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# THE EPOCH OF 20<sup>TH</sup> -21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MILITARY INTERVENTIONS: EXEMPLARY INTERVENTIONS OR QUINTESSENTIAL FIASCO?

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## ABSTRACT

Humanitarian intervention can be apprehended as the actual use of strength by a State with the objective to avert human atrocities in another State. Humanitarian interventions are basically of two types, namely (a) Military intervention and (b) Humanitarian intervention with aid and sanctions. The paper restricts its purview to specifically military interventions.

The period between the 1900s and the beginning of the 2000s was marked as an era for the widespread abstraction of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Humanitarian interventions. However, it is noted that behind the garb of ‘Humanitarian interventions’, the principles of Sovereignty are ignored, additionally, the interventions have proven to create more chaos than orderliness. The paper endorses that with the rise of liberalism, international law did not respect the principle of State Sovereignty. Further, the analysis provided in the paper answers the question, of whether “Military interventions are exemplary interventions or quintessential fiasco?”. The paper begins by providing the theory of “Failed States” and subsequently contours the conception that humanitarian intervention is a liberal technique employed to achieve the pinnacles of global governance by the powerful states. This has been substantiated by five different case studies of humanitarian intervention in Somalia, Kosovo, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan. The paper ultimately underpins the urgency to assume responsibility for humanitarian interventions.

Keywords: Liberalism, Humanitarian interventions, Military interventions, Responsibility to protect, Sovereignty.

## INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian intervention can be comprehended as a calculated violation of State rights cloaked under the name of humanity<sup>1</sup>. In simpler terms, humanitarian intervention can be interpreted as necessary actions taken by organizations to relieve the plight of human suffering by invading the borders of another sovereign state. The sufferings usually stem from ignorance faced by the abused groups falling under the government of a particular State. The abuse is deliberate and organized in nature, leading to **human rights violations** ranging from ethnic cleansing, and coercive expulsions to genocides. Humanitarian intervention also finds its applicability in situations when the **civil order** of the State has collapsed.

Three peculiar humanitarian interventions that have been globally condemned based on the argument that such interventions undermine the conception of **State Sovereignty** enshrined under the Charter of United Nation are- India's intervention in Bangladesh War (1971), Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia (1978) and Tanzania's intervention in Uganda (1979).

However, the notion of humanitarian intervention faced widespread criticism. Several denigrators linked humanitarian interventions with **liberal imperialism**, based on the contention that such interventions vigorously obtrude western beliefs onto other cultures. This can be further substantiated by highlighting the absenteeism of the Western powers in the **1994 Genocide** which took place in **Rwanda**, thereby demonstrating their sheer hypocrisy as the situation did not reserve either economic or political interest favorable to the intervening countries. Subsequently, critics started associating **interventionism** with **self-interest** as humanitarianism commenced to be recognized as rhetoric for sheathing either geopolitical strategies or economic benefits.

## THE THEORY OF FAILED STATES

The **destabilization of world peace** was witnessed with the end of the **Cold War**. The States which were unable to govern themselves, id est the world's weak states were commonly referred to as the '**Failed States**'<sup>2</sup>. Failed States proved to be inept to provide basic amenities to their citizens thereby breaching the fundamental rights of their people. The US has invaded

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis Heraclides, Ada Dialla, Humanitarian Intervention in the Long 19th Century, 1-6, Manchester University Press.

<sup>2</sup>Sonali Huria, "Failed States & Foreign Military Intervention: the Afghanistan Imbroglio", <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep09275> (last visited on 23rd June 2022).

militarily in the so-called **collapsed States** based on the contention that such interventions were necessary to reimpose stability thereby facilitating the protection of human rights. The interventions by the US in Iraq (1991), Somalia (1992), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001) can be safely branded as the truest ‘**interventions**’ as there was a complete absence of consent on behalf of the government in the States in which the intervention was carried out.

The US classified Afghanistan as a ‘**Failed State**’ owing to the attack of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 on the World Trade Centre, thereby subsequently launching the ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ combined with the ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT). In order to make the intervention globally respectable, the need for **protecting the rights** of the Afghan population was cited.

