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Military Intervention and the Destabilization of Target States

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Abstract

This article examines the use of foreign military intervention (FMI) through the international relations theory of liberalism. As intra-state conflict is becoming increasingly transnational in nature, FMI has become a powerful foreign policy tool in the post-Cold War era. Often, the use of military intervention is aimed to promote liberal democracy and humanitarian values. This often requires a dynamic change to the target state’s centralized power structure. In turn, this transfer of power has repeatedly allowed for long-standing power vacuums to emerge. In academia, FMI should not be examined as a single event phenomenon; therefore, this article uses a qualitative approach when examining the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria to provide a more encompassing detail of the intended and unintended consequences of FMI, as well as prospects for the future of these nations, all of which have been plagued by civil strife, violence, and human rights violations in recent years.

Keywords: Military Intervention; Responsibility to Protect, Democratic Peace Theory, Liberalism, Power Vacuum

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Introduction

Conflict in nations around the world have often warranted involvement from external actors, either on behalf of or in opposition to the current regime. Foreign military intervention (FMI), regarding the development and evolution of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) over the years, has created power vacuums and destabilized the target states. In the post-Cold War era, intra-state conflict has replaced inter-state conflict as the dominant form of organized violence. In 2014, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reported that there were 40 active armed conflicts and 11 of which were labeled as wars, and while the number of armed conflicts in the world has decreased since the end of the Cold War, the number of internationalized armed conflicts is on the rise, giving the impression that the world is becoming ever more violent (Pettersson and Wallensteen, 2015).

A fundamental component of liberalism is democratic peace theory, which states that liberal states (democracies) do not go to war with one another. Although democracies do not go to war with one another, this may not make them more peaceful than non-democracies (Navari 2008). This use of military force could further be utilized depending on the regime type of the recipient state, and intervention can be viewed as the new, liberal face of conflict in the post-Cold war era.

Foreign military intervention, a state or non-state actor’s military intervention in the affairs of another, is often heavily criticized by many within the international community. FMI is often considered the most risky and costly form of intervention but is still a popular tool of foreign policy (Peksen 2012). Foreign intervention, by another state or non-state actor, such as the United Nations (UN) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is often used to control the violence, to halt ongoing human rights abuses within the state of interest, or to advance self-interests. In the post-Cold War era, intra-state conflicts emerged as a new threat to regional stability and international security.

Often, this conflict becomes internationalized through FMI or other means. Intra-state conflict is becoming increasingly transnational in nature, as violence, arms, refugees, terrorists, epidemics, and more transcend territorial borders. Peksen and Olson state, “borders are indeed porous and conflicts contagious”, which highlights the absolute need to better control conflict or mass human rights violations (Peksen and Olson-Lounsbery 2012, p. 346).

There is little consensus on when or what type of intervention is deemed necessary, but at the World Summit of 2005, the United Nations unanimously approved the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine, giving the international community a more universal framework for intervention during times of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other human rights atrocities (Murdie and Peksen 2013). R2P sets the groundwork for the concept that the use of military force, as a last resort, is legitimately acceptable during times of humanitarian emergencies and other.
Literature Review

Third-party foreign military intervention was once seen as aggressive or hostile interstate interaction, with no respect for the concept of sovereignty (Pickering and Mitchell 2017). Arguably, it has become legitimized in the international system in times of humanitarian emergencies or civil strife, specifically regarding the passage of Responsibility to Protect Doctrine, which may bring forth a shift in norms surrounding sovereignty, conflict, and intervention in the upcoming decades. Still, foreign military intervention, regarding the development and evolution R2P over the years, has created power vacuums and destabilized the state of interests. Specifically, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

Earlier research highlights the international communities lack of determination to address humanitarian crisis, such as in Rwanda and Bosnia-Kosovo, were unsuccessful in mitigating the human rights abuses present (Peksen 2012). The humanitarian crises of the 1990s helped lead to the unanimous decision to adopt R2P. More and more literature is emerging on the impact of FMI on target societies, human rights in the state of interests, conflict management, democratization, and more. Still, as there are contradictions present in the literature. More data must be collected to provide a more encompassing understanding of foreign military intervention as a policy tool and the outcomes of it—intended or unintended.

