

MAKING HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION WORK: THE POLITICAL, STRATEGIC AND CREDIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

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The end of the Cold War imparted upon the United States new responsibilities to address humanitarian crises abroad. Reacting to major eruptions of violence, the US intervened in several countries throughout the 1990s. This paper focuses on four case studies: Northern Iraq (1991-96), Somalia (1992-95), Bosnia (1992-95), and Kosovo (1999). I will exploit Taylor Seybolt's methodology, using the number of lives saved as the criterion to determine the success of humanitarian interventions.

I will demonstrate that success relies on three main factors. First, the extent of political involvement of the intervener(s) in the target country's future and the resulting degree of military commitment of intervening forces, i.e. whether the intervener is willing to risk soldiers' lives. Second, the strategic appropriateness of the intervention, i.e. the relevance of the intervener's strategic choice in dealing with the source of violence (avoidance, defense, deterrence, or compellence). Third, the degree of local, regional, international and domestic credibility and legitimacy of the intervention. I will argue that, should these three criteria not be met, interventions are likely to generate excessive and unforeseen costs for the intervener as well as for the target country's civilian population.

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The end of the Cold War imparted to the United States new responsibilities to address humanitarian crises abroad. The rise of internal conflicts and civil wars also gave humanitarian interventions a new, enhanced role in curbing political violence across the globe.¹ Reacting to major eruptions of violence, the US intervened in several countries throughout the 1990s, in Africa, Europe as well as in the Middle East. For the sake of brevity, this paper will focus on four case studies: Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq (1991-96), Operation Restore Hope in Somalia (1992-95), Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia (1992-95), and Operation Allied Force in Kosovo (1999). Epitomizing the enhanced humanitarian mission of American military interventionism after the end of the Cold Wars, these four campaigns were

implemented under a politico-moral discourse emphasizing the local population's needs. They are thus to be contrasted with other American operations in the same period, such as the 1991 Desert Storm and the 2003 Iraqi Freedom, which fit a more traditional definition of war.

This paper defines humanitarian interventions, in contrast to traditional wars, as military campaigns that are carried out with the prime and explicit goal of alleviating human suffering and saving lives. In other words, they consist of operations aiming at "saving lives with force."² I will exploit Taylor Seybolt's methodology, using the number of lives saved as the criterion to determine the success of humanitarian interventions.³ Retaining Seybolt's approach will allow me to focus to bulk of this paper on the structural explanations behind

¹ Stephen J. Stedman, *The New Interventionists* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 1: 1992/1993), 3.

² Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Expanding Global Military Capacity for Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), 1.

³ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), ix.

humanitarian intervention's operational success or failure.

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This paper aims to contribute to the growing literature on humanitarian intervention, providing operational requirements for policy-makers to determine whether potential interventions are likely to succeed. I will argue that, should these three criteria not be met, interventions are likely to generate excessive and unforeseen costs for the intervener as well as for the target country's civilian population. While this piece focuses on interventions with a large American presence (even when included within a broader UN or Nato coalition), these findings are transferable to other intervening powers' strategies. While the capabilities and the extent of potential involvement obviously varies following the intervening power, the same political, strategic and credibility dilemmas are likely to arise when contemplating military humanitarian interventions abroad.

This paper's conclusions are crucial to the core design of humanitarian interventions. Precisely because a humanitarian intervention's explicit aim is to alleviate human suffering, it can only be justified if it substantially helps the target

population. An effective intervention makes the intended beneficiaries better off than they would have been without it, a parameter that I will measure by the number of lives saved.⁵

1. Political Resolve and Military Commitment: Assessing Tolerance to Risk

a. *The Political Parameter*

This paper argues that a humanitarian intervention is more likely to succeed when the intervening country has significant political interests in intervention, in addition to humanitarian ones—as long as the two do not conflict.⁶ I will argue that, because of the scope and intensity of the military and economic resources required by such interventions, morality alone cannot be a sufficient guide.⁷

Only when the political interests of the intervening power are strongly engaged on the ground will it fully mobilize, endowing the operation with the effective means to succeed.⁸ On the other hand, a token action, with military deployment under limited rules of engagement, can only convey a lack of resolve rather than a readiness to bear the burden of escalation if necessary—which undoubtedly results in a failure to effectively alleviate human suffering.⁹

In the age of global real-time information, the lack of reporting on humanitarian crises abroad is not the main impediment to effective intervention. For the United States, the lack of capacity is not the main problem either. Throughout the 1990s, what crucially determined the impact of American humanitarian operations abroad were neither information nor capacity-related factors, but rather political tolerance to risks and costs.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁵ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 3.

⁶ Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Expanding Global Military Capacity for Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), 20.

⁷ Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 248; Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World*

in the Post-Cold War Era (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 19.

⁸ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 20.

⁹ Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 249.

¹⁰ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 277.