However, behind the **façade of humanitarianism**, it can be argued that the intervention by America can be termed awry. The intervention has resulted in the weakening of Afghanistan, thereby leading to strife-ridden issues. Numerous factors have contributed in resulting of the failure of the international forces, ultimately causing civilian casualties, some of them being- unreasonable use of power, purposeless bombings (causing the death of several civilians who were helpless in the crossfire), reluctance to compromise with the Afghan farming methods (zero-tolerance towards the production of opium). This brings one to answer the daunting question that whether such military interventions are: **Exemplary interventions or quintessential fiasco?**

### CASE STUDIES<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. SOMALIA 1991: FAILED MILITARY INTERVENTION LED BY THE US.

- **Historical Background:** The Nation of Somalia collapsed owing to a dictatorial establishment. The capital city of Mogadishu slipped into a state of lawlessness leading to a massive massacre. The dire situation was followed by a draught, which compelled the **UN Security Council** to vote for an intervention to be led by the US military in the year 1992. The intervention was intended to fulfil a two-fold purpose, namely- **(a)** providing humanitarian support and **(b)** aversion to human barbarity. The intervention seemed to accomplish its objectives

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<sup>3</sup> Neba Ridley, “The Rise and Decline of Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect”, Journal of International Social Inge search, 121-128, 2017.

initially, however consequently with the establishment of **anarchy** the intervention was perceived as a common enemy.

- **Observation:** The Nation of Somalia even after two decades of humanitarian intervention can be classified as a **Failed State** as the outcome of the intervention left bitter experiences. The intervention led by the US was comprehended as a harmless operation, so as to usher into the contemporary democratic liberal propositions to appear as an opponent of dictatorial regimes<sup>4</sup>. It was established that the intervention was bound to be a failure since it lacked profound commitments as the **Eastern African nation** served no critical national interest which could have persuaded the US to be more convoluted in the mission.
- **Outcome:** The mission of the US in Somalia contributed to giving shape to the foreign policy of the US under the administration of Clinton, which provided to not intervene in situations lacking strategic national interest. The other western countries also resolved to follow the policy of **non-intervention**, thereby substantiating the minimal role of the international communities in the subsequent case of **Rwanda** and **Srebrenica** even in dire crimes of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

## 2. KOSOVO 1999: CASE OF UNILATERAL HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION.

- **Historical Background:** The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia faced a military intervention in the year 1999 led by NATO accompanied by airstrikes. The reason for the intervention was cited as to prevent the crime of ethnic cleansing committed against the Kosovar Davidson under the regime of **Slobodan Milosevic**. The deportment of the intervention was widely condemned.
- **Observation:** On a detailed analysis of the above intervention, it can be regarded that such impedes the contemporary conception of humanitarian interventions. NATO disregarded the authorization of the Security Council and

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<sup>4</sup> Rotberg, Robert “When States Fail: Causes and Consequences”. John F. Kennedy School of Government [http://web.mit.edu/ssp/seminars/wed\\_archives\\_03fa11/rotberg.htm](http://web.mit.edu/ssp/seminars/wed_archives_03fa11/rotberg.htm) (last visited on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022).

the same qualified as a **unilateral humanitarian intervention**. It has been observed that the prime object of the military intervention was not to prevent the human atrociousness being carried out in Kosovo, rather the military intervention was fueled by the motive to exert power against the authoritarian regimes<sup>5</sup>. Both NATO and Yugoslavia proposed two separate diplomatic propositions, however, they were proved to be redundant as, after seventy-eight days of airstrikes, a compromise was reached dictated on the terms **outlined by the West**.

- **Outcome:** It can be regarded that, earlier settlement of the situation could have led to the aversion to the high loss of human lives. The military intervention in Kosovo can be identified as an **acceleration** and **extension** of the liberal projects headed by the West. It has been argued by several scholars that such projects are just a pretext to disguise geopolitical strategic and national interests behind the garb of humanitarian considerations. The ulterior motive was recognized to **bolster the coherence of NATO** combined with the interest of the US in Europe.

