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14. ABSTRACT The United States can be caught between conflicting desires: a desire to help others and allay human suffering and the desire to avoid getting entangled in "forever wars" and risk excessive costs of blood and treasure for interests that are not vital to U.S. security. The U.S. must have a guide to help its political and military leaders decide when to intervene militarily abroad. The Weinberger and Powell Doctrines favor military intervention only when vital interests are at risk and even then, only with the maximum use of force to ensure a quick, decisive victory. What about interventions abroad when vital interests are not at stake? This paper will demonstrate that there is a set of criteria (dubbed the Intervention Trinity here) that should be met before military intervention is considered. First, there must be a persistent humanitarian need where military support can be used to alleviate civilian deaths and suffering. Next, there must be broad international support for military intervention. Finally, the responsibility and burden of military intervention must also be shared by the United States and its coalition partners.					
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**THE INTERVENTION TRINITY: A NEW WAY TO THINK ABOUT MILITARY
INTERVENTION ABROAD**



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THE INTERVENTION TRINITY

As a global power with global interests, the United States risks getting pulled into conflicts around the globe that are not to defend the homeland of the United States (the Balkans, Libya and Syria come to mind). The Serbian army or Gaddafi's forces were not attacking or threatening the U.S. homeland for example. The U.S. must have a guideline of conditions to be met before considering future military interventions abroad. In light of strategic competition with the Peoples Republic of China, the U.S. must be even more judicious with where it gets involved militarily in order to preserve readiness with its main competitor. For purposes of this paper, the term "intervening militarily" shall mean U.S. assets (troops, aircraft, ships, drones) actively engaged (*or at least have the ability to engage if needed*) in combat operations against an adversary. By this definition the United States is not involved militarily with Ukraine, though it has intervened diplomatically and economically. HADR operations would fall outside of this as well since those interventions are not against an armed adversary.

The following criteria is specifically designed to be considered when the intervention is in a foreign land where no existential threat to the homeland exists – deemed the Intervention Trinity. First, there must be a persistent humanitarian need that demands military support in order to alleviate civilian deaths and suffering. Second, there must be broad international support for military intervention. Lastly, the responsibility of military intervention operations must be shared by the United States and its coalition partners (financial and military support) so that the burdens of intervention are shared.

BEYOND THE WEINBERGER AND POWELL DOCTRINES

Two other well-known approaches for the consideration of military intervention exist. They are known as the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines (named after Secretary of Defense

Caspar Weinberger and General Colin Powell respectively). Both stress that the vital interests of the United States must be at stake and that should those interests be threatened, military force should be a last resort option. Further, if military force is brought to bear – maximum force should be used to win (no half measures).¹ The fact remains however, that the country has and will continue to get involved overseas in conflicts that have nothing to do with the “vital interests” of the United States. It would be a hard sell indeed to convince anyone that military action in Libya (2011), the Balkans (1999) or Syria (2014)² were done to defend the vital interests of the United States. These military interventions do not mesh with the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines. The Intervention Trinity is a set of considerations that go beyond the two Doctrines to guide political and military leaders in deciding on whether to intervene militarily abroad in conflicts of choice.

HOMELAND DEFENSE

Before expounding on each portion of the Intervention Trinity, it must be explained that these considerations are specifically for military intervention outside of homeland defense. The U.S. military always has the responsibility and right to defend the nation. The initial operations in Afghanistan for example, were conducted to eliminate the Al Qaeda threat to the homeland and the Taliban that harbored them after the U.S. was attacked on 11 September 2001. An attack on a NATO country (though not “homeland defense”) would also fall outside of these considerations because Article 5 of the NATO charter already covers the defense of these partner nations. The Trinity is a set of considerations for *specific* instances when military intervention is being considered when there is no threat to the homeland.

¹ Handel, Michael. “Masters of War.” 11.

² No specific reference – dates are common knowledge and known by the author before writing this paper.

PREVENTIVE AND PREEMPTIVE INTERVENTION

It should also be noted that the Intervention Trinity can be applied *both* preemptively and preventively. The U.S. may consider “preempting” imminent casualties with intervention and also may consider acting “preventively” (i.e. when there is no imminent threat, but it is believed that at some point in the future that threat will materialize). For example, the U.S. released exquisite intelligence reports to the world revealing Russia’s plans to invade Ukraine before the actual invasion in February 2022.³ The U.S. could have intervened preemptively with a no-fly zone or armed troops stationed at the border of Ukraine and Russia in order to alleviate civilian casualties (assuming the other parts of the Intervention Trinity were met – international support and a coalition sharing the burden of the intervention). Alternatively, the U.S. could have also stationed troops, ships or aircraft in Ukraine several years before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine believing that President Putin could initiate a second war in Ukraine sometime in the future after the annexation of Crimea (again – provided that the other criteria of the Trinity were met). As of May 2023, there have been almost 8,500 civilian deaths in Ukraine⁴. Looking back, it would appear that the first criteria in the Trinity has been or would have been met (if preventive intervention was pursued).