This paper argues that foreign commitments, especially open-ended ones, are unpalatable at home in the absence of strong national security interests.¹¹ In such cases, the operation is likely to be cut short under domestic pressure before its initial aims have been achieved. American public opinion, while willing to support humanitarian operations abroad, exhibits a low tolerance to losses in soldiers' lives.¹² A lack of political will on the intervener's part is likely to result in operational stalemate or in the intervener's withdrawal.

In humanitarian operations, intervening powers rarely have vital interests in the outcome of the conflict. While they attempt to save lives abroad, intervening governments are primarily concerned with the sacrifices shouldered by their own soldiers.¹³ A specific country is also never more than one foreign policy agenda item among others for international powers—especially for the US—which restricts the political attention such powers are able to allocate to a specific theatre of operation. On the contrary, local parties have to live—or die—with the consequences of intervention.¹⁴ They can afford, unlike intervening forces, to be “single-minded in their dedication.”¹⁵ This paper defines humanitarian interventions as inherently political and strategic endeavors. Should interveners identify humanitarian crises as the result of specific local policies—as opposed to reflecting century-old hatreds, willingness to craft genuinely substantial and effective operations will increase.¹⁶

b. *Success: Iraq and Kosovo*

Operation Provide Comfort lasted from April 1991 to December 1996. It encompassed American aerial protection operations as well as a limited UN presence. The intervention's aim was to repel Saddam Hussein's forces to allow Kurdish civilians to safely return to Northern Iraq. This paper deems such an operation a success on the three criteria I have identified. As a result, the operation saved thousands of lives. A useful comparison which speaks to the campaign's concrete impact would involve the similar case of Kurdish civilians who returned to Iran without international assistance—there were 23,000 victims in the latter case, while only a few in the former.¹⁷

In Iraq, from the very beginning of the operation, the highest levels of the American government backed a strong intervention. Secretary of State James Baker even visited the Turkey-Iraq border, reporting back to President Bush in the strongest terms: “We've got to do something and do it now. If we don't, literally thousands of people are going to die.”¹⁸

Saddam Hussein regularly tested the coalition's commitment to protect the Northern Iraq safe zone through small-scale military attacks by ground forces. Such challenges were met with proportionate isolated air strikes from the Americans, demonstrating the political will of the intervener to fulfill its mission and avoiding a full-blown takeover of the region by Iraqi forces.¹⁹ In Iraq, the coalition's military commanders were able to back their words with action because political leaders at home were willing to bear the

¹¹ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 228

¹² Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 85.

¹³ Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 67.

¹⁴ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 225. Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 118.

¹⁵ Stephen J. Stedman, *The New Interventionists* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 1: 1992/1993), 8.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Robinson, *"If You Leave Us Here, We Will Die": How Genocide Was Stopped in East Timor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 249.

¹⁷ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 49.

¹⁸ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 86.

¹⁹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 147.

political burden of soldiers taking significant risks in combat operations.²⁰

The American involvement in Kosovo can also be deemed a success. Operation Allied Force in Kosovo followed the February 1999 breakdown of the Rambouillet talks, during which Slobodan Milošević refused an agreement with Kosovar Albanians striving for autonomy—and ultimately secession. Nato's policy was that of a coercive bombing campaign against Serbian targets. The short-term humanitarian outcome of the campaign was negative, causing the death of 5,000 Serb soldiers and 500 civilians.²¹ The intervention also led Serbian security forces to step up their attacks against civilians, causing further humanitarian damage.²² Ultimately, however, Operation Allied Force successfully put an end to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, liberated 1.7 million Albanians from tyrannical Serb rule and opened the way for a political transition in the area.²³

In Kosovo, coalition forces were fully involved not only because of the dire humanitarian crisis in the region but also because they considered their core national security interests to be at stake. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was particularly adamant in refusing to repeat the mistakes of the Bosnian crisis.²⁴ This significant amount of political will allowed for the mobilization of extensive resources for the sake of the operation's success.

Yet, even for the successful Kosovo operation, the refusal of the intervening power's leaders to endanger their soldiers' lives produced significant humanitarian distress: as pilots had to fly above

4,600 meters to stay above the range of Serbian air defenses, strikes became less precise and civilians suffered in greater numbers.²⁵

c. *Failure: Somalia and Bosnia*

Operation Restore Hope began in December 1992. It followed the January 1991 departure of Mohammed Siyad Barre, which plunged Somalia into civil unrest. The political crisis was combined with a severe drought, which caused dire humanitarian suffering.²⁶ Mandated under the Chapter VII of the UN Charter, intervening forces were directed to use "all necessary means" to establish a safe environment for relief operations to reach civilians (UNSC Resolution 794, 1992). While the intervention saved 10,000 lives, this paper argues that it was nonetheless a failure in that it could have saved many more, had its political, strategic and legitimacy credentials been strengthened.²⁷ This paper indeed considers, based on the extent of the Somalis' humanitarian plight as well as that of the American capabilities that could have been deployed, that much more could have been done

American forces' engagement reference card in Somalia read: "The US is not at war."²⁸ Unlike Somali warlords, the American leadership was not willing to risk its soldiers' lives for the sake of Somalia.²⁹ With the Cold War decidedly over, the US had no ostensible geopolitical ambitions in Somalia. As compared to Kuwait's, to which the US had just intervened, Somalia's oil reserves

²⁰ Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 306.