### 3. LIBYA 2011: MODEL INTERVENTION OR MODEL FAILURE.

- **Historical Background:** In the year 2011 the UNSC passed a resolution commending military intervention in Libya. Then-President Obama affirmed that the resolution was passed to preserve the lives of activists advocating on behalf of a democratic form of government, and whose lives were threatened by the dictatorial establishment under the regime of **President Muammar al-Qaddafi**. The US, NATO member States and Security Council had to immediately intervene in the interest of peace in order to subside the conflict between rebel groups and pro-governmental bodies. The intervention was also backed by the **Arab league**. Finally, the pro-democratic groups succeeded and were able to conquer Libya.
- **Observation:** It can be regarded that the military intervention failed to meet its initial goal of humanitarian intervention. Despite the inclination of the scholars

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<sup>5</sup> Vol.49, Fabio Ghia, "Armed Intervention in UN Peacekeeping: The Necessity for Change"; 132-136, Naval War College Press.

approving the intervention, it can be regarded that in practicality, even prior to the mentioned intervention, the pro-government groups were able to regain most of the territories of Libya. The intervention by NATO using airstrikes combined with ground clashes made the death toll rise from 1000 lives to 8000 lives.

- **Outcome:** It can be safely concluded that the involvement of NATO intensified the impact as well as the duration of the strife. The whole intervention multiplied the death toll by **seven-fold**, thereby aggravating human atrocities. The outcome of the intervention was exacerbated as a total state of anarchy was introduced in Libya, thereby promoting the **proliferation of weapons** and **Islamic Radicalism**. Additionally, NATO prevented any scope of conciliation by denying dialogue proposals and a ceasefire between the two groups. The presence of national interest for the US has been re-instated by the speech delivered by **President Obama** (then) reiterating that “the US had a strategic interest in ensuring that the violence in Libya does not disrupt nearby Arab fledgling democracies”.

#### 4. SYRIA 2011: IMPRACTICABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

- **Historical Background:** The civil war of 2011 in Syria marked the imbroglio of humanitarian intervention. The intervention was inferred as a tragedy because it led to the death, brutalization and injury of several thousand Syrians. The Statistics estimated by **the United Nations Commission for Refugees** provided that the civil war had displaced about 7.6 million Syrian citizens, hence creating an unprecedented anomaly in history.
- **Observation:** The incompetence of the international communities to intercede in the dire humanitarian fiasco in the era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century discloses not just the lacunas of intentions of the communities, but rather depicts the **impracticability of principles** put forth by the international communities such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The futility of humanitarian interventions can be substantiated by the level of inaction portrayed by the failure of the UN Security Council to reach a consensual accord on humanitarian intervention. The concept of humanitarian intervention has failed to meet its original

objective and has instead become an instrument that is to be employed politically by the dominant states to seek their own **geopolitical** and **national interest**.

- **Outcome:** It has been regarded that Russia was an integral State in downplaying the liberal democracies of the West, thereby highlighting higher concern for the Sovereignty of the State. Russia embraced a statist approach, thereby opposing the propositions of **Western liberalism**, hence displaying a paradigm shift.

## **INTERVENTIONS: FUELED BY LIBERALISM**

**The post-cold war** era witnessed a rise in the extent of humanitarian crisis majorly arising out of poverty, marginalization and under-development leading to conflicts within the States<sup>6</sup>. The liberals were compelled to intervene due to the declining willingness of the States to protect the human rights of their citizens. Most Humanitarian interventions engineered by the West have been comprehended to be a **liberal mode of global governance**. The post-Cold war era witnessed a rise in **Liberalism**. Liberalism can be construed as a philosophy governed by moral and political beliefs coupled with equality before the law and the consent of the individuals who are governed. Liberalism imposed a new moral philosophy putting forth that the international communities had the onus to protect the citizen of the States which were incompetent to effectively guarantee human rights to their people.

Several scholars have argued that the new perception of humanitarian intervention inspired by liberalism violates the **UN charter**, as it breaches **Article 2(4)**<sup>7</sup> and **Article 2(7)**<sup>8</sup> of the UN Charter. **Article 2(4)** provides that “all members states shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state” while **Article 2(7)** outlines that “Nothing contained in the present charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign state”

Gradually the UN and the international communities started gaining wide recognition and

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<sup>6</sup>Jessen-Petersen, “Humanitarian in crisis”, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep12279> (last visited on 23rd June 2022).

<sup>7</sup> U.N. Charter art. 2(4).

<sup>8</sup> U.N. Charter art. 2(7).

acknowledgement in the early 2000s<sup>9</sup>. The notion of humanitarian intervention was further backed by the advancement of the philosophy of **R2P: Responsibility to Protect**<sup>10</sup>. The accretion in the notion of humanitarian intervention has been based on the liberal assumption that the dictatorial and authoritarians are more prone to commit human rights violations. The declaration of war on **Iraq by the US** can be contemplated as the augmentation of the notion of liberal beliefs.

