-scale violence perpetrated against civilians abroad. First, if such massive human suffering anywhere is left unanswered, it sends powerful cues to would-be oppressors and *génocidaires* in other parts of the world, making similar gruesome behavior more likely in the future. In his own words: “no people can suffer . . . without their suffering affecting all other peoples, . . . by setting a dangerous precedent.”⁶³ Hence the world’s liberal and democratic nations should do anything they can to prevent such precedents from being set, seeking to uphold universal moral principles – what Mazzini calls the common “Law of Humanity” – and notably the sanctity of human life. But beyond such prudential considerations, Mazzini also believed that we have a basic duty to come to the aid of those who suffer from large-scale violence abroad:

Above anything else, such suffering . . . degrades our very existence, by attacking it in what we all share in common, namely *human dignity and human conscience* . . . Every single one of us is responsible for his brother’s safety: it is not only when we kill him, but also when we permit others to kill him, although we would have been able to defend him, that we have to fear the question with which God pursued the first violator of the solid bond of humanity.⁶⁴

It was not so much the violation of basic human rights that concerned Mazzini – after all, the notion of individual claims and entitlements is not central to his political and moral philosophy.⁶⁵ Instead, his argument, which illustrates his profoundly solidarist conception of international society, is that *humanity itself* – our common identity as creatures endowed with a moral conscience – is harmed by evil committed against men and women anywhere. He asserts that “we are . . . all brothers, held to a common duty of love and cooperation,” before noting that if left unanswered, other people’s “suffering breaks the divine unity – and therefore saps the foundation – of our common faith.”⁶⁶ Mazzini’s moral universalism and democratic solidarism were to a significant degree inspired by Christian ethics: though critical of the Catholic Church and especially of the papacy as political institutions, he remained a devout Christian throughout his life, and his theory of political association clearly reflects New-Testament ideas of Christian fellowship.⁶⁷

⁶³ Mazzini, “The European Question,” p. 196.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁶⁵ See e.g. S. Mattarelli, “Duties and Rights in the Thought of Giuseppe Mazzini,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 4 (2008), 480–5.

⁶⁶ Mazzini, “The European Question,” pp. 196–7.

⁶⁷ Mazzini was heavily influenced by the writings of Félicité de Lamennais, a French priest and philosopher who attempted to combine political liberalism with Roman Catholicism after the French Revolution. See R. Sarti, *Mazzini: A Life for the Religion of Politics*

In short, Mazzini envisaged an international society in which liberal and democratic nations might combine as a matter of *moral duty* to bring an end to egregious acts of violence being committed within the borders of an independent state.⁶⁸ It appears that his preference was for collective, or what we might today call multilateral, humanitarian intervention: “Whenever such blatant breaches of the moral Law are committed, all the nations that recognize and accept the common goal should bond together to oppose the crime.”⁶⁹ Apart from this brief reference, he never explicitly discussed the desirability of collective endorsement, but his concern about self-serving interventions by the powerful suggests that he would have been quite sympathetic to multilateral safeguards in this context.

Elsewhere, Mazzini more directly suggests what types of crimes would warrant humanitarian military intervention, and what mechanisms might drive it:

People begin to feel that . . . there are bonds of international duty binding all the nations of this earth together. Hence, the conviction is gaining ground that if on any spot of the world, even within the limits of an independent nation, some glaring wrong should be done . . . – if, for example, there should be, as there has been in our time, a massacre of Christians within the dominions of the Turks – then other nations are not absolved from all concern in the matter simply because of the large distance between them and the scene of the wrong.⁷⁰

There is no specific discussion in Mazzini’s writings of the threshold of violence that justifies humanitarian intervention, though genocide and massacres of ethnic or religious minorities would seem to qualify. We might infer from the centrality of national sovereignty and self-determination to his thought that such large-scale killings are indeed the only circumstance in which he was willing to justify humanitarian military intervention. That sets the bar fairly high, but it is in line with the reasoning of contemporary liberal internationalists like Michael Walzer or Stanley Hoffmann, who justify humanitarian intervention only to stop exceptional acts of violence that “shock the moral conscience of mankind.” It also accords with the conclusions of the 2005 UN World Summit, which – referring to the “Responsibility to Protect” – justify military intervention only in the face of ongoing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.⁷¹

(Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 59–60; and L. Pivano, *Lamennais e Mazzini* (Turin: Associazione mazziniana italiana, 1958).

⁶⁸ On this point, see also Vincent, *Nonintervention*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Mazzini, “Principles of International Politics,” p. 227.

⁷⁰ Mazzini, “On Nonintervention,” p. 218.