²¹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 82.

²² *Ibid.*, 249.

²³ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 275.

²⁴ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 75.

²⁵ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 248.

²⁶ Terrence Lyons, *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1995), 20.

²⁷ S. Hansch et. al., *Lives Lost, Lives Saved: Excess Mortality and the Impact of Health Interventions in the Somalia Emergency* (Washington: Refugee Policy Group, 1994), 32.

²⁸ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 154.

²⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 75.

were almost non-existent.³⁰ Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that while the US did not want to get involved in a Somali civil war, its world power position ultimately constrained it to reluctantly intervene.³¹ As a result of this lack of political incentive for substantive commitment, American forces withdrew after 18 soldiers died in Mogadishu on October 3, 1993. Due to the absence of political interests, in addition to humanitarian ones, the American leadership exhibited a comparatively low tolerance to risk and hence failed to complete the operation.³² Because of the lack of sustained American involvement in Somalia, the maximum number of politically allowable American death turned out to be zero.³³ Throughout 1993, Congress members were continuously calling for a withdrawal, stating that the US “no longer has a vital interest in the outcome of the civil war in Somalia.”³⁴

In Somalia, the deterrent threats of intervening forces proved by and large hollow. National contingents were not willing to engage in combat and hence followed a policy of retrenchment that failed to protect humanitarian convoys.³⁵ Powell also refused to commit American forces to longer-term nation-building goals: “the Somali factions were ultimately going to solve their political differences their own way.”³⁶ As a result, intervening forces disengaged as soon as costs started to mount, with the US leaving only a small contingent in support of the UN mission.³⁷ Frank Crigler, former US Ambassador to Somalia accepted, after the 1993 fiasco, that “you cannot do peacemaking unless you swallow the risk, go

where the fighting is and dirty your shoes.”³⁸

Ultimately, interveners in Somalia failed because the operational means they were willing to empower soldiers with did not match the humanitarian needs of civilians.

The American involvement in Bosnia is also an example of failure. The 1995 Operation Deliberate Force followed the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation after the death of Marshal Josip Broz Tito. With Croatia and Bosnia declaring their independence, war broke out on several fronts within the former federation until the parties signed the December 1995 Dayton Agreement. The American intervention was decided after the failure of the UN-led operations in Bosnia, which fell short of effectively protecting civilians.

In Bosnia, despite the gravity of the crisis, there was little political will for an extensive intervention. In the early days of the Bosnian War, Colin Powell presented President Bush with his plan to curb violence. Powell estimated that ending violence would necessitate 250,000 troops, most of which would have to be deployed on the ground.³⁹ Bush, weary of another Vietnam-type quagmire, kept forces at home. The intervening coalition failed to gather the required political capital to mount a successful operation.

The Clinton administration, despite significant policy adjustments, did not exhibit more political will. Clinton continued his predecessor’s policy of limited intervention. Congress also proved extremely reluctant to allow further American involvement.⁴⁰ Powell deemed such a strategy a direct reflection of the lack of involvement of the American administration in Bosnia: “as soon as

³⁰ Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 21.

³¹ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 564.

³² Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 89.

³³ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁴ US Congress. House. HR 227. 1993.; US Congress. House. HR 271. 1993.

³⁵ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 154.

³⁶ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 580.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 583; Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 303.

³⁸ US Congress. House. HR 16677. 1995.

³⁹ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 83.

⁴⁰ US Congress. House. HR 15100. 1995.; US Congress. House. HR 2550. 1995.

they tell me it's limited, it means that they do not care whether you achieve a result or not."⁴¹ While threatening strikes against the Serbs, Clinton also stated "the United States is not, and should not, become involved as a partisan in a war."⁴² This confused policy, stemming from a reluctance to craft a genuinely extensive intervention, "inevitably cost lives on all sides."⁴³

American administrations misidentified the genocidal Serbian forces as an "unbeatable monster."⁴⁴ Reports from within Bosnia nevertheless demonstrated that the Serbs, while relatively effective as killers, would have fared poorly had foreign troops been sent on the ground.⁴⁵ Yet, Bosnia, despite the country's dire humanitarian situation, did not represent an unmistakable national security interest for the United States—which curtailed the coalition's political mandate.⁴⁶