It must be noted, that just because the criteria of the Trinity may be met in a preemptive or preventive scenario (or anytime for that matter) does not mean that the U.S. *should* intervene – it only means that intervention can seriously be considered. Whether the U.S. should have intervened in Ukraine for example is another topic entirely that involves considerations of nuclear weapons, the global economy and the threat of escalation to threats to the homeland. The

³ The author’s assessment based on watching / reading the news up until the invasion

⁴ Radio Free Europe. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-civilian-deaths-russia-invasion/32358863.html#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20says%20that,the%20start%20of%20the%20invasion. Apr, 2023>.

above examples simply illustrate that the Trinity *may* be applied both preemptively and preventively.

HUMANITARIAN NEED

The first consideration in the Intervention Trinity is a pressing humanitarian need. When writing about the U.S. military intervention in Libya, Admiral Stavridis noted “we knew it would be expensive, potentially entangling, and not in the direct and vital interest of the security of the United States.”⁵ However, the Admiral favored intervention because of the immense human suffering. The reasons for intervention in order to alleviate human suffering are threefold: the liberal argument of the moral and ethical responsibility to protect (a United Nations coined term abbreviated as R2P), a realist argument that humanitarian intervention enhances U.S. prestige and lastly an argument for Human Security.

First, there is a moral and ethical responsibility to protect innocent civilians from suffering, pain and death. “When large numbers of innocent civilians are being killed or threatened... intervention must be considered.”⁶ This is known by the United Nations as “responsibility to protect” or R2P. In 1994 amidst ethnic strains in Rwanda, the United Nations did nothing to intervene in the country’s conflict. Over 800,000 innocent civilians were killed.⁷ In Srebrenica, nearly 8,000 Muslims were killed by Bosnian Serbs and again, the United Nations peacekeeping force did nothing to intervene.⁸ These are examples of immense human suffering that could have been lessened had an outside military used hard power to intervene and protect civilians.

⁵ Stavridis, “The Accidental Admiral” 52.

⁶ Stavridis. “The Accidental Admiral” 64.

⁷ <https://world101.cfr.org/how-world-works-and-sometimes-doesnt/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect>

⁸ <https://world101.cfr.org/how-world-works-and-sometimes-doesnt/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect>

Furthermore, there is evidence that the U.S. public supports humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian intervention to protect civilians rose to “67 percent in 2004, 71 percent in 2006 and 69 percent in 2008 indicating that they supported US troops intervening in cases of genocide.”⁹ This proves that while Americans do believe in humanitarian values and want to prevent genocide if able. “In 2005, UN members endorsed the responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine, which states that countries have a responsibility to protect their citizens and, if they fail to do so, that responsibility falls instead on the rest of the world.”¹⁰ This doctrine essentially justifies the violation of sovereignty in order to protect lives. Though in recent years China and Russia have used the argument of sovereignty to veto intervention, the U.S. can use that to its advantage to promulgate its “brand” (which will be discussed in the following argument) as well as appeal to the American peoples.

Second, military intervention under humanitarian need is good for the interests of the country. Robert Kaplan (a realist in international relations theory) wrote “some of the darkest days of the Cold War—governed by realpolitik calculations of power—were also suffused with human rights concerns at the highest official levels. It was what defined the American brand and distinguished it from that of the Soviets.”¹¹ This is still an advantage for the United States. The brand of the country is one that champions democratic values and the value of human life. China and Russia (U.S. strategic competitors / adversaries) by comparison, do not choose to intervene for humanitarian reasons. In Syria, nearly 400,000 have been killed. Many millions more have become forced out of their homes due to the civil war. China and Russia have used their veto in

⁹ Haar, Roberta. “Never again or yet again?” 7.

¹⁰ <https://world101.cfr.org/how-world-works-and-sometimes-doesnt/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect>

¹¹ Kapan, Robert. George Shultz Showed U.S. Foreign Policy Is Strongest When We Combine Realism and Human Rights. 1.

the United Nations to stop any humanitarian intervention.¹² By intervening for humanitarian reasons to reduce human suffering, the United States demonstrates to the world the country's values of human life and dignity and that the U.S. will act to save lives while its competitors do not. This enhances American prestige and influence in the world.

