

The Effects of Military Intervention in Failing States

Krishna Ramji Rao

Introduction

“Better to die standing, than to live on your knees.” Ernesto “Che” Guevara

Around July 1992, Somalia was proclaimed to be a failed state¹ because the central government had lost control over the country and its territory and had given way to customary and religious law.² Somalia entered a state of civil conflict in 1991. Some of the characteristics that affect a state's status include the loss of the central government's control over the nation's territory, which essentially affects the nation's integrity and sovereignty, the removal of the capacity to make moral decisions, the inability to deliver public services, and the government's inability to interact with other states.³

Military intervention, also connoted as humanitarian intervention, is a series of actions taken by a sovereign state, a coalition of sovereign states, or non-state actors that result in human agony within the borders of a sovereign country and influence other factors concerning the stability of the target country.⁴

The connection between military intervention and failing states and its consequences, causes, and effects are something that can be argued. Many issues relating to these two are consequences of them. The military intervention also causes a halt in international trade and businesses suffer losses causing economic collapse, an important issue. Not only does military intervention also cause a power vacuum, this power vacuum results in political imbalance, another issue.

¹ James Fergusson, (2013), *Somalia: A failed state is back from the dead*, [online] URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/somalia-a-failed-state-is-back-from-the-dead-8449310.html?printService=print> (accessed 28/01/2023).

² Central Intelligence Agency, (2003), *Somalia - Government - Judicial branch*, [online] URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160304065944/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/download/download-2003/factbook2003.zip> (accessed: 28/01/2023).

³ Fragile States Index, (Unknown), *What does State Fragility Mean?* [online], URL: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/frequently-asked-questions/what-does-state-fragility-mean/> (accessed 19/08/2022).

⁴ Bell, Duncan (Unknown), *Humanitarian intervention*, [online] URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanitarian-intervention> (accessed 23/09/2022).

Economic Collapse

Assessing the economic impact of a military intervention depends on various factors which determine the size of the intervention, its purpose, and its type. Some interventions have far-reaching and long-lasting effects on the target country.

Hostile interventions occur over a long period compared to supportive interventions; this means they do more economic damage. Even in certain situations when they do not extend over long periods they do break investor confidence. According to a press release made by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2008 Foreign Direct Investment in infrastructure has exponentially increased in the past few years.⁵

Long-term violence requires extensive monetary support, and a hostile intervention can push the leaders of the target country to divert resources to economically inefficient military spending.⁶ A hostile intervention causes mass destruction of physical and human capital, a factor which is rarely accounted for, it also reduces the GDP per capita by decreasing labour and total factor productivity which is a consequence of the destruction of physical capital.⁷

A study conducted by researchers, Jeffery Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, at Kansas State University, has given us empirical evidence concerning economic growth and external intervention. Computational Modelling was used to find the impact of the external militaristic intervention on the economy, and the results proved that there was a slight decline in economic growth due to external militaristic intervention. However, this was only for variables with a democratic political atmosphere. In variables with non-democratic political atmospheres, positive economic growth was seen.⁸

Over the years, there have been numerous militaristic interventions, and their impacts are still evident today. Syria is a prime example of an economic collapse brought about by interventions. The Syrian Pound was valued at roughly 50 American Dollars in the years before the civil war and militaristic interventions. By 2021, however, it had dropped by an astounding 300%. Additionally, the civil conflict and military interventions have severely depleted the nation's human and material resources. According to an SCPR assessment from 2015, the Syrian economy has lost up to USD 202 billion since the crisis began. A separate study done by the UNRWA in March 2015 showed that public and private investment in the country had dropped by 10.8% of the GDP.⁹

⁵ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2008), *Boosting infrastructure in developing countries: Foreign investment helps -- if planning is effective*, [online] URL: <https://unctad.org/press-material/boosting-infrastructure-developing-countries-foreign-investment-helps-if-planning> (accessed: 27/08/2022).

⁶ Pickering and Kisangani (2006), Consequences of Foreign Military Intervention, *Political Research Quarterly*, 59., pp. 363-376.

⁷ Thies, F. Clifford and Baum, F. Christopher (2020), *The Effect of War on Economic Growth*, [online] URL: <https://www.cato.org/cato-journal/winter-2020/effect-war-economic-growth> (accessed: 27/08/2022).

⁸ Pickering and Kisangani (2006), Consequences of Foreign Military Intervention, *Political Research Quarterly*, 59., pp. 363-376.

⁹ Al-Mahmoud, Hamoud (2015), *The War Economy in the Syrian Conflict: The Government's Hands-Off Tactics*, [online] URL:

Another example of this type of economic loss is the Indian Intervention in the Bangladesh Liberation War. The intervention had its goods, it liberated the Bangladeshi people, However, the intervention in Bangladesh left it with a problem, an economy that was mainly based on agriculture with low productivity and an undeveloped industrial sector. On top of this, the war left the country's infrastructure in ruins.¹⁰

Economic collapse and degradation is a serious problem which causes long-lasting effects on a country and its citizens. To help the citizens a course of action to handle the consequences of this issue is needed. To help the affected humanitarian workers need safe passage to reach them, a humanitarian corridor must be agreed upon by the governments of the involved countries. For this to occur all countries need to follow International Humanitarian Law.¹¹ This was established through a series of treaties and conventions such as the Geneva Conventions. If all countries part of a conflict adheres to International Humanitarian Law the consequences of economic collapse on the civilians can be reduced.¹²

Political Imbalance

A country's pre-intervention state and the manner of intervention matter. A friendly intervention would impact the political balance differently than a hostile one. The intervention's internal or external perpetrators don't matter because both support and resistance have the same fundamental goals.

