

Task 7.

What makes humanitarian intervention fail?

Use the interventions in Libya and Kosovo to support your analysis.

**A realist analysis: What makes
humanitarian military interventions fail?**

*Protecting fundamental human rights and providing
emergency assistance.*

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1.0 Introduction

During the past centuries, military intervention has been primarily characterized as both political and strategic. However, in the 1990s the international community reached a new concept of intervention termed by Mohammed Ayoob as “the new interventionism”.¹ Here, the term intervention was pushed in a qualitatively different direction. The new interventionism was supposed to be universal and humanitarian in character, as well as a project undertaken by, or on behalf of, the international community.² With the new objectives of humanitarian interventions, sovereignty was also becoming a questionable concept, and was now seen as a responsibility with ‘respect for a minimal standard of human rights’ as an essential attribute.³ With the new interventionism, followed the report named *The Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) issued by the International Commission of Intervention and State Security at the beginning of the 21st century.⁴ This advocated that the responsibility to protect one’s populace came with the notion of sovereignty, if this criterion was not met, the international community could then take appropriate actions on behalf of a mandate issued by the UN Security Council.⁵ The new interventionism was a highly contested concept within the broad school of realism. Realists believe that rational states act on behalf of state interest,⁶ an intervention based on the selflessness of humanitarianism was thus not rational, and could therefore be a subject to abuse.

According to professor Sheena C. Greitens, humanitarian interventions can either take non-military forms through aid, diplomacy and sanctions, or as ‘forcible military interventions in humanitarian crises’ also known as humanitarian military interventions.⁷ This essay will focus on the latter – humanitarian military interventions. Further, Greitens states that humanitarian intervention’s prime goal is to protect fundamental human rights and provide emergency assistance.⁸ In this essay a failed humanitarian intervention will thus be defined as an intervention who does not fully meet this humanitarian prime goal. A challenge regarding this prime goal is the fact that the international community consists of individual states with individual interests, which can trump the humanitarian ambition. This fact underlines the

¹ Ayoob, “Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty”, 83.

² *ibid.* 83.

³ *ibid.* 84.

⁴ Persaud, “Human Security”, 143.

⁵ Bellamy. “Humanitarian Intervention”, 336

⁶ Dune and Schmidt, “Realism”, 100.

⁷ Greitens, “Humanitarian Intervention and Peace Operations, 265.

⁸ Greitens, “Humanitarian Intervention and Peace Operations, 265..

dilemma of humanitarian interventions becoming a subject to abuse by powerful states. The core argument of this essay will hence be that humanitarian military interventions fail because state interest, in terms of survival and self-help, trump the humanitarian goal of the intervention. This will be supported by the cases of Kosovo (1999) and Libya (2011) where colliding state interest and the overreliance on airpower contributed to an increased civilian death toll, prolonged war, and to different extents, an unstable peace. The term “unstable peace” in this essay will be defined as diffuse political instability, distrust, and uncertainty within a region or state. The theoretical perspective will be that of the broad school of realism, but instead of focusing on a specific theory within realism the paper will use its three core elements; statism, survival and self-help.⁹

2.0 Statism, survival and self-help

Realism states that the international system is characterized by anarchy and that all states are sovereign (statism). Within an anarchic system states compete with other states for power and security, this competitive logic of power thus makes agreement on a universal principle, such as humanitarian intervention, difficult.¹⁰ Further, in world politics realists believe that the pre-eminent goal is survival. State leaders must protect the state at all costs, even individual acts of the immoral kind might have to be performed for the greater good.¹¹ Realists also believe that in the international system war is always a possibility because there is nothing that can prevent a state from using force against another.¹² States must rely on themselves to achieve security (self-help), which fuels the importance of prioritizing state interest.

Realism do not acknowledge any other actors than states which further results in an exclusive focus on state power. This limits the argumentation of the paper, preventing it from discussing factors such as how domestic opinion may affect the strategy of a humanitarian intervention. Other theories of international relations could shed light on such arguments, but because of the limited word count this paper will focus on a realist explanation. Therefore, this paper will argue that humanitarian military interventions fail due to states acting in accordance with state interest in terms of the three core elements; statism, survival and self-help.

⁹ Dunne and Schmidt, “Realism”, 101.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 107.

¹¹ *ibid.* 108.