Lastly, the emerging concept of "human security" is another reason why military intervention for humanitarian need should be considered. Human security stresses the primacy of human rights – i.e. freedom from fear and want.¹³ From a human security perspective, military intervention should *only* be done to protect civilians, not to offensively fight an adversary. Perhaps targeting opponents is necessary, but the reasons for that targeting is to protect civilians. According to Mary Kaldor, the job of any military intervention is to enable peace and civilian safety. "Thus, techniques such as creating safe havens, humanitarian corridors, or no-fly zones are typical of a human security approach."¹⁴ The United States should embrace these tenants of human security in order to intervene when human lives are at risk. For example, at the outset of the Ukraine War, there was public debate over President Zelenski's request for a "no-fly zone designed to facilitate evacuation of civilians and stop Russia's targeting of Ukraine's civilian population."¹⁵ Had the zone been enacted it could have been created under the umbrella of human security.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The next consideration in the Intervention Trinity is broad international support.

International support is important for two main reasons: legitimacy and legality. For the purposes

¹² <https://world101.cfr.org/how-world-works-and-sometimes-doesnt/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect> (last 3 sentences have facts from this source).

¹³ Kaldor, Mary, *Human Security in Complex Operations*, 6.

¹⁴ Kaldor, Mary, *Human Security in Complex Operations*, 6.

¹⁵ Schmitt, Michael. "A No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine and International Law." <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/no-fly-zone-ukraine-international-law/>

of the Trinity broad international support is defined by the following: the public support of the majority of Western democracies (i.e., the European Union, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, South Korea etc.) *or* the U.N. in the form of a United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR). The support of Western democracies is associated with *legitimacy* and a UNSCR is associated with *legality*. Ideally, a military intervention is both legitimate and legal. However, given Russia's and China's veto power in the United Nations and their opposition to intervention of any kind, the U.S. may have to settle for only legitimacy when considering intervention.

First, international support for military intervention is necessary because it makes the violation of another country's sovereignty legitimate. An action can be defined as legitimate "when it is perceived as normatively valid by the relevant audience. Three elements stand out in this definition of legitimacy: perception, normative validity, and audience."¹⁶ A few conclusions can be drawn from this definition. First, the *perception* of Western democracies matters most. Democracies value the rule of law, human rights, *and* sovereignty. If a majority of Western democratic states support military intervention (thus violating a state's sovereignty) there must be a good reason (i.e. intolerable human suffering). Second, *normative validity* refers to a moral imperative. For example, intervening to protect civilians would be normatively valid because the average human being would find it moral to protect innocents. Third, the *audience* is that of other Western democratic states as opposed to authoritarian regimes. Again – because democratic states value human rights and the rule of law, those are the states that comprise the audience when an action is deemed "legitimate" or not.

Why does the United States need legitimacy in order to conduct a military intervention? "From an identity-based perspective, upholding the "rules of the game"—and being able to

¹⁶ Nunez-Mietz, "Legalization and the Legitimation of the Use of Force" 727. 9

demonstrate it—is the appropriate thing to do for any actor that sees itself as part of ‘the game.’”¹⁷ In other words, in order for the U.S. to maintain its position as the champion of the international rules-based order, it must act accordingly. If the U.S. conducts interventions that are not legitimate, it risks the condemnation of its allies, the undermining of the American brand and the country’s proclaimed values, the weakening of its global leadership and prestige and finally – risk of having to conduct the intervention unilaterally (discussed in the third part of the Trinity). Legitimacy is why broad international support is a requirement of the Intervention Trinity.

Second, international support for military intervention is necessary because it makes the violation of another country’s sovereignty legal. International law generally prohibits the use of military force to violate another country’s sovereignty. Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter makes war between states *illegal*: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”¹⁸ What makes the use of military force against another nation *legal* is a UNSCR.¹⁹

Admiral Stavridis noted when he was SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander, Europe): “Intervention – like any other international action involving force – should at least theoretically be sanctioned by the UN Security Council....It is always vastly better to have the UN imprimatur behind an intervention.”²⁰ Like legitimacy, legality is important because the United States risks damaging its brand and alienating its allies without it. A violation of a state’s sovereignty can damage the political and diplomatic reach of the United States. The U.S. should at least attempt

¹⁷ Nunez-Mietz, “Legalization and the Legitimation of the Use of Force” 728.

¹⁸ Kreps, Sarah. “Multilateral Military Interventions: Theory and Practice.” 584.