## HEGEMONY OF THE WEST

The Western liberal States often cloaked their self-interest in the name of **moral righteousness**. Humanitarian interventions and global governance were comprehended to be synonymous, as the liberal notion when backed by the international communities became a universal justification. Steadily the West started justifying wars on the grounds of **morality and protection of Human rights**<sup>11</sup>. The whole phenomenon can be viewed as a tool to target the non-western States, prone to either dictatorial or authoritarian regimes. The succeeding section will underpin the issues with efficient implementation of humanitarian intervention, which is not unique to several cases.

On analyzing the above-mentioned case studies of **Somalia, Kosovo, Libya and Syria**, it is evident that the ulterior motive of humanitarian interventions deviates from its chief concern, which is to protect the citizens from all forms of human atrocities, rather the same is motivated by the self-interest of the West, thereby **delegitimizing their actions**. So as to cite the instance of **Kosovo and Libya**, it is palpable that NATO's prime concern was to compel a change in the regime even at the cost of several civilian lives. Hence it can be safely concluded that the **humanitarian interventions in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century have been orchestrated to establish political dominance in lieu of moral righteousness**. The actions of the West clearly demonstrate their desire for **selectivity** engineered by self-interest as well as their **unmistakable double standards**. Every decision of the international communities has been sustained by geopolitical interests. The continual human disaster in the case of **Syria** can be

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<sup>9</sup>Beach, Hugh. "Just War and the Responsibility to Protect: Developments in UN Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Intervention". *Disarmament Diplomacy* 80. Autumn 2005: 56.

<sup>10</sup> Vol.4, Vesselin Popovski, "The Concepts of Responsibility to Protect and Protection of Civilians: 'Sisters, but not Twins'", 1-12, Institute of Regional Security.

<sup>11</sup>Vol.2, Rob van Leeuwen, "Humanitarian intervention and hegemonic power", 10-14, Stichting Atlantische Commissie.



contemplated as a result of the lack of common aspirations and commitment leading to inaction in cases of dire need.

## **INTERVENTIONS: A QUINTESSENTIAL FIASCO**

Considering the cases of **Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan**, the abyss in the operational framework of the working of the NATO and US can be evidently identified. Subsequent to the Cold war era, the US ratified the practice of **interventionism**, so as to counter the authoritarian States financing and supporting terrorism and propagating belief in mass destruction<sup>12</sup>. The failure of the US to rebuild Afghanistan is a classic example of the **lack of ramifications of humanitarian interventions**. Hence **military interventions are a quintessential fiasco**, and this can be substantiated by an aggrandized analysis of the intervention by the US in Afghanistan<sup>13</sup>.

## **THE INTERVENTION OF THE US IN AFGHANISTAN: PANACEA OR PREDICAMENT?**

### **BACKGROUND**

As already mentioned, the US had identified Afghanistan as a **'Failed State'** and regarded the same as a secured haven of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group which was held culpable for the attack on the World Trade Centre. The military intervention of the US in Afghanistan can be regarded as unprecedented as it was targeted against a non-state actor and at the same time backed by a sovereign state. America laid down that the chief objective of the intervention was to dismantle al-Qaeda, capture Osama Bin Laden and consequently eliminate the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. In order to garner support for the intervention, the US branded the intervention through the prism of the **humanitarian facet**, thereby promoting the notions of democracy.

### **THE US INTERVENTION: A PREDICAMENT**

Despite the initial victory of the US in dethroning the Taliban from power, its policy in the latter half floundered dreadfully. The US lacked any post-intervention policy the military budget ousted reconstruction aid and this was coupled with rising casualties. Dejectedly in

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<sup>12</sup>Thorsten Gromes, "Humanitarian Military Interventions Since the Second World War", <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19997.6> (last visited on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022).

<sup>13</sup>Wardak, Soorgul. "Challenges in Rebuilding Afghanistan". Afghanistan Studies Journal, Vol.1, No.2, <http://www.uobkupartnership.talktalk.net/Drswarda k.doc> (last visited on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022).

2021, the Taliban forces were able to conquer most of Afghanistan after the US withdrew its forces. Scholars reckon that the fundamental problem which led to the collapse of Afghanistan is the intentions of the humanitarian interventions directed toward **countering extremist philosophies**.