Defining FMI is contested, as is the shortcomings and consequences of. The definitions are vague and treat intervention as a single event phenomenon, some omit the use of foreign troops already stationed within the state of interest, others focus on a single state’s use of military force, and many studies result in conflicting data (Pearson 1974; Perksen 2012; Kisangani and Pickering 2015). For this paper and the individual cases that will be looked at, the loose definition noted prior—a state or non-state actor’s military intervention in the affairs of another—will be used. Foreign military interventions may be neutral, intervention on neither behalf or in opposition to any group, supportive, interventions on behalf of the regime, or hostile, interventions in opposition to the regime. (Perksen, 2012).

FMI is sometimes utilized in the pursuit of policy or economic goals by the third-party. Aïdt and Albornoz (2011) found that foreign military intervention is more likely to come from states whose government has a large pro-investor bias, while the target states hold high foreign direct investment (FDI) returns and income inequality. This political bias on humanitarian intervention can further be seen in the UN Security Council (UNSC), where authorization of intervention is more likely when one strong permanent member faces pressure to intervene or has strong national interest to do so (Kuperman 2008).

Humanitarian intervention is sometimes placed into a subcategory of its own and defined as military intervention aimed at stopping human rights violations in the target state. While humanitarian intervention may receive notoriety following events in the 1990s, such...
as the Rwandan genocide and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Kosovo, many military interventions throughout the nineteenth century were justified on the grounds of protecting human rights, such as U.S. interventions in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Belgium intervention in the Congo in 1960, and France in the Central African Republic in 1979 (Heraclides and Dialla 2015). The legitimization of humanitarian intervention was advanced with the unanimous passage by the United Nations for the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. 

The R2P doctrine states, “Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of nonintervention yields to the international responsibility to protect” (Gregg 2016, p. 192). R2P emerged partially in response to the horrific human rights violations and atrocities of the 90s, and while the doctrine primarily addresses the responses to genocide and ethnic cleansing, it was used to further justify the 2011 U.S.-led NATO intervention in Libya. 

The legitimization of military intervention is a slippery slope. Since R2P allows the UN to appropriate a coercive military response when citizens of a state are facing massive danger, “legitimization”, therefore, refers to authorization by the UNSC. Once military force is authorized in a scenario, the UN, NATO, or a coalition of states can intervene without violating international law. This is problematic, as the UNSC is made up of five permanent members (P5) and ten rotating members. A veto from a P5 member automatically kills any resolution. Russia and China are P5 Member States who often lead the criticism of R2P. Russia and China are notable for their disregard for human rights and respect for their own personal territorial integrity and sovereignty, which leads them to view R2P as a possible threat. Weaker UN Member States also view R2P as a threat, as they are more likely to be subjected to FMI more than strong, or Western, Member States. 

Although seemingly altruistic, there are noticeable shortcomings of R2P outside of jeopardizing state sovereignty and the unintended consequences that following military intervention, which the mere concept of protection against ‘risk’ promotes irresponsible risk-taking. Kuperman (2008) notes that R2P raises expectations of intervention to protect target groups which unintentionally creates rebellions by lowering its ‘expected cost and increasing its likelihood of success”. Still, the evolution of Responsibility to Protect has created an international norm which may change the concept of sovereignty and the nonintervention principle the international community previously abided by in the upcoming decades. Further noting, many international institutions, such as the UN, were originally created to cope with interstate issues (Yilmaz, 2007). This is significant since mediation through a third-party, such as by fellow states, regional organizations, and international institutions, has gained increasing prominence as a means to end many conflicts in the post-Cold War era. Currently, third-party mediation efforts are being employed in Afghanistan and Libya with arguably little tangible success. Still, the UN tends to be brought in to mediate the end to the armed conflict
if other states and/or regional organizations fail to do so (Wallensteen and Svensson, 2014). A mediated outcome is becoming increasingly important for a more sustainable end to a protracted, internationalized conflict.