¹² *Ibid.*

2.1 State interests, survival and self-help

From a realist perspective humanitarian interventions primarily based on humanitarianism are not rational due to states acting in accordance to state interest and the principle of survival and self-help.¹³ Per this argument humanitarian interventions are likely to be subject to abuse, yet this is a contested argument since states often act on behalf of humanitarianism although the humanitarian goal may be obscured by other interests. There are however historical examples of states showing an inclination toward ‘abusing’ humanitarian justifications to legitimize wars that are far from humanitarian in nature.¹⁴ Both the invasion in Iraq in 2003, led by the US and UK, and the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, are examples of invasions where the invading parties tried to legitimize their invasion in terms of humanitarianism.¹⁵ The cases of Kosovo and Libya can to some extent support this argument as it may seem like the coalition of intervening states had other interests than primarily humanitarian ones. One could here argue that the NATO-alliance’s state interests, apart from the humanitarian ones, obscured the humanitarian goal in both Kosovo and Libya by also focusing on energy security in terms of oil,¹⁶ societal security and NATO’s legitimacy¹⁷.

Regarding the case of Kosovo, it was found that within the NATO coalition, state interests were more evident at stake than humanitarian interests. The NATO states were during the time, quite reluctant to accept large numbers of refugees on a permanent basis from the Balkan area.¹⁸ Also, NATO’s credibility was at stake, the coalition had become deeply involved in 1998 in the international diplomacy regarding Kosovo, particularly in making military threats to Belgrade and in underwriting agreements. The alliance would indeed have lost credibility if it had not acted after it became apparent that the agreements were not being observed.¹⁹ Kosovo may therefore have been an opportunity for NATO and its members to show that it was still relevant whilst preventing large numbers of refugees staying on permanent basis in the European western countries. Thus, one may argue that the intervention was not done primarily on humanitarian grounds, but also to ensure NATO’s credibility and the European states’ societal security.

¹³ Glaser, “Realism”, 16.

¹⁴ Bellamy, “Humanitarian Intervention”, 333.

¹⁵ Ibid, 333.

¹⁶ The Economist, “Libyan oil: Relying on Libya”.

¹⁷ Roberts, “NATO’s ‘Humanitarian War’ Over Kosovo”, 108.

¹⁸ Roberts, “NATO’s ‘Humanitarian War’ Over Kosovo”, 108.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

During the NATO-intervention in Libya, one could also argue that the humanitarian intervention was enacted on behalf of the intervening states' nation-interests. Libya exported roughly 85 percent of its oil to several European states, among those were Italy, France, and Great Britain.²⁰ Libyan oil accounted for more than 17 percent of French oil imports and 8 percent of British imports.²¹ France and Great Britain were also the ones within the coalition that advocated the most strongly for an intervention.²² During the civil war, oil production significantly dropped. The decline caused great damage to the importing European states; Britain and France. Consequently, the incentive to end the civil war in hopes of restoring Libya's oil production and ensuring their state's energy security, might have been a key purpose of the intervention. Since both Great Britain and France mainly pushed for the intervention, and consequently played significant roles in providing air forces and training rebels,²³ one can argue that oil, in terms of energy security, was a key subject of the intervention.

From a realist perspective – the humanitarian interventions in Kosovo and Libya being on behalf of either NATO's legitimacy or security – one could therefore argue that the interventions were primarily based on state interests and not fundamental human rights and humanitarian assistance.

2.1 Casualties and overreliance on airpower

State interest being the greater goal of the two interventions may further explain the overreliance on air-power in both Kosovo and Libya. Airpower may not be as precise as ground forces, yet it is a safer way to reduce one's own casualties. NATO's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo is an example of the consequences of overreliance on airpower. The decision-making rules of NATO only allowed for three days of initial target selection.²⁴ It also limited military operations to airpower, where they were only allowed to fly at 15 000 feet. These tactical, as well as operational constraints, put civilians at risk. Strategic bombing options that may have shortened the war, were also politically inhibited.²⁵ In Kosovo, the

²⁰ The Economist, "Libyan oil: Relying on Libya".

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 111.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 108.