What mattered most to the average American was to end the fighting. Hence both the US and the UN refused to lift the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims, as the intervening powers believed that such a lift might prolong fighting. Indeed, should the embargo remain in place, Bosnian Muslim would have to accept the Serbs' conditions, thus putting a quick end to the violence. In 1994, the UN military commander even threatened the Bosnian government with force should it violate the Sarajevo weapons exclusion zone.⁴⁷ This policy, a direct result of the lack of political tolerance for foreign involvement, has been compared to "a lopsided boxing match in which the losing boxer has one hand tied behind his back

and the spectator, who wants the bloody spectacle to end, urges him to take a fall."⁴⁸

The working assumption of the intervening forces in Bosnia was that the mere presence of UN troops would constitute a sufficient deterrent.⁴⁹ This paper argues that this was not *only* a strategic blunder, but also reflected the interveners' lack of political will.⁵⁰ Engagement rules did not allow soldiers to pursue militiamen or to dismantle roadblocks, constraining the campaign's impact.⁵¹ Soldiers were only allowed to "threaten" force, but not to use it.⁵²

Starting from 1993, the intervening forces started to drop humanitarian supply from planes. Yet, because pilots were not able to fly during nighttime or within the reach of anti-aircraft weapons, drops were extremely imprecise—supply recovery rates were at times lower than 20%.⁵³ Had the pilots been ordered to take more risks, supplies would have more effectively reached the target population. Yet, the intervener's low risk tolerance substantially limited the operation's success.

Intervening forces in Bosnia also agreed to deliver 25% of their supplies to Bosnian Serbs as well as to prevent Bosnian Muslim from using the Sarajevo airport.⁵⁴ The interveners' lack of political will led them not only to reduce the operation's effectiveness but also to bear the responsibility of compromising with the dominant side.⁵⁵ This resulted in blurring the intervention's moral mandate to support the victims. All in all, the intervention contributed to a stalemate and

⁴¹ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 558.

⁴² Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁴ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 99.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁷ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 25.

⁴⁸ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 91.

⁴⁹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 160.

⁵⁰ James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (London: Hurts&Co, 1997), 132.

⁵¹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 163.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁵ US Congress. House. HR 2814. 1995.

hence failed to save as many lives as it could have.⁵⁶

2. Strategic Appropriateness: Choosing the Right Framework

a. *The Strategic Parameter*

This paper has defined humanitarian interventions as firmly within the realm of national security policies. In the previous section, I have argued that the presence of strong political interests in intervention determines their success. In addition, humanitarian interventions should not be considered outside of the realm of strategic choices. Choosing the appropriate strategic framework is a crucial element of an intervention's success on the ground.

Beyond the political decision of determining the extent of involvement, the strategic framework which presides over the allocation of operational resources as well as the extent to which such operational choices coincide with local needs is crucial to an operation's ability to save lives.⁵⁷ Humanitarian actions, whose effectiveness already suffers from their primarily reactive character, become problematic when they are restricted by a limited strategic mandate.⁵⁸

This paper argues that humanitarian operations follow one of the four following strategic choices: avoidance, defense, deterrence, and compellence. Avoidance implies that the prime focus of the operation is to deliver emergency aid, as was the case in Iraq. A strategy of defense means that protecting aid operations is the prime reason for intervention, as was the case in Bosnia and

Somalia. Deterrence and compellence, on the other hand, imply saving the victims—for the former—and directly facing the perpetrators—for the latter.⁵⁹ While operations surely combine aspects of the different strategic choices, I will only analyze their prime strategic focus.

When interveners avoid hard strategic choices, they ultimately constrain their own ability to save lives.⁶⁰ As Michael Walzer bluntly put it, “you can't kill unless you are prepared to die.”⁶¹ I will attempt to demonstrate that when perpetrators need to be defeated for human lives to be saved, the interveners should definitively take sides—and doing so must result in a “mandate to win” rather than in a mere “act of presence.”⁶² Interventions that refuse to address the root causes of violence tend to become “compromises that kill.”⁶³

Humanitarian tragedies are, first and foremost, political crises that call for changing the political balance of power on the ground.⁶⁴ As Nicolaus Mills put it, “unless one side is helped to win, and win quickly, nothing serious can be done to reduce violence.”⁶⁵ As such, neutral humanitarian interventions are only suitable to situations and areas in which violence has already significantly decreased.

This paper's argument is not that one operational strategy is inherently more efficient than the others, but rather that the extent to which the intervener's strategic choice fits the local environment determines how effective the intervener will be. In other words, tactics which

⁵⁶ Ibid, 119; Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 25.

⁵⁷ Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Expanding Global Military Capacity for Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), 23.

⁵⁸ Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 69.

⁵⁹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 42.

⁶⁰ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 48.

⁶¹ Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 101.

⁶² Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 279.

⁶³ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 24.

⁶⁴ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 102.