In all, the outcomes of FMI are mixed. Studies that look at the impact of socioeconomic quality of life after or if the intervention was efficient in halting human rights violations while others focus on the efficiency of intervention in advancing democracy in the target state. Murdie and Davis (2010) note how intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) peacekeeping interventions, which are humanitarian in purpose and employ mediation attempts are more likely to improve human rights conditions in the state of interest, while higher per capita income levels and democratic regimes are also found to have a positive correlation with upholding human rights within a state and the presence of conflict and larger population sizes have a negative correlation. While Perksen (2012) noted IGO-led interventions, such as the UN or NATO, are better at mitigating human rights abuses in target states, but the type of intervention matters greatly.

Hostile interventions showed statistical insignificance, but neutral and supportive interventions both resulted in higher levels of human rights abuses in the targeted states (Perksen 2012). Hostile interventions tend to further weaken the targeted state’s ability to govern or fully control its territory, as well as shift local power dynamics and weaken the government’s monopoly of military force, or completely resulting in the collapse of a state, which in turn may lead to the creation a power vacuum in the state of interest (Peksen 2012; Peksen and Lounsbery 2012). Peksen and Olson (2012) found further evidence that suggests supportive interventions enhance the target government’s legitimacy, capacity, and authority. These studies in particular highlight how all interventions are not equal and can generally be problematic for the states of interest.

Theory Application: Liberalism and Foreign Military Intervention

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 came an unprecedented wave of optimism. With this, liberalism overtook realism as the dominant theory in international relations. A significant component of liberalism, democratic peace theory, states that democracies are less likely to go to war with one another and are more likely to promote peace which is to be strengthened through international organizations and free-trade. Walker (2008) argues that there are two contradictory components of liberalist tradition at play that have endured throughout time when it comes to military intervention: the political thought of Thomas Paine and that of Immanuel Kant. While both note the emergence of democratic peace theory in their writings of the eighteenth century, Paine advocates for military intervention to promote spread of democracy, while Kant advocates the principle of nonintervention and respect for state sovereignty (Walker 2008).
Kant brings up important concepts that are relevant in the contemporary era: there is no higher authority, so who will authorize interference, if a state has ‘fallen into evil’ then ‘its lawlessness should serve as a warning’ to others within the international system, and interference in one state’s autonomy would make all states insecure (Heraclides and Dialla 2015, p. 81). Within liberalism, there are two competing schools of thought on intervention. Much like in the international system, there are competing norms on intervention.

The UN doctrine Responsibility to Protect is an example of the emergence of a liberal competing norm in the international system. R2P, which calls for the use of forceful intervention in times of humanitarian crisis or human rights violations, is contradictory to the principle of noninterventionism and individual state sovereignty. R2P advocates that state sovereignty in itself implied protection of civilians and their rights; therefore, a state sovereignty will be upheld, so long as the state represents human rights. Still, the doctrine fundamentally challenges the long-stated notion of state sovereignty. Gregg (2016 p. 196) argues that military intervention may be able to build state governments, but it cannot establish a universal human rights order, while the universal agreement on human rights are Western, democratic based. R2P at its core is a liberal conception. While there is still anarchy at the international level, IGOs like the UN, are used as tools to advance concepts like free-trade and democratic values.

The debate on interventionism still rings true today. At face value, democratic peace theory may have helped legitimize the use of military intervention to promote democracy in the targeted states. The literature seems to suggest that IGO-led intervention, rather than unilateral intervention, are typically more successful in advancing human rights and stability in the target state (Murdie and Davis 2012; Lynch, 2011; Peksen 2011; Peksen and Olson 2012; Murdie and Peksen 2013), while hostile intervention for nation-building in developing states shows statistical significance to foster economic growth and democratization in the target states (Pickering and Kisangani 2006). The emergence of R2P shows how evolving international norms will continue to change the concept of sovereignty and legitimize the use of military force to protect citizens around the globe.