¹⁹ Nunez-Mietz, “Legalization and the Legitimation of the Use of Force” 741.

²⁰ Stavridis 74.

to have a UNSCR authorizing the legal use of force for intervention. The U.N. is the de facto institution that records history. The U.S. should endeavor to be on the right (legal) side of history.

The “elephant in the room” of course (as noted above) is that Russia and China continue to veto any intervention that they do not agree with. As of 2022, they have collectively stopped more than 15 attempts to pass a resolution to intervene in Syria.²¹ That should not prevent the U.S. from attempting to secure a resolution. Regardless of whether it comes the form of the support of Western democracies or a UNSCR it is broad international support that forms the second criteria of the Intervention Trinity.

SHARED BURDEN

Lastly, when military intervention is being considered abroad the operation should have its burdens shared by a coalition. Sharing the burden here is defined as coalition partners fighting (or stationed and prepared to fight) side by side with the U.S. military, *and* the financial contribution to the intervention. “The age of unilateral action is rapidly passing. Despite the frustrations, working with a coalition is vastly better than going it alone.”²² Realists do not want the U.S. to be the only nation expending blood and treasure for a cause not vital to U.S. interests, and liberals tout the benefits of international engagement and problem solving together. Regardless of these two perspectives, the most important reasons for shared military action are twofold: the desire to share the enormous financial and human costs of military operations, and that multilateral military interventions are more likely to succeed.

²¹ <https://world101.cfr.org/how-world-works-and-sometimes-doesnt/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect>

²² Stavridis, “The Accidental Admiral.” 64.

First, a shared responsibility for military interventions abroad is a consideration because of the huge financial and human costs in lives and equipment. For example, the U.S. spent \$2.313 trillion since 2001 in Afghanistan (not including lifetime veteran care). Nearly 176,000 people died in the war (including U.S. military, contractors and the opposition). Of this number only 1,144 were allied military.²³ This is a huge bill of blood and treasure. Though Afghanistan may have been vital to the security of the U.S. the bill above illustrates how expensive a war can be. This is even more poignant during strategic competition with the PRC. The U.S. cannot risk spending this kind of money on an operation not vital to the U.S. when readiness must be preserved for the PRC.

Troop contributions is one way to share the burdens of military intervention. “A state with substantial interest - measured in part by the costly signal of troop contributions will demand more sway over the institution; therefore, what the actor contributes will correspond with its decision-making authority.”²⁴ A true shared burden means the deployment of troops to the cause. If the coalition state supports with troops, that state will most certainly have a stake in the outcome of the conflict and the decision-making authority on the back end when peace is declared. This helps alleviate the burden of what occurs after a conflict has taken place. If there is any nation building to be done, the U.S. should not be the only one taking that burden on.

Contributing financially is another way to share the burden of an intervention. “In the Gulf War...Japan and Germany provided roughly \$16 billion to the Coalition of the intervention's total costs, while the Gulf states contributed about \$36 billion, leaving the United

²³ All data from Brown University. “Costs of War.” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/human-and-budgetary-costs-date-us-war-afghanistan-2001-2022>

²⁴ Kreps, Sarah. “Multilateral Military Interventions: Theory and Practice.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 123, No. 4 (Winter 2008-09), 591

States with the delta of only \$7 billion.”²⁵ This is a scenario that any future military intervention on behalf of the United States should attempt to emulate. As is the same with troop contributions, when coalition partner states provide money to the cause, these states will have a stake in the outcome of the intervention. In the First Gulf War for example, the states mentioned above had a hand in the decision of whether to fight on into Baghdad or not.²⁶ At first blush this may seem like it limits U.S. freedom of maneuver in how to conduct an intervention. However, the truth is that ceding a little bit of strategic control over execution is a bargain when you have financial and troop support from partner nations.

Additionally, military interventions that are conducted multilaterally have a greater chance of succeeding. A comprehensive study conducted in 2011 on the subject of multilateral versus unilateral military intervention was concluded with findings that support this statement. According to the study (cited below) multilateral interventions did better to democratize a state than unilateral interventions over a period from 1960 to 2002. According to the study “the impacts of such interventions are felt as early as two years following onset, and later again at four and seven years postintervention onset....As well, by year four humanitarian multilateral operations have a positive liberalizing effect.”²⁷ The study further concludes that when states intervene multilaterally the economic growth of the target state was better than unilateral interventions.²⁸

To be fair, the cited study admitted that more research and data was needed to fully endorse the benefits of military intervention as a coalition over the long term and that

²⁵ Kreps, Sarah. “Multilateral Military Interventions: Theory and Practice.” 591.