⁶⁵ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 259.

may be effective in one country might be completely unfit to address another crisis.⁶⁶

b. Success: Iraq and Kosovo

The strategic framework of the Northern Iraq intervention proved reflective of the operation's need to protect the target population. Focusing exclusively on assisting civilians within Northern Iraq, as opposed to rescuing all the victims of the Saddam Hussein regime, the intervening forces identified a precise target population and accurately addressed its needs through a robust no-fly zone—Operation Provide Comfort is a prime example of a strategy of avoidance, and occasionally defense. The US made consistent use of its overwhelming force and of its superior capacities to deliver humanitarian supplies. In Kosovo, intervening forces adopted more forceful means of intervention than in Iraq. Their aim was to effectively dominate the battlefield rather than to impress the enemy by their mere presence.⁶⁷ In Kosovo, the intervening forces identified defeating the perpetrators as the strategic *raison d'être* of their involvement—a goal that was not needed to protect civilians in Northern Iraq. The 45,000 troops of the coalition could hence effectively protect victims and save lives.⁶⁸ Strategic appropriateness and political will combined to avoid further casualties in the region. Intervening forces realized that their ability to save human lives was ultimately dependent on changes in the local balances of power and hence chose a strategy of deterrence, and at times compellence. Rather than hiding themselves behind the pretense of neutrality, they strove to effectively determine the political outcome of the conflict.⁶⁹ This paper

argues that impartiality, in situations in which parties have yet to agree to a settlement, is operationally dysfunctional, as it translates in an implicit mandate favoring the most powerful side of the conflict.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the intervening forces implemented a policy of gradual escalation of military strikes against the Serbs—as opposed to an all-out assault from Day 1. This proved especially effective at saving lives, as it limited the direct casualties of the intervention and gradually undermined the Serbs' willingness to fight.⁷¹

While this paper considers the Kosovo campaign to be a success, this does not mean that the choice of deterrence and compellence had no negative consequences. Indeed, especially in the volatile operational environments, such strategies also add troops and firepower to already explosive contexts. In 1999, the Nato campaign accelerated expulsions of Albanian civilians.⁷²

c. Failure: Somalia and Bosnia

As they primarily followed a strategy of avoidance and defense, whose main purpose was not to actually defeat perpetrators, the intervening forces in Somalia were extremely restrained in their ability to address the root causes of violence.⁷³ As a result, intervening forces could only deliver less than 10% of the required 35,000 tons of food Somalia required monthly to curb the famine.⁷⁴ Colin Powell himself admitted that his office initially misjudged the causes of the Somali crisis, underestimating the role of internal feuding in the deadly famine.⁷⁵ Because of the lack of political will to intervene, the intervention was strategically constrained to address the symptoms of violence

⁶⁶ Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Expanding Global Military Capacity for Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), 24.

⁶⁷ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 22.; US Congress. House. HR 561. 1998.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁹ Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 249.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷¹ Adam Roberts, *NATO's "Humanitarian War" over Kosovo*, eds L. Minear, T. van Baarda, and M. Sommers, *NATO and Humanitarian Action in the Kosovo Crisis* (Providence: Brown University, 2002), 123.

⁷² Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁴ Philip Johnston, *Somalia Diary* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1994), 47.

⁷⁵ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 565.

rather than its root causes. It was limited to sending and protecting humanitarian convoys while letting warlords continue to fight and kill—a pristine example of a strategy of avoidance.⁷⁶ This policy failed to produce a sustained cessation of hostilities among Somali factions: “the Somalis were apparently feeling sufficiently well-nourished to resume killing each other” commented Powell in 1993, after most American forces had already withdrawn from Somalia.⁷⁷

The US strategy fell short of actually pushing for a negotiated political settlement by impacting the on-the-ground power balance. Intervening forces thus misidentified the needs of the civilian population and failed to pursue the actions required to save the greatest number of Somali lives. The American strategy in Somalia should have been one of deterrence and compellence rather than one of avoidance and defense.⁷⁸ The US prioritized passive force to active security, and hence failed to exploit the potential of its superior military might to curtail the perpetrator’s freedom of operation.

Another example of failure of military humanitarian interventions can be found in Bosnia. The intervening forces adopted a strategy of avoidance and defense that meant allowing war crime perpetrators to pursue their activities. The interveners’ strategic choice of avoidance did not allow for direct confrontation with belligerent forces. This decision, unsuited to a local environment in which attackers regularly led operations that systematically targeted Bosnian civilians, was ineffective in preventing the massacre of Srebrenica in July 1995. The massacre

of 8,373 unarmed civilians unfolded—quite literally—under the eyes of UN and Nato units, as the strategic choice of their hierarchy prevented them from fighting attackers.⁷⁹ Likewise, the mere presence of UN troops in Sarajevo did not prevent Serbian shelling of the city.⁸⁰