**Case Study: Afghanistan**

The first notable foreign military intervention with dire consequences is the case of Afghanistan. The conflict in Afghanistan is ongoing, causing it to become an eighteen-year endeavor for the United States. The proxy war during the 1980s followed by the civil war in Afghanistan in the 90s caused a massive instability threat to the entire region. The Taliban had taken control of the Afghani government, and further heightened the security threat to the region and beyond (Muzaffary 2008). The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack changed security policy for the United States and NATO allies. Military intervention in Afghanistan titled “Operation Enduring Freedom” began on October 7, 2001 under a U.S.-led multilateral mandate for largely political reasoning, rather than humanitarian (Moore 2007). After 9/11,
the War on Terror pushed humanitarian concerns in Afghanistan to the back-burner (Ayub and Kouvo 2008). Operation Enduring Freedom was a joint U.S., United Kingdom (UK), and Afghani operation—separate from NATO operations—with the objective to dismantle the infrastructure that provided a safe haven for the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The Taliban regime was toppled within the first 102 days after 9/11 (Lambeth 2005).

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan had no real strategy for long-term stabilization or democracy promotion after a quick plan of operation to expel the Taliban (Ayub and Kouvo 2008). Decades of war and poverty had already destroyed legitimate governmental institutions and the economic sector, and the creation of a power vacuum lead to consequences that are felt still today. Arguably, the first total withdrawal from Afghanistan after the Soviet-U.S. proxy war allowed the Taliban to take control in the 90s. Without implementing legitimate governmental institutions, a second would likely render the same fate for the state. In a nation where war lords and local leaders take precedent, instilling democratic values, such as free and fair elections, has proven difficult (Moore 2007). The creation of a power vacuum with no legitimate Afghani government for an extended period of time only contributed to the volatile environment. It allowed Taliban insurgency groups to continue to fight for power. A combination of other factors, such as competition among external actors, wrongful allocation of foreign aid, corruption, political factionalism and lack of capacity of governmental institutions added to the chaos (Moore 2007; Walt 2018).

Prospects for the Future: A Window of Opportunity

Eighteen years later, the U.S. is still fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and propping up the internationally recognized Afghan government. As of 2018, the U.S. government claims the Taliban insurgency controls 44% of Afghani territory, military analysts suspect the number is closer to 61% (Nordland et al 2018). Nordland, Ngu, and Abed (2018) note this is the largest amount of territory the Taliban has held since the initial invasion in 2001. Currently, the war in Afghanistan has reached a stalemate among all sides, suggesting that there is no military victory as a resolution to the issues at hand. Rather, there may be a political one. Decades of war has left a crippled state and a tired insurgency, a tired Afghan government, and a tired NATO alliance looking for an exit to an endless war.

Under the Trump administration, the Taliban holds a window of opportunity to negotiate a political resolution and successfully implement their most favorable outcome: A full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. A premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan runs the risk of jeopardizing the security of NATO forces, who have been fighting alongside U.S. forces, a partial collapse of the Afghan government, which survives off of U.S. foreign aid. Arguably, a premature withdrawal suggests the United States and allies leave behind a humanitarian disaster caused by the unintended consequences of long-standing occupation (Schake 2019). This may once again bring us full circle back into Afghanistan in the future. The Taliban are sitting in a strong position at the negotiation table. Violence tends to
increase prior to peace talks, and the Taliban have been the cause of massive waves of violence in recent months (Olson-Lounsbery and DeRouen 2016). One issue which may prove draining on the reconciliation process is that hostile interventions, which are foreign belligerent military operations against the government, tend to show they are empirically not conducive to peace talks (Olson-Lounsbery and DeRouen 2016). Once the ruling regime, the Taliban now has a spot at the negotiation table and demands international legitimacy once more.

Walt (2018) suggests toppling an authoritarian regime and driving the Taliban from power was the easiest part. Controlling for a long-standing power vacuum in which the Taliban is continuously attempting to rise to fill is challenging. Implementing a legitimate, Western-style democracy in a nation lacking strong institutions or demand for it the most difficult objective. The power vacuum created by the initial intervention in 2001 has allowed the Taliban to continue to vie for power for eighteen years. Still, the prospect for peace is becoming increasingly more influential as we move forward. It seems as though the only way forward from this conflict is for the United States to give up the original goal: To ensure that the Taliban will not rise to power again or to allow Afghanistan to become a state sponsor of transnational terrorist organizations. Moving forward with peace talks makes this unlikely, and there is a strong precedent that the power structure of Afghan politics will change drastically.

