

# The Index of Governance

**Improving Governance at the International Level: A modest proposal to reduce oppression and “humanitarian” wars by measuring and influencing the actions of governments.**

*Richard Lawson\**

## **Summary**

For all of us who opposed the war on Iraq, the question remains, “What would you have done to end Saddam Hussein’s reign of terror? Or to stop the genocide in Rwanda, or the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo?” There is no clear, categorical answer to the question, but there may be a way forward through measuring the human rights performance of the world’s governments, and applying rewards for good practice and disincentives for bad practice.

## **The Problem - Oppression leads to War**

George W Bush’s Operation Iraqi Liberation shows that violent overthrow of oppressive regimes causes as many problems as it solves. Yet on the other hand few people support the idea that the international community should sit back in a spirit of *laissez faire* while atrocities and genocide take. We have to address the question of what to do about regimes who use torture, and other abuses of human rights.

In his Millennium Report to the United Nations General Assembly, Secretary-General Kofi Annan challenged the international community to address the real dilemmas posed by intervention and sovereignty. The Independent International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) was established by the Canadian government in September 2000 to respond to that challenge, and has presented a report that indicates when and how military action might be taken against an oppressive regime. And on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004, the High Level Panel appointed by UN General Secretary Kofi Annan to review security matters presented its report, “A more secure world: Our shared responsibility”. One of its recommendations reads: (55). *The Panel endorses the emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect, exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort, in the event of genocide and other large -scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of humanitarian law which sovereign governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent.*

This leaves the UN in the position of being prepared to use military violence against a state, violence in which many non-combatants are bound to be injured and killed. This may ultimately be necessary, but before it resorts to military action, the UN needs to put in place a non-violent system

that rewards good governance and gives disadvantages to governments that are tending towards oppression and genocide - and this the High Level Panel seems to have failed to do.

## **The Index of Governance**

The performance of any institution can be measured. The Amnesty International/Observer Index of Human Rights (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/rightsindex/Story/0,2763,201762,00.html>) is a good working model. It was compiled in two ways. The first ranking represents the incidence of headline abuses of human rights over 13 categories, including the use of torture, disappearances, death penalty; denial of free speech; abuse of political prisoners, denial of free movement, children's rights; religious freedom; fair trials, minority rights, and women's rights. The total for each country was then multiplied by its score on the Human Development Index (HDI), as defined by the United Nations, to avoid unfairly penalising less-developed countries.

The focus on human rights stands as a simple proxy for the other actions of a government, and it is likely that it would also be an accurate indicator of the global performance of a government.

To create an Index of Governance based on human rights would not be a difficult or expensive task, and could be run by a modest secretariat within the UN, on an on-going basis.

The very act of creating the Index would have a therapeutic effect. Governments might appeal against their ratings, and release prisoners prior to the appeals inspection by UN officials. Governments are sensitive to international opinion.

## **Enforcing good behaviour with Smart Sanctions**

Once the Index is installed, work can be started on the far more difficult task of influencing the behaviour of governments. The 192 or so governments on the UN Index will be grouped into a convenient number of bands according to their score. Diplomatic and economic rights and privileges will be accorded to each country in proportion to their position on the Index of Governance.

The mildest sanctions might include:

- Loss of the right to take a seat on the UN Security Council.
- Loss of specified voting rights in UN, with diminution of the power of the country's vote
- Tightened border controls, in readiness for smart sanctions.
- Loss of ability to receive loans, for instance for state-run enterprises.
- Restriction on the ability to use airlines.
- Restrictions on visa issues to members of the Government.

If the country falls further down the scale, more severe sanctions are introduced progressively, with restrictions on trade in specified financial transactions, freezing of accounts of government officials, embargo on all lethal goods, dual purpose technology, chemical weapon precursors, biotechnology, nuclear technology, wines and spirits, tobacco, cars, oil & oil products, and luxury items.

In the case of governments who fail to reform despite being under milder sanctions, opposition groups who support the principles of good governance will be supported with financial and logistical help.

Finally, if the regime still refuses to improve, or if it is engaging in ethnic cleansing or genocide, these opposition parties could be entrusted and empowered with responsibility for imports of, and fair distribution of, necessities like food and medicines. This would give them practice in the arts of co-operation (with each other) and administration, enabling them to prepare for government. The distribution efforts will be protected by UN forces, which would finally lead on to the kind of military measures being contemplated by UN General Secretary Kofi Anan and the Canadian Commission.

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