European troops in Bosnia were not considered soldiers, but were rather viewed, by diplomats and military alike, as “grown-up Boy Scouts doing good deeds”—which prevented them from defeating the actual perpetrators of violence and led them to focus on short-sighted solutions to humanitarian distress.⁸¹

The UN even refused to return weapons its peacekeepers had confiscated from Bosnian Muslims in 1993.⁸² The American refusal to lift the arms embargo, while demonstrating a crucial lack of political resolve, also reveals the strategic short-sightedness of the intervener. While Bosnians were asking for *their own weapons* rather than for foreign powers to send troops, the interveners refused to endow their local partners with the effective means to impact the local military power balance.⁸³

This paper’s argument is that humanitarian intervention goes wrong when the intervening power misidentifies the target population’s needs. Strategic blunders in Bosnia materialized in the “well-fed dead” paradox, by which the interveners focused on providing humanitarian supplies but failed to offer genuine protection to civilians.⁸⁴ UN forces were also described as “eunuchs at an orgy,” a particularly powerful if crude reflection of the discrepancy between on-the-ground operational needs and UN strategic decisions.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Ibid, 565; Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 123.

⁷⁷ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 583.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 124.

⁷⁹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 22.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 44.

⁸¹ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New

York: Basic, 2002), 85; Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 74.

⁸² Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 196.

⁸³ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 270.

⁸⁴ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 43.

⁸⁵ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 9.

The UN intervention in Bosnia was followed by a Nato operation that involved a more forceful use of military might—signaling a strategic departure from the previous policy of avoidance. This adjustment helped break the siege of Sarajevo and saved thousands of lives.⁸⁶ As such, the traditional UN peacekeeping framework proved inappropriate to the non-consensual Bosnian environment, in which there was simply no peace to keep. In both Bosnia and Somalia, the intervening forces did not aim to alter power balances on the ground but only to mitigate the consequences of human rights violations.⁸⁷ Such a restricted strategic mandate, which reduced the interveners' ability to save lives, undoubtedly stemmed from a lack of political will. Accepting humanitarian interventions for what they are, military acts directed against individuals and groups that are breaking the peace, would allow intervening forces to depart from impartiality and substantially engage with the root causes of violence.⁸⁸

3. Local and International Legitimacy: Building Support for Intervention

a. *The Legitimacy Parameter*

Humanitarian interventions are unlike any other form of military operations. Because of their specific character, their success is highly dependent on the degree of support they are able to garner from both local and international partners.⁸⁹ This paper has identified five factors of a humanitarian intervention's credibility and legitimacy.⁹⁰

First, the intervention must be based on the right authority. The dilemma of humanitarian interventions is the following: without clear

political interests, the intervention is unlikely to succeed. Yet, precisely because of such interests, the intervention is at risk of being cast as illegitimate. While the interveners must use the full range of their capabilities to attain their objectives, local-level ownership must be emphasized at every step of the intervention.⁹¹ Second, it must be perceived as a fight for a just cause. The level of humanitarian distress must be widely recognized and accepted as a legitimate reason for international military intervention.⁹² Should the humanitarian rationale for intervention be subject to controversy, the interveners are likely to face significant hurdles to an effective and broadly supported campaign. Third, the intervention must only be enacted as a last resort. Because its aim is to save lives, a military humanitarian intervention can only be credible and legitimate when it is undertaken after all other less drastic tools have failed.⁹³ This does not mean that intervening forces should exhaust every single diplomatic venue before intervening—which would involve significant time loss—but rather that all non-military means should be considered prior to intervening. Fourth, it must make use of proportional means. The military rules of engagement, while allowing for an effective alleviation of human suffering, should also reflect the fact that interventions in complex emergencies are fundamentally different from all-out wars. The precision of modern weapons makes the unnecessary slaughter of

⁸⁶ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 68.

⁸⁷ Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 67.

⁸⁸ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 78; Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 73.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 115.

⁹⁰ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 12.

⁹¹ Sarah J. Meharg, *Measuring What Matters: In Peace Operations & Crisis Management* (Montreal: Queen's U School of Policy Studies, 2009), 157.

⁹² Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 12.