While the conflict is ripe for negotiations to take place, concessions—on all sides—will need to be made moving forward. To ensure success, this conflict must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned with all key players included in the negotiations. This includes the U.S., Pakistan, the Taliban, and the Afghan government. Women, a group that have been notoriously victimized and controlled by the Taliban, must be included in the peace talks, as transitional justice and accountability for human rights violations must be part of the reconciliation process. Including women is incredibly important, as the country has seen improvements in women’s rights. Further, peace agreements which include woman delegates have a longer lasting peace (Krause et al., 2018). In the end, it will be the dialogue among Afghans themselves that will determine the political future of their war-torn Afghanistan.

Case Study: Iraq

The foreign military interventions of Iraq and Afghanistan are two important cases which brought military intervention and the outcomes of to the forefront of the international debate. March 20, 2003, unilateral U.S. foreign military operations in Iraq began based on two stated objectives by the Bush administration: eradicating Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and bringing ‘freedom’ to the Iraqi people with the intervention titled “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (Stradiotto 2004). In this case, freedom also meant democracy. Liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein’s dictatorial wrath called for regime change and a democratic form of government to be resurrected. While the intervention came two years
prior to the unanimous passage of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, the UN and many members of the international community were not supportive of U.S. invasion of Iraq to promote democracy and freedom for the Iraqi peoples. They were further unconvinced that Saddam Hussein possessed WMDs, a mistake but not an unreasonable assumption. Ultimately, the U.S. violated state sovereignty and the international legal system with the use of military force in Iraq without UN Security Council authorization (Biggar 2011).

As noted, the use of military intervention to promote democracy and humanitarian values is a liberal concept, and it often requires an authoritarian regime to be toppled. In the case of Iraq, it aided in the destabilization of the state and created a power vacuum that allowed militants to flourish. Another important factor in the shortcomings in the military intervention in that Iraq was the state lacked the prerequisites for democracy. The removal of the target authoritarian regime was originally perceived as successful, but the difficult part was installing a democratic regime and then the long-term sustainability of the regime while mitigating any unintended consequences (Stradiotto 2004).

Toppling tyrants and liberating a suppressed nation may be a good thing to do, but the military intervention in Iraq created larger unintended consequences. Biggar (2011) argues that while international law forbids states from intervening militarily in other nation’s affairs without Security Council authorization, there are certain cases where states are morally obliged to do so, noting the humanitarian need to do so in Iraq. This argument is later utilized as justification for the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

The intervention in Iraq led to long-standing problems that were not adequately addressed. For the U.S. to intervene and occupy Iraq, the national interest in doing so had to be established, followed by long-term commitments which demanded U.S. domestic electorate support (Biggar 2011). While the U.S. attempted to install democratic foundations, when time came to cast their first vote in a post-Saddam Hussein state, many Iraqis felt insecure in an increasingly volatile environment with insurgency groups rising to fill the power vacuum seen due to lack of a legitimate government (Karon 2005).

This aided the onset of a civil war and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) the perfect opportunity to attempt to fill the power vacuum created. Insurgent groups, such as ISIL, are born out of the destabilization created by FMI. The ramifications of the shortcomings of coercive intervention are long-standing and porous. They help cause national, regional, and international security threats that are still present fifteen years after the initial intervention. What Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya have taught the U.S. is that removing a tyrannical regime is the easiest part, while the long-standing commitments that follow prove to be difficult.