²⁵ *ibid.*

NATO bombing campaign initially hardened Serbian opinion against the Kosovar Albanians and rallied public support behind Slobadon Milosevic. It might have given Milosevic the excuse he needed to implement a long-held plan to ethnically cleanse the region.²⁶ The complete reliance on airpower resulted in NATO airplanes flying too high, and too fast, to protect civilians on the ground when the Serbian attacks on Kosovars escalated. The NATO-bombing did not save any lives. On the contrary, it caused between 600 and 5000 Serbian military deaths, 400-600 Serbian civilian deaths, and an unknown number of Kosovar Albanian civilian deaths.²⁷ Hence, one may here argue that the NATO intervention escalated the already strained tension in the region which further resulted in a magnified civilian death toll. One may even argue that the reliance on air-power enhanced the hatred between the two ethnic groups as it hardened Serbian opinion against Kosovar Albanians. It was not until the USA provided ground troops, and Russia used economic sanctions to force Milosevic to comply, that the war ended.²⁸

Why the NATO-allies primarily used air-power during the humanitarian intervention may be explained by the intervening states' state interests. As previously shown, the states had other interests than that of primarily humanitarian ones. One could therefore argue that their overreliance on air-power was a further extension of state interest. Air-power was relatively risk free, which would reduce the intervening states' casualties. Thus, the states relied on air-power, which consequently put the lives of the Kosovar populace at risk. Additionally, the use of air-power was seen as an effective threat toward Milosevic, therefore one can also argue that the overreliance on airpower, both as a threat and use of force, was used by the intervening states in the hopes of inducing Milosevic to comply with the demands of the UN Security Council.²⁹

Many argue that the NATO-bombings worsened the situation for the Kosovar population. In the days after the bombing instigated, a White House spokesman said the situation in Kosovo had taken 'a dramatic and serious turn for the worse'³⁰. One month after the NATO bombing campaign had begun, over half a million people had fled from Kosovo into neighboring

²⁶ Valentino, "The True Costs of Humanitarian Intervention", 65.

²⁷ Seybolt, "Humanitarian Military Intervention", 82.

²⁸ Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 109.

²⁹ Roberts, "NATO's 'Humanitarian War' Over Kosovo", 111.

³⁰ Ibid. 113.

countries, many thousands were relocated within Kosovo, and thousands had been killed.³¹ One could therefore subsequently argue that the NATO-bombing intensified the war, and may even have prolonged it.

Regarding the humanitarian intervention in Libya, NATO was once more the leading party, and, like Kosovo, the organization relied primarily on airpower whilst ground forces were not to be contemplated.³² However, in this case, the use of airpower was seen as militarily successful, both due to it effectively ending the uprising, as well as the NATO alliance hardly suffering any casualties.³³ On the other hand, it is rather debatable whether it was successful in terms of protecting fundamental human rights. The NATO-bombings by themselves resulted in at least 72 civilian deaths, where one third was children under the age of 18.³⁴ Further, due to the NATO support of insurgents, the intervention also resulted in a regime change which caused violent deaths and other human rights abuses to increase several folds.³⁵ After the intervention in Libya, the states' first elected prime minister, Mustafa Aby Shagour, lasted less than one month in office. In less than four years, Libya had more than four prime ministers, and in May 2014, Libya had come to the brink of a new civil war between liberals and Islamists.³⁶ Six months after the war, Human Rights Watch declared that the abuses "appear to be so widespread and systematic that they may amount to crimes against humanity".³⁷ Henceforth one may argue that the overreliance on airpower in Kosovo was a contributing factor to an increased death toll. Whilst in Libya the regime change, and not airpower, implicitly resulted in an increased death toll and a prolonged war.

2.2 Colliding state interest and an unstable peace

In addition to the argument of state interest obscuring the humanitarian goal by overreliance on airpower, is the additional realist argument that states have a difficulty cooperating due to colliding interests. This may further affect the losing state negatively, due to the fact that the colliding interests of the international community might result in confusion regarding the post-war peace-building process, which further leads to an unstable peace. Regarding the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 111.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch "Unacknowledged Deaths".

³⁵ Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle", 67.

³⁶ Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle", 67.

³⁷ Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle", 68.

cases of Kosovo and Libya, colliding state-interests was one of the contributing factors that may have led to an unstable peace within the two regions.

After the intervention in Kosovo, the region was left under the governance of the United Nations' Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), acting through UN mandate and on behalf of the Resolution 1244.³⁸ Henceforth, the state did not suffer a regime change like the one in Libya. On the contrary, the province was, until 2008, primarily administered by the UN whilst being officially part of the state of Serbia and Montenegro.³⁹ The goal was to build a democratic state within the province. However, the state has been troubled by its weak institutions, divided population and contested status to serve as obstacles to any easy political transition.⁴⁰

An underlying problem regarding the mandate of the international mission in Kosovo was that the issue of Kosovo's final status was not defined in the resolution 1244. It confirmed Yugoslavia's, but not Serbia's, sovereignty over Kosovo. It also affirmed substantial autonomy and self-government for the people in Kosovo within Yugoslavia. Yet this substantial autonomy was not defined clearly.⁴¹ An explanation to the vagueness regarding the resolution was the contradicting interests of the UN member states. In the end, the resolution was a compromise between the USA and the international community on one side, and Yugoslavia and Russia on the other, whilst the people of Kosovo were not taking part in this compromise due to them being the subjects of UNMIK.⁴² This lack of unified command and operational issues resulted in major political difficulties to the international administration. It, among other things, made it difficult for the administration to implement political initiatives requiring significant enforcement capacity and undermined the administration's credibility by reducing its ability to display credible authority to the local population.⁴³ The colliding state interests regarding resolution 1244 may thus have been one of the factors resulting in an unstable peace in Kosovo due to incoherence regarding the authority of the UNMIK.