⁹³ Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 112.

civilians especially detrimental to the quest for legitimacy of interveners.⁹⁴

Fifth, the intervention must present reasonable prospects of success in achieving its goals.⁹⁵ The ability of interveners to develop a strong political vision and to support it with an appropriate military mandate is crucial in enhancing the intervention's success prospects.⁹⁶ Powell for instance identified the convergence between clearly defined political goals and the intervener's military commitments as the most crucial factor behind success in military operations.⁹⁷

b. Success: Iraq and Kosovo

In Iraq as well as in Kosovo, intervening forces successfully convinced their regional and international partners of the need for intervention—which materialized in Iraq's case in the UN Security Council Resolution 688 and in Kosovo's in Resolution 1244.⁹⁸

The local-level ownership criterion was easily met, as populations on the ground unambiguously called for international support. The US also had strong political interests in both cases, which allowed the intervening forces to deploy the appropriate level of military might. Secondly, the widely publicized humanitarian distress from which local populations in both Kosovo and Iraq suffered paved the way for building the legitimacy of the campaign at home. Thirdly, as the interventions were undertaken after the breakdown of repeated diplomatic appeals, they met the last resort criteria. The fact that the Serbian regime—and even more so the Iraqi one—were so adamant in refusing an acceptable compromise facilitated

the use of force. The US, despite its clear military superiority, did not use disproportionate military means, thus meeting the fourth criteria. Finally, carefully planned political campaign based on sound intelligence convinced the American people that success was more likely than failure. As such, because their operations met all of the abovementioned criteria, the American leadership could convince its own public opinion of the intervention's relevance (House Res. 299, 1992). Rather than portraying the operations in purely moral terms, pro-intervention coalitions put American national security in the balance. "Pay the moral price of silence now and you will soon have to pay the political price of turmoil nearer home", argued pro-intervention forces.⁹⁹ States that murder their own citizens almost inevitably threaten the lives of citizens elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ This reasoning is particularly well suited to the challenges of the post-Cold War era, in which the security of states and that of individuals has become mutually reinforcing.¹⁰¹ The identification of humanitarian crises as vital theaters for national security interests allowed the interveners to garner the required political capital at home to efficiently intervene abroad. Here, the intervention met the legitimacy criteria this paper has earlier identified. Striving to achieve local support does not mean that interventions should not be carried out without the agreement of the target country's government. In many cases, the local government is actually one of the main sources of humanitarian distress. Had the intervening forces sought Iraq's consent before intervening, the rescue of thousands of Kurdish civilians would not have been possible.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 272.

⁹⁵ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 25.

⁹⁶ Sarah J. Meharg, *Measuring What Matters: In Peace Operations & Crisis Management* (Montreal: Queen's U School of Policy Studies, 2009), 156.

⁹⁷ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 576.

⁹⁸ United Nations. Security Council. UNSCR 668. 1991.; United Nations. Security Council. UNSCR 1244. 1999.

⁹⁹ Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 74.

¹⁰⁰ Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and the Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic, 2002), 281.

¹⁰¹ Sarah J. Meharg, *Measuring What Matters: In Peace Operations & Crisis Management* (Montreal: Queen's U School of Policy Studies, 2009), 154.

¹⁰² Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 21; Chester A. Crocker, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2007), 280.

On the other hand, Nato forces intervened after an explicit call for assistance from the Turkish government, which significantly bolstered the intervention's regional credibility.¹⁰³ While the intervention was carried out against the will of the local government, it gathered the support of key allies in the region. The fact that such allies were culturally and religiously akin to Saddam's regime further helped mitigate criticism against the intervention. The strong international support the intervention received was also necessary to carry out what was tantamount to a blatant, if justifiable, infringement on Iraq's state sovereignty.¹⁰⁴

c. Failure: Somalia and Bosnia

In Somalia, intervening forces identified General Mohamed Farah Aidid as the prime enemy to peace. Yet, they entered the civil war without backing a contender to Aidid's rule.¹⁰⁵ Powell had eloquently warned American civilian leaders against the commitment of military forces abroad in the absence of a "clear political objective."¹⁰⁶ His recommendations were however largely unwelcomed in a Clinton administration that refused to take hard strategic decisions on Somalia.

The refusal to recognize Aidid as a legitimate actor in Somali politics, despite his popularity with locals and his extensive network of domestic surrogates, undermined the intervention's local legitimacy—ultimately breaking the intervener's resolve.¹⁰⁷ For the American government, Aidid was just a troublemaker. In reality, he was one of the prime claimants to national political authority in Somalia.¹⁰⁸ American forces, by fighting Aidid, turned a mere strong man into a martyr, further

undermining their ability to save Somali lives.¹⁰⁹ In this case, the American operation failed to come to terms with the evolving situation on the ground and thus lacked a crucial sense of local legitimacy. In Somalia, intervening forces faced a dilemma between peace and justice. By choosing to roll back Aidid rather than recognizing him as a legitimate partner, the US may very well have lengthened the conflict.¹¹⁰ Supporting a military balance of power on the ground should not be confused with either peace or justice—the way it was in Somalia—as this supports military stalemate and ultimately "costs more lives."¹¹¹ Such dilemmas, should they be successfully resolved by a politically audacious and strategically adequate intervention, are crucial to an intervention's legitimacy—and ultimately to its ability to alleviate human suffering. The American public was by and large skeptical of the intervention in Somalia, which prevented US leaders to garner the political willingness to mount a successful operation. Powell for instance described how Americans were left in confusion after Marines became targets for warring Somali factions—in stark contrast with America's purely humanitarian mandate of emergency supply distribution.¹¹² As such, in addition to lacking local support, the intervention was also contested at home and internationally. Thus, the intervention failed to garner local or international legitimacy. Precisely because of this indecision, the UN and US presence in Somalia not only cost interveners blood and money; but also fueled fighting among Somalis by producing inter-factional competition for foreign contracts and assistance funds.¹¹³ In Somalia, because of the intervention's lack of local

¹⁰³ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 49.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.; United Nations. Security Council. UNSCR 688. 1991.