**Prospects for the Future: Potential to be Met**

The U.S. has invested fifteen years of time, effort, and lives in Iraq attempting to instill democratic values, stabilize the state, and combat terrorist organizations that capitalized off
the instability and ungoverned territories, such as the Islamic State. Most American deployments were removed by former President Obama in 2011 after the U.S. and Iraq failed to negotiate an agreement over them; however, in 2014 the Islamic State seized large swaths of territory in Northern Iraq, prompting U.S. forces to return strictly for anti-terrorism purposes (Taylor 2018). While the Islamic State has been largely defeated in Iraq, deeper stabilization efforts much be successful to ensure there will be no return. The Iraqi political process shows many signs of weakness, specifically with Iran’s connection to Iraqi Islamist political parties and other corrupt politicians vulnerable to Iranian influence (Al-Alusi 2018). The United States has long been committed to curbing Iranian influence in the region, but the Trump administration is especially hawkish towards Iran.

To comate these sectarian challenges and the threat of Iranian influence, many argue that decentralization of the Iraqi government will restore basic services to local populations by allotting more power to local governments (Diamond 2017). Often, these local governments lack the capacity to take on more governmental responsibilities while the central government does not want to relinquish any power. The lack of basic services in local populations be problematic. When individual's’ basic needs are not met, it allows them to share grievances and mobilize against the government, which they then view as a common enemy. Decentralization can decrease extremist influence in local populations (Diamond 2017). Iraq must be able to stand alone without the U.S. propping up the Iraqi government or economy. Being able to do so would stem a mutually beneficial economic and political partnership between the two countries.

The current administration needs to adapt a new policy for Iraq since the attention on Iran has changed drastically since the Obama era. While President Trump mentioned pulling troops out of Syria and Afghanistan during his 2018 State of the Union, Iraq was not mentioned, and after his first trip to visit troops at an American base in Iraq he stated in a CBS interview, “We might as well keep it [the base]. And one of the reasons I want to keep it is because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran, because Iran is a real problem” (Taylor 2018). This notion likely struck a cord with Iraqis, who are disenchanted with American forces still in the country fighting terrorism and are trying to stay out of the middle of confrontations Iran and the U.S. Currently, there is still no clear vision for the future of Iraq from the U.S., and Iraqi citizens are becoming disillusioned with the form of democracy the U.S. has spent years implementing. A stable, mostly democratic Iraq is in the best interest of the U.S. in the middle east. Getting to that point has been challenging U.S. policy for almost sixteen years.

Case Study: Libya

The military intervention in Libya marked the third time in a decade the international community all too easily embraced regime change in rogue states then failed to meet the needs to stabilize the state after. The Arab Spring, a series of protests and uprisings fueled by unaddressed economic and political grievances, began in late 2010 in response to oppressive
regimes and spread throughout the Arab world. The Arab Spring toppled regimes in few, ignited large-scale violence in others, and were suppressed by some.

The massive demonstrations of the Arab Spring began when a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, burned himself to death in front of a government building in an act of defiance and desperation after police in his town seized his fruits and vegetables when he did not have a permit. Cellphone cameras caught the incident, which spread throughout the Internet. For his act of defiance in the face of governmental oppression, Bouazizi became a martyr. Mohamed Bouazizi was the catalyst needed to mobilize masses in Tunisia and throughout the Arab World (Tierney, 2016). Libya saw damaging blowback from the Arab Spring uprisings, and the consequences are still felt today as the state struggles with infighting and warring factions.

Colonel Muammar Al-Qaddafi ruled Libya for forty-two years and was considered a rogue tyrant by many in the international community, specifically by the major powers who viewed his past state-sponsorship of terrorism, pursuit of WMDs, and rejection of democratic norms as worrisome and destabilizing regional security (Buckley 2012). Qaddafi’s dictatorial rule suppressed four decades of economic and political grievances and tribal infighting and, therefore, held the state together by force. When the Arab Spring protests made way to Libya in early 2011, Qaddafi cracked down on the protests with extreme force and brutality. The international community began organizing a response to the instability and human rights abuses committed under Qaddafi’s command. One month later in March, the UNSC voted to pass sanctions against Qaddafi and his family members, as well as refer him to the International Criminal Court (ICC), while NATO, the Arab League, and the UNSC worked to establish a no-fly zone in Libya (Buckley 2012). The Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on March 17, authorizing member states to take “all necessary measures” to protect civilians which would be carried out as a NATO mission dubbed “Operation Unified Protector” (Lynch 2011). This essentially authorized the use of military force.