⁷¹ Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 101, 107; S. Hoffmann, “The politics and ethics of military intervention,” *Survival* 37, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 29–51; UN General Assembly,

Mazzini sensed that the issue of humanitarian intervention might become more relevant in the future, as improved means of information, communication, and transport were increasing people's awareness of events in foreign countries and their sense of belonging to a common humanity. The bond of "international duty binding all the nations of this earth together," he observed, "is perceived more widely and the likelihood of meeting [our duty] increases, as the improvement of our means of transport and communication between one land and another reduces our earth to a more manageable compass, making its inhabitants more conscious of being but one family."⁷² Nevertheless, it should be noted that Mazzini's international society was essentially Christian and European. Historically, his reflections on humanitarian intervention appear to have been motivated by repeated instances of European military interference in the Ottoman Empire, ostensibly to protect local Christian populations there from religiously motivated violence. As early as 1827, Russia, Great Britain, and France had intervened in the Greek war of independence, partially justifying their actions on humanitarian grounds. In 1860, France dispatched six thousand troops to Lebanon to stop recurring acts of violence perpetrated against the local Christian Maronite population (the "massacre of Christians within the dominion of the Turks" to which Mazzini may be referring), and the intervention was endorsed by most European powers.⁷³

Finally, Mazzini did not explicitly discuss the justifiable scope and duration of humanitarian military intervention. But his opposition to externally imposed regime change and trusteeship in the European context suggests that he envisioned humanitarian intervention as a limited, "surgical" form of interference: powerful liberal countries should deploy military force to stop large-scale violence against civilians abroad, but after halting the killing they should swiftly withdraw, in order to allow the local population to freely determine its own future. Of course, we know today that following humanitarian intervention in failed states and deeply divided war-torn societies (such as Kosovo or East Timor), a longer-term external presence may be necessary to maintain political stability and (re-)establish the conditions under which meaningful self-determination becomes possible. Such protracted international trusteeship raises a

Resolution 60/1: 2005 World Summit Outcome, UN Doc. A/RES/60/1, October 24, 2005, p. 30, §139.

⁷² Mazzini, "On Nonintervention," p. 218.

⁷³ See M. Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 58–62. On the 1827 intervention in Greece, see also D. Trim, "Intervention in European history," Ch. 1 in this volume, pp. 41–2.

number of difficult ethical questions of its own. Mazzini had some important things to say about international trusteeship for the purpose of “nation-building,” although as we shall see his discussion was highly problematic.

“Nation-building” through international trusteeship?

Somewhat surprisingly, given Mazzini’s status as an icon of anti-imperialist movements, he thought that all of the aforementioned limits on military intervention should apply only among fully developed (i.e., in his time, European) nations. Martin Wight probably exaggerated when he suggested that Mazzini was “a Victorian in every sense except that he was not a British subject”;⁷⁴ and yet the Italian patriot shared with his Victorian contemporaries a philosophy of progress that portrayed most non-European peoples as backward, in need of being “educated” and trained to become ready for self-government. As Mazzini wrote in a letter to his mother in 1845: “Europe has been providentially called to conquer the rest of the world to progressive civilization.”⁷⁵ Several years later, following the completion of Italy’s national unification, he expressed the hope that his homeland, too, would “contribute to the great civilizing mission suggested by our times” and “invade and colonize the Tunisian lands when the opportunity presents itself.”⁷⁶

Mazzini’s paternalistic endorsement of colonialism as an instrument of Europe’s “civilizing mission” parallels Mill’s idea that “Nations which are still barbarous . . . should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners.”⁷⁷ More generally, as Jennifer Pitts has shown, nineteenth-century liberalism rejected earlier natural rights theories produced by the Age of Enlightenment in favor of the idea that civil and political liberties are historically contingent and require the achievement of a certain stage of social and moral development before they can take hold.⁷⁸ For nineteenth-century liberals, the putatively barbarous nature of the individual men and women living in faraway places in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere was the underlying cause of broader social and political

⁷⁴ Wight, *Four Seminal Thinkers in International Theory*, pp. 90, 109.

⁷⁵ Mazzini, *Letters* (trans. A. De Roses Jervis) (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979), p. 98.

⁷⁶ Mazzini, “Principles of International Politics,” pp. 238–9.

⁷⁷ Mill, “A Few Words on Nonintervention,” p. 377. See also Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, pp. 264, 454ff.

⁷⁸ J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The rise of imperial liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton University Press, 2005). On Victorian theories of empire in particular, see also D. Bell, “Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought,” *Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006), 281–98.

backwardness. Hence, those barbarous individuals first had to be educated by benevolent colonialists to think rationally and obey general laws, before they could aspire to collectively govern themselves.⁷⁹ For Mazzini in particular, the goal of benign European trusteeship was to raise backward societies to a level of moral and political development where the principle of nationality could take hold, so that meaningful self-determination would become possible.