³⁸ Narten, "Dilemmas of promoting 'local ownership': the case of postwar Kosovo", 267.

³⁹ Tansey, "Democratization without a state: Democratic Regime-building in Kosovo", 133

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 129.

⁴¹ Pula, "The UN in Kosovo: Administering Democratization?", 202.

⁴² *Ibid.* 202-203.

⁴³ Yannis, "The UN as government in Kosovo", 73.

In Libya, the intervening coalition could not agree on whether regime change or humanitarian assistance would be the actual mission.⁴⁴ Nonetheless the intervention resulted in regime change, this because NATO additionally supported the insurgents within the state.⁴⁵ The NATO support resulted in the insurgents successively taking power in Libya by gaining control over the capital, Tripoli, and other important strategic areas, where the final result was the death of Qaddafi.⁴⁶ The insurgents were further recognized as the legitimate government of Libya by much of the international community, hence a change in the Libyan regime had taken place.⁴⁷ One can therefore argue that regime change was one of the objectives of the intervention. In 2003, Qaddafi complied to U.S. demands that the state gave up its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).⁴⁸ Although he had complied to give up the WMD, there was still a fear within the international community that he might change his mind.⁴⁹ The UN mandate to intervene in Libya could therefore have been an opportunity for the NATO-coalition to end the regime of a leader that was perceived as unpredictable. Either way the intervention and the support of insurgents resulted in the downfall of the Qaddafi regime.

Although there is a possibility that the humanitarian intervention in Libya was meant to result in a regime change by the intervening coalition, there was still no consensus within the coalition regarding a plan for post-conflict peace-building. Days before the humanitarian intervention in Libya, Germany refused to participate. Only a handful of countries agreed to send aid, however a criterion was for the intervention to consist of limited air-power, no ground forces were ever to be contemplated.⁵⁰ The result was that the members of the NATO-coalition were not able to agree on a plan for post-conflict peace-building.⁵¹ Hence, when the death of Muammar Qaddafi was de facto, the NATO coalition had little to no plan of how to rebuild the shattered and highly complex state. One may therefore argue that the insurgents receiving recognition by much of the international community as a legitimate government, may have been a consequence of the NATO-alliance never agreeing on a plan for post-

⁴⁴ Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 111.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Payandeh, "The United Nations, Military Intervention and Regime Change in Libya", 358.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jakobsen, "Coercive Diplomacy: Countering War-Threatening Crises and Armed Conflicts", 289.

⁴⁹ Datta, "Humanitarian Military Intervention in Kosovo and Libya", 368.

⁵⁰ Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship", 111.

⁵¹ Ibid.

conflict peace-building. Thus, one may argue that Libya suffered an unstable peace, characterized by the lack of consensus regarding a legitimate government, due to the colliding state interests which prevented a post-war state-building plan.

3.0 Conclusion

From a realist perspective humanitarian military intervention fail because state interest often obscure the humanitarian goal of protecting fundamental human rights and providing emergency assistance. The reliance on airpower to ensure the safety of the intervening states' own troops resulted in an increased death toll in Kosovo, and may also have intensified the war. The use of airpower had a smaller effect on Libya regarding civilian casualties, however, the support of insurgents, which further resulted in regime change, prolonged the war and implicitly increased the death toll. Also, the competitive logic of the international system had distinct consequences for the post-war peace-building within both Kosovo and Libya due to colliding state interests. This may have contributed to the unstable peace in both regions.

To conclude, realism states that humanitarian interventions fail because it devaluates state sovereignty, and because the principles of survival and self-help trump the humanitarian goal. All though this was the case in both Kosovo and Libya, it is rather difficult to determine whether state interests are what makes all humanitarian interventions fail since they have only occurred twice in modern history. But, from a realist analysis of the two interventions one may ascertain that non-humanitarian state interests were contributing factors which caused the humanitarian interventions to fail.

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