An establishment of a no-fly zone would involve violence, as it meant taking out Libya’s air defenses. Shortly after, individual member states and the Arab League retracted and expressed concern for the violence that would come from a NATO enforced no-fly zone, which challenged the legality of the intervention (Buckley 2012). Later that year, anti-Qaddafi forces killed him, ending the long-standing authoritarian regime, creating a power vacuum in the state. After the regime was toppled, no one stepped up to the plate to control for the lack of legitimate leadership in Libya. The rebel militias had nowhere to turn, and instead continued vying for power and fill the void that the death of Qaddafi had left. The warring factions were further complicated through regional powers diverging interests in supporting the groups, shifting alliances on all sides, as well as terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State, to utilize the chaos and ungoverned territories in Libya as a refuge (Alkaff 2015).
Today, Libya is in a state of anarchy with three governments competing for power, and the UN-led peace talks being extended, still with no results. The 2011 National Transitional Council (NTC) was set up to see a post-Gaddafi transition of power, but the NTC was ineffective at disarming or integrating the insurgency groups, either for or against Gaddafi. The fighting and chaos intensified in 2014 after the national elections failed to unify the politically diverse landscape, and a new insurgency, comprised of former anti-Gaddafi rebels and Islamists, rejected the election, seeing it as a new offset of those loyal to Gaddafi pre-2011 (Alkaff 2015).

This new group, known as Libya Dawn, seized control of areas, such as Tripoli and set up an opposition government, the General National Congress (GNC). Because the United States, UNSC Member States, and NATO allies did not attempt to reconstruct Libya or implement a lasting form of government right after the intervention, Libya disintegrated into a quagmire, as the rebel militias fought for power against one another and a newly installed government. Today, Libya is still in the midst of a bloody civil war with no political means to an end in sight.

The Responsibility to Protect doctrine aided in setting precedent for military intervention, as a last resort, in times of human rights abuses. While the job of protecting citizens was given to NATO in this case, the question then arose if NATO acted outside of its mandate. Further, R2P and the military intervention in Libya received criticism for the hidden agenda and self-serving interests of the intervening powers. This subjectivity surrounding R2P can be seen in the Libyan intervention. While Qaddafi did commit human rights abuses, Libya was in the midst of a civil war. Qaddafi had not threatened his neighbors with force or committed genocidal crimes. Instead, Qaddafi’s regime was disliked by many within the international community. The self-serving interests of some states, in which they would have liked to see the dictator toppled, can be noted.

In 2014, reflecting on the Libyan intervention and one of his worst mistakes made during his presidency, President Obama stated, “[W]e [and] our European partners underestimated the need to come in full force if you’re going to do this. Then it’s the day after Qaddafi is gone, when everybody is feeling good and everybody is holding up posters saying, ‘Thank you, America.’ At that moment, there has to be a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn’t have any civic traditions” (Tierney, 2016). This represents a similar failure in each of the cases. Each case shows how military intervention has toppled tyrants or entire governments within months of the start date, while the consequences and instability are felt for years after. A tyrant cannot be toppled if anarchy and conflict will rise to fill the void.

Prospects for the Future: A Perpetual Quagmire?
While the NATO-led foreign military intervention, which oversaw the toppling of Libya’s longstanding dictator was originally deemed a ‘success’, Libya is no closer to peace than it was seven years ago. Today, the country is still in the midst of a bloody civil war. Unlike Afghanistan, there is no political means to an end in sight for Libya. The turmoil and fragmented society in Libya has become transnational in nature. That is, the entire region of Northern Africa, as well as Europe has seen the negative consequences of this. The European Union has experienced an unprecedented flow of migrants across the Mediterranean because of the conflict, as well.