The nineteenth-century defense of external political tutelage as a means to “civilize” less developed peoples will strike most contemporary readers as untenable. We know today that the anthropological foundations of the classical liberal argument were scientifically unsound, to say the least. Most of the societies targeted by European colonialism were effectively self-governing on their own terms, while imperial rule was often an obstacle to further development and progress. At the same time, classical liberals such as Mazzini and Mill made the valid conceptual claim that international paternalism may be justified in the face of structural impediments to self-government that make it impossible for a people to freely determine their own future. From a contemporary point of view, international trusteeship might still be acceptable as a transitional measure, to assist war-torn societies like Bosnia, Somalia, or Afghanistan overcome *political* (as opposed to racial or cultural) impediments to collective self-government stemming from the collapse of domestic authority structures.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Mazzini saw himself as a political activist and pamphleteer (today, we might say a “public intellectual”), more than as a scholar or theorist. His overarching goal was to steer Europe’s political change in a decidedly liberal and democratic direction. Thus, he was less concerned with analytical rigor and deductive consistency than with persuading his readers to support his struggle. Most of the causes he championed – national self-determination, democracy, international federation, even humanitarian intervention – were part of progressive political discourse

⁷⁹ Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention*, p. 70. For a helpful discussion see also S. Holmes, “Making Sense of Liberal Imperialism,” in N. Urbinati and A. Zakaras (eds.), *J. S. Mill’s Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 298–346.

⁸⁰ See S. Recchia, “Just and Unjust Postwar Reconstruction: How much external interference can be justified?” *Ethics & International Affairs*, 23, no. 2 (2009), 165–87; and R. Keohane, “Political Authority after Intervention: gradations in sovereignty,” in J. L. Holzgrefe and R. Keohane (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

in his time. But Mazzini developed those notions further in an original way, combining them into a powerful vision that influenced generations of progressive democrats and liberals until well into the twentieth century. It might therefore be appropriate to recognize Mazzini as the founding figure of the more activist, or *democratic Wilsonian*, branch of modern liberal internationalism. As previously noted, President Wilson himself was profoundly influenced by Mazzini's life and writings. Going even further, Samuel Moyn has recently termed Mazzini "the most globally influential heir of the French Revolution."⁸¹

The political reality that Mazzini was facing in mid-nineteenth century Europe in many ways resembles broader world political circumstances today. Following the Napoleonic Wars, the principles of state sovereignty and nonintervention were solemnly reaffirmed as foundations of European international society. At the same time, in the face of rapid social and economic change, people across the continent were yearning for greater personal and political freedoms; and democratic political activists hoping for outside assistance were naturally looking to Britain and the United States, the leading liberal nations of the time. Today, almost two centuries later, the principles of sovereignty and nonintervention have been solemnly enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. But as a result of increasing global interconnectedness, and stimulated by broader social, political, and economic transformations, oppressed peoples across the globe are once again struggling for greater freedom, and they are calling on the most powerful liberal nations to assist them in their fight.

The similarities between post-Napoleonic Europe and contemporary international society – combined with Mazzini's thoroughly modern effort to square a strong belief in national sovereignty and independence with an equally deep commitment to human dignity and equality – may explain why many of his arguments appear so familiar today. Europe, for Mazzini, was a solidarist international society, within which different peoples, or nations, had special rights (to independence) and duties (of assistance) towards each other. In recent years, something close to a globalized version of Mazzini's account of international society has been developed by John Rawls, with his idea of a "Society of Peoples."⁸²

⁸¹ S. Moyn, "Giuseppe Mazzini in (and Against) the History of Human Rights," in Miaa Halme-Tuomisaari and Pamela Slotte (eds.), *History of Human Rights*, forthcoming.

⁸² Rawls's peoples are "free and independent"; they "are to observe a duty of non-intervention"; and they "have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions." Cf. Rawls, *Law of Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 37.

Perhaps the principal lesson from Mazzini's political thought is that while liberals and democrats ought to display solidarity with peoples abroad struggling for political freedom and social betterment, they should refrain from projecting their own "thick" normative convictions on foreign societies, accepting that there might be different national paths to self-determination. Furthermore, even when "thin" universal principles appear unequivocally violated, liberals should exercise great prudence in calling for military intervention, keeping in mind that the motives of interveners are always mixed and the consequences difficult to foresee.⁸³ Notwithstanding Mazzini's often verbose rhetoric and revolutionary zeal, he was aware that principled morality in international relations always needs to be combined with a more prudential type of reasoning, to have a realistic chance of improving the human condition in a highly imperfect world. "The theory of international politics," he explained, "can be perfected in no other way than by dealing sincerely and thoroughly with individual cases as they successively arise."⁸⁴

⁸³ On the distinction between "thin" universal morality and "thick" national moral traditions, see M. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

⁸⁴ Mazzini, "On Nonintervention," p. 218.