The intervention by the US in Afghanistan has been **regarded as a predicament** because the intervention can be held responsible for Afghanistan gradually plunging into **chaos and frailty**. The role of the US decelerated the organic prosperity and advancement of public institutions of the State. Subsequent to **1979**, Afghanistan proved to be a field where the enormous powers of the Cold war conflict were played out. **Ninety per cent** of the infrastructure was damaged and thus this led to the displacement of several citizens of Afghanistan, thereby rendering them homeless. The intervention of the US was followed by the involvement of the Soviets, which thereby ballooned the resistance of the Afghan Population. The melee between the Western Presence and Taliban coupled with the involvement of Pakistan and the Moscow backed-Kabul inflicted abominable hardship on the civilians of Afghanistan with a million estimated casualties and the displacement of six million refugees.

The intervention of the US failed for a number of reasons, some of them are (a) futile attempts to transform Afghanistan, thereby creating widespread resentment among the local population, (b) overuse of drones and air strikes leading to thousands of casualties (c) the eradication of poppy caused the impoverishment of the farming sector (d) trying to train and equip the Afghans with American weapons compelled them to be dependent on the logistics of the US. The **20-year-long tragedy in Afghanistan** can be regarded as an abysmal operation of the US leaving behind the citizens of Afghanistan to pay the price.

### **THE PARADOX OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION**

Therefore, the so-called '**humanitarian intervention**' in Afghanistan, **paradoxically** led to the destabilization of the State. The incompetency of the US can be linked to the political interest of America. The US vehemently discounted its initial objective of intervention: nation-building, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the government already established in Afghanistan. This begets us to question the **significance of humanitarian interventions**. On contemplating the whole situation of Afghanistan, it can be safely regarded that military interventions should emphasize the objectives associated with the military and not divulge into societal and political engineering.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Coordination between humanitarian and military interventions:** The international communities should strike a balance between humanitarian perspective and military interventions. For instance, the Somalian experience renders us with the lesson that it is imperative to relatively harmonize the two. It is essential to categorize on a priority basis, whether the intervention qualifies as humanitarian or fulfils political and national interests. If the situation corresponds to the latter category, then the enemy should be targeted and defeated, however, in the former case, a delicate approach should be adopted.
2. **Employing proportional means:** The intervening State should be mindful of when and how to intervene. The intervention of the US in Afghanistan and Iraq has recorded the usage of some of the most erratic weapons, thereby causing huge casualties. It is imperative to note that the destruction from the intervention should be outweighed by the effectiveness of the intervention.
3. **Conceptualizing a just cause:** Force by the intervening state should only be used when there is a gross violation of human rights. Intervention stands justified if it breaches international humanitarian law.
4. **Restoration of institutional infrastructure:** Most humanitarian interventions are bound to fail because the intervening forces fail to restore the institutional infrastructure. This creates a sense of distrust among the people. Irrespective of an emergency, the intervening States should refurbish the infrastructure, so as to promote mutual trust and safeguard human rights.
5. **Adopting a consolidated command framework:** With respect to the intervening forces, since the intervention takes place in some other State, a unified doctrine and consolidated command framework should be adopted, so as to give due respect to different cultures. This will help in the prevention of resistance from the local population thereby averting casualties.

## CONCLUSION

As already expressed in the paper, the era of post-cold war witnessed a deterioration in the

gravity of Sovereignty of States as the aeon of globalization marked the way for liberal beliefs revolving around Humanitarian interventions. The period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed expanding interest of the international communities in the conviction of humanitarian interventions.

However, the question of whether military interventions are: **Exemplary interventions or quintessential fiasco**, has been elaborately answered in the whole paper. The so-called humanitarian interventions have been used as moral rhetoric, in order to gain global acceptance. The concept of humanitarianism is crucially concerned with safeguarding the interests of the victims when exposed to brutal human atrocities. The detailed case studies of **Somalia, Kosovo, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan** manifestly establish that the principal objective of the humanitarian interventions is persuaded by the self-interest of the Intervening actors. Therefore, one can safely regard human rights, humanitarian intervention has been proved futile in most cases, and the same can be regarded **as a quintessential fiasco**.

It is finally under-pinned that the question of the hour is not whether strategic national and geopolitical interests are a pull factor for such humanitarian intervention, because the answer to that question stands positive. However, the imperative question to be answered is how such humanitarian interventions can be dedicated to averting of human rights violations.