¹⁰⁵ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 49.

¹⁰⁶ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 576.

¹⁰⁷ Donald C. Daniel, and Bradd C. Hayes, *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 271.

¹⁰⁸ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 26.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995), 71.

¹¹⁰ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹² Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 586.

¹¹³ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 26.

credibility and international legitimacy, an attempt to bring peace eventually led to postponing it—causing many more Somali casualties in the process.¹¹⁴

While American forces failed in Somalia because they could not bear the costs of their initial losses, intervening forces in Bosnia remained mired in indecision and half-measures, self-curtailling their political legitimacy and ultimately their ability to save lives.¹¹⁵

Local factions, unlike intervening forces, have the ability to “win by not losing.” Local forces are effective at exploiting the asymmetries of civil wars.¹¹⁶ As a result, should intervening forces fail to effectively affect the local balance of power, they will likely fail to garner the legitimacy required to save lives. The creation of “safe areas” for Bosnian Muslims in cities surrounded by newly conquered Serb territories encapsulates the interveners’ half-measure policy in Bosnia. The strategy indeed created territorial anomalies to the Serb conquest, which incentivized Serbian forces to increase pressure on such areas.¹¹⁷ This blunder contributed to the intervention’s legitimacy deficit, which, along with a lack of political will and strategic acumen, explains its inability to effectively save lives. Rami Shehadeh, a high-level official at the UN Department of Political Affairs, expressed the traumatic weight such policies still carry today.¹¹⁸

The intervention’s half-measures, criticized at the highest levels of US civilian and military leadership, also contributed to a lack of engagement of America’s traditional allies. European countries refused to commit troops to ground operations, prioritizing the use of diplomacy over that of military might.¹¹⁹ America’s indecisiveness failed to change its international partners’ positions, ultimately curtailing the intervention’s impact.

This paper’s findings regarding the quest for legitimacy in humanitarian interventions coincide with what I have identified under my political and strategic criteria: when interventions are portrayed as neutral, non-partisan technical activities rather than inherently political endeavors, they usually fail to save civilian lives.¹²⁰

Conclusion

This paper has utilized a wide array of official documents and academic pieces regarding the case studies of Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo. I have evaluated each humanitarian interventions’ success using the criteria of the number of lives it has saved, identifying three crucial parameters for success or failure: the extent of political involvement of the intervening forces in the target country, the strategic acumen of the operation’s mandate to deal with the sources of humanitarian distress, and the intervention’s legitimacy in the eyes of local, regional and international powers. I have argued that, should intervening forces fail to garner the required political will for extensive commitment abroad, the resulting operation will be too limited to be genuinely effective at saving lives. This paper has also demonstrated that when the strategic choices of the interveners do not address the true causes of humanitarian crises and refuse to recognize that a sustainable end to violence involves addressing the local balance of power, then the operation fails to save sufficient numbers of lives. Finally, this piece has detailed how the positive humanitarian impact of military humanitarian operations depends on the degree of legitimacy that the campaign gathers at all levels: local, international, domestic and foreign. This paper is designed to provide decision-makers with the tools necessary to determine whether potential interventions are likely to succeed, but also to help them strengthen the capacity of

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 30.

¹¹⁶ Stephan J. Stedman, *The New Interventionists* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 1: 1992/1993), 9.

¹¹⁷ Richard K. Betts, *The Delusion of Impartial Intervention* (Foreign Affairs Vol. 7, No. 6: 1994), 33.

¹¹⁸ Rami Shehadeh. United Nations. Department of Political Affairs – Syrian Team. In-person interview with the author at the UN Headquarters. October 2016.

¹¹⁹ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 576.

¹²⁰ Sarah J. Meharg, *Measuring What Matters: In Peace Operations & Crisis Management* (Montreal: Queen’s U School of Policy Studies, 2009), 153.

existing operations to effectively alleviate human suffering. While this piece has focused on the 1990s, which marked the beginning of a new era of American military commitment abroad for humanitarian motives, its findings could also prove useful to evaluate today's humanitarian intervention options. The cases of Iraq, Syria, and Libya could be analyzed using this paper's methodology, hopefully assisting decision-makers in realizing the crucial role of political, strategic, and legitimacy parameters in their ability to save lives abroad.

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