We must first examine the causes and justifications for the intervention to comprehend how it affects the political equilibrium of a nation. Using American interventions as an example, the Presidents of the United States of America have cited, other than ensuring national security, the advancement of democracy as their justification. The United States intervened in the Texan Independence Movement (which at the time was a part of Mexico) in the 1840s and attempted to advance democracy in Texas by declaring war on Mexico. This phenomenon of citing the promotion of democracy as the justification for military intervention has been a tradition ever since. In the mid and late 1910s, United States President Woodrow Wilson intervened in the First World War "in order to make the world safe for democracy", This eventually led to the German defeat and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles which created the Weimar Republic, he also sent United States troops into Mexico again to quote "teach Mexicans the meaning of democracy".¹³ In 1983 President Ronald Regan defended the United States's intervention in

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/15/war-economy-in-syrian-conflict-government-s-hands-off-tactics-pub-62202> (accessed: 27/08/2022).

¹⁰ Khatun, (2021), *Bangladesh's achievements in 50 years and making it meaningful*.

¹¹ International Committee of The Red Cross (2022), *How humanitarian corridors work to help people in conflict zones*, [online] URI:

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/how-humanitarian-corridors-work#:~:text=Humanitarian%20corridors%20or%20safe%20passages,the%20wounded%2C%20sick%20or%20dead.> (accessed 03/09/2022).

¹² United Nations Human Rights Responsibility (Unknown), *Examples of definitions of humanitarian law violations*, [online] URL:

https://elearning.un.org/CONT/GEN/CS/UNHR_V3/Module_01/story_content/external_files/Examples%20of%20definitions%20of%20humanitarian%20law%20violations.pdf (accessed: 03/09/2022).

¹³ Meerink (1996), United States Military Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.33, pp. 391-402.

*This is not the extract quote but an equivalent translation

Lebanon by saying “The chances for a united democratic Lebanon would not have been high if the United States had not intervened”.¹⁴

After understanding the reason for military intervention, we can see how military intervention affects a country's political balance.

In a military intervention, the leaders of the intervening country might focus more on pleasing the constituents in their homeland and might install an autocratic leader who supports their ideals and policies.¹⁵ An example of this is the United States intervention in the 1953 Irani Coup d’etat where the rule of Mohammad Mosaddegh, the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, was replaced by the autocratic Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (known as the Shah). The consequences of Shah’s incapability to rule the country and his lavish lifestyle, at the expense of the country, enraged the public who overthrew him establishing an Islamic republic and creating a state of unrest and instability.

On the 3rd of December 1971, India intervened in the ongoing Bangladesh Liberation War. In 1973 the constitution of Bangladesh established a secular republic; the same year Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was voted in as prime minister. Even though the intervention is seen from a positive view as a new country it faced many challenges, international recognition difficulties, political turmoil, assassinations, virtual dictatorship and coup d’etats. The political situation of the country and military intervention was dire and stayed so until many years after independence.¹⁶

Since it is the most difficult to remedy, political imbalance is a long-lasting and significant result of military intervention. A strong, united community can readily counter a political danger and making sure that new governments uphold the law and citizens' rights is still another crucial aspect. In the 2005 World Summit, all constituents of the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine permits the use of force when necessary, but the United Nations Security Council alone has the power to do so. This doctrine, however, does not specify what would happen after the employment of force, as seen before, the employment of force does not always result in a peaceful outcome and can result in political imbalance. To counter this issue a fourth pillar should be added to this doctrine which states no nation or state, for their benefit, should interfere with the democratic rebuilding of the intervened state either directly or indirectly.¹⁷

¹⁴ Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report

¹⁵ Mesquita and Downs (2005), Development and Democracy, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, pp. 77–86.

¹⁶ Tinker, Russel Hugh, (Unknown), *Bangladesh since independence*, [online] URL: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamalpur-Bangladesh>

¹⁷ United Nations (Unknown), *The Responsibility to Protect*, [online] URL:

[https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect#:~:text=The%20responsibility%20to%20protect%20\(commonly,and%20the%20responsibility%20of%20the](https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect#:~:text=The%20responsibility%20to%20protect%20(commonly,and%20the%20responsibility%20of%20the) (accessed: 20/01/2023).



Conclusion

Both issues are of major importance and require attention. Political Imbalance can cause mass destruction in the target country, it creates a political vacuum allowing extremist groups and political factions to lead hostile policies. This indirectly causes economic problems. Both issues, due to their common stem, are extremely interconnected. However, we can tell which issue is more prevalent by looking at factors such as the scale of impact and urgency. Political imbalance is the more prevalent issue as its impact can have international consequences, political imbalance in one state can cause a seismic shift in a region's geopolitical balance. Political Imbalance can also, indirectly cause economic collapse and is one of its most dangerous consequences.

Conflict is inevitable, what is possible is to contain its negative effects. With global collaboration and effort, the victims of consequences caused by military intervention can be supported and helped. Economic Collapse and Political Imbalance are just two of the main issues that stem from military intervention, many such issues arise due to intervention and are equally important as these. Military Intervention has a profound effect on the geopolitics of the world and decides the fate of millions in a second. It can better their lives or destroy them completely, it can help a state improve in various factors or it can degrade it even more.

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