To make matters worse, external powers, such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), are intervening through military personnel and arms deals for rival militias and warring factions (Lynch 2011). For example, Egypt and the UAE have launched airstrikes against Libya Dawn and provided warring factions weaponry while Turkey, Qatar, and Sudan provided Libya Dawn with different degrees of support (Alkraff 2015). The environment in Libya post intervention is dangerous, and there are no currents means for a political negotiation, ceasefire, or peace agreement to be crafted.

As it stands, external powers have the largest pull here. The internationally-recognized government in the east should be strengthened, and the human suffering mitigated. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported basic services, such as water, electricity, sanitation, and health are not being properly provided to the Libyan people, with 17.5% of hospitals currently closed, 400,000 people are facing food scarcity, and almost 600 schools closed (Hamladi 2017). The UNDP further reports 1.3 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance in Libya. As conflict continues, so does massive humanitarian suffering.

A multilateral approach needs to be placed on the negotiation table for Libya’s society and political institutions to level out and stabilize. Key regional players should halt their arms deals with warring factions and move forward with humanitarian assistance, as well as capacity building tools to increase governmental productivity. Often, this can be done through cooperation between individual states, such as the U.S., Egypt, UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Sudan, and others, as well as institutions, such as the African Union (AU) and UN. All of whom have played a large role in the destabilization of Libya, and all of whom should play an even larger role in the long-term stabilization of Libya to promote regional and international security.

Final Remarks

In all, foreign military intervention, regarding the development and evolution of Responsibility to Protect through the years, has continued to create power vacuums and destabilized the target states, specifically in each of the cases noted. These cases further highlight the concept that the promotion of human rights and democratic values suggests the use of coercive military force may further be utilized depending on the regime type of the
recipient state. As democracies tend to go to war with one another less than non-democracies, democratic peace theory may have helped legitimize the use of military intervention to promote these values in target states.

One main objective in Afghanistan was to topple the Taliban-led government causing regional and international security concerns and instill democratic institutions and values. In Iraq, it was a unilateral approach to topple Saddam Hussein and bring freedom, and democracy, to the Iraqi people. For Libya, military intervention was largely on a humanitarian basis, yet political interests by the West can be noted, specifically with the protests that caused the uprisings being pro-democratic in nature. The failure of FMI in the post-intervention environment hurt the basis for R2P, as the lack of collected response needed for stabilization and reform created a dire situation in Libya. In each state, a power vacuum formed, allowing insurgent groups to rise in attempts to fill the void of legitimate leadership. This aided in the creation of an even more volatile environment that transcended into protracted conflicts among various actors.

Another case where the principle of R2P faced international criticism was Syria. Non-state actors and the Syrian government have both been accused of using violence towards civilians, but the Syrian government largely holds a monopoly over this force, as well as the responsibility to protect its citizens in times of conflict. Russia has vetoed 12 resolutions on Syria that have been passed by the Security Council, and there have further been nine rounds failed of UN-led peace talks, with each side rooted in mistrust and unwillingness to work together (BBC 2018). The cases of Libya and Syria raised fundamental questions, such as: (1) When is intervention necessary to protect civilians; (2) What is legitimate use of coercive force; (3) When a permanent member (P5) of the Security Council can veto authorization of military force on the grounds of protecting civilians, what can be done? President Obama’s infamous lack of action over the “red line” surrounding the Syrian government’s use of chemical weapons on civilians weakened R2P’s moral standing further.

Each intervention saw a mixture of motives from the actors involved and was gravely flawed in implementation. Each intervention further found the easiest part to be removing the authoritarian regime from power, while the most difficult challenges followed. Seemingly altruistic, political and self-serving interests still dominate decisions on military intervention. Research around FMI and the outcomes is often a contested topic, as is when the use of force is justifiable. That does not go to say FMI is never justified; rather, it can be perceived as subjective and Western centric. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine gives some framework to this and may prove to be an international norm that continues to erode the traditional concept of state sovereignty. Nonetheless, R2P failed in Libya and Syria, which has damaged the credibility of the doctrine and brought many questions and criticisms to the forefront of this debate. More data can be collected to provide a better encompassing understanding of FMI as a policy tool and the protracted outcomes of it—intended or unintended.
References