²⁶ Kreps, Sarah. “Multilateral Military Interventions: Theory and Practice.” 591.

²⁷ Marie Olson Lounsbery, Frederic Pearson and Andrea Kathryn Talentino. “Unilateral and Multilateral Military Intervention.” *Democracy and Security*, July-September 2011, Vol. 7, No. 3 (July-September 2011), pg 245.

²⁸ Lounsbery et al. “Unilateral and Multilateral Military Intervention.” pg 248.

intervention (regardless of acting alone or with a coalition) might still be detrimental in the long run for target states. The goal of Intervention Trinity however, is not to debate the merits of intervention. The risks of military action are well documented outside the scope of this paper. The goal of the Trinity is to provide the framework of conditions to be met before intervention should *even be considered*. The fact remains that multilateral military interventions are more effective than unilateral ones and troop support and financial contributions alleviate the burdens of U.S. intervention alone.

COUNTERARGUMENT AND REBUTTAL

The U.S. may have an interest in intervening abroad when the Trinity cannot be met. There may not be a coalition willing to fight alongside the U.S. or help foot the bill. If there is an interest to intervene but the Trinity cannot be met, does that mean that the U.S. should not pursue and undertake a military intervention?

For example, the United States may have an interest in defending Taiwan from a cross-strait invasion from the PRC. However, European states (usually the closest allies of the U.S.) may not send troops in support of that kind of intervention. Jeremy Shapiro (research director for the European Council of Foreign Relations) noted “I suspect that the vast majority of [European leaders] agree in terms of wanting to maintain some independence from the United States, to have a relationship with China, and in fact, how Taiwan isn't really their problem.”²⁹ He continued, “I don't think I would expect Europe to, I don't know, send fighter jets or frigates.”³⁰ If his analysis is correct and if other democratic states in the Pacific agree— the U.S. could be placed in a position to not have all of the criteria met to pursue intervention.

²⁹ Joyner, Ella. “EU and CHINA: Is Taiwan really Europe's Problem?” <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-and-china-is-taiwan-really-europes-problem/a-65283824>. April 2023.

³⁰ Joyner, Ella. “EU and CHINA: Is Taiwan really Europe's Problem?” <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-and-china-is-taiwan-really-europes-problem/a-65283824>. April 2023.

It could be argued then, that the Intervention Trinity has failed to take into account potentially the greatest geopolitical threat to the United States – a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The truth is however, that the criteria of the Trinity still apply.

In short – if the criteria are not met, the U.S. *should not intervene* militarily in Taiwan. The Trinity exists to prevent the country from expending massive amounts of blood and treasure on a war of choice. It is more permissive than the Powell Doctrine, but not so much as to jeopardize blood and treasure for a war that is not launched to defend the homeland. An argument does exist asserting that Taiwan represents “vital interests” to the U.S. (and so may fall under the Powell or Weinberger Doctrines) however experts are divided on this issue as well as the American public.³¹

Given this, the U.S. *can and should* do some things now to ensure that the Trinity is met *before* a crisis compels the U.S. to decide on military intervention. First, the U.S. should continue to portray an invasion of Taiwan as a humanitarian issue. Needless lives will be lost if the PRC attacks Taiwan. This will assist in garnering the international support needed to enhance legitimacy. Europe may not be part of a coalition of fighting partners in a Taiwan scenario but they can certainly voice public condemnation towards China and provide the international support for a defense of Taiwan. Second, the U.S. should work to secure commitments from partner nations now in order to build a coalition willing to share the burdens of the intervention. The U.S. should obtain pledges of both military and financial support for any military operation should the PRC pursue an armed course of action regarding Taiwan from these nations.

³¹ Kim, Lami. “Should the United States Defend or Ditch Taiwan?” <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/should-united-states-defend-or-ditch-taiwan-202772>. June 2022.

By taking action now, the U.S. can get involved in Taiwan militarily with all of the benefits of the Trinity intact. Civilian deaths can be prevented, the international community can be on the side of the U.S. and the huge costs of human and financial burdens can be shared.

CONCLUSION

As described throughout this paper, the U.S. must have a guideline of when military intervention can be considered when the intervention falls outside of homeland defense. First, there must be a humanitarian need to alleviate human suffering. Second, there must be broad international support for military intervention. Lastly, the responsibility of military intervention must be shared by a coalition (financial and military support) so that the burdens of intervention are shared. By ensuring that the Intervention Trinity is met before intervention the U.S. can alleviate human suffering while also limiting the amount of blood and treasure spent on a war of choice.

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