

At What Cost? Examining the Efficacy of Military Intervention

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Abstract

According to the United Nations, human rights are the rights to which all people are equally and fairly entitled. Among these are: to be free from slavery and torture, to express themselves, to work and be educated, and to life itself (Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Globalization has been a powerful means to deal with crucial issues integral to the sanctity of human life by bringing international attention and support from around the world to violations of human rights. The military efforts of NATO and the UN forces are ready examples of the global initiative against human rights violations; however, they are not without their cost. This is evidenced by the general ineffectiveness of military interventions, seen in conflicts such as the Iraq War which led to the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (1999-present) (Lopez, 2020), the Somali Civil War (1989/1991-present), the Kosovo War (1998-1999), and the Bosnian War (1992-1995). In order to provide an in-depth analysis, this paper limits its purview to the Kosovo War and the Bosnian War. The high casualty rates, impact of refugees, and destabilization to international societies during the Kosovo War, and then again three years later in the Bosnian War, show how difficult military intervention is for protecting human rights. Instead, the international society should explore non-violent alternatives—economic sanctions and cyber-attacks—and work together to combat human rights violations. The importance of global collaboration in non-violent intervention can be used, for example, to cease North Korea’s mass human rights abuses under the current dictatorship. While the U.S. government’s sanctions are not the most effective, and focus more on nuclear rather than human rights issues, scholars have speculated that sanctions from stronger trading partners will have a real impact on the situation; thus, non-violent approaches call for international collaboration. This paper examines the scholarship on armed interventions and argues that military interventions even for humanitarian purposes are not justifiable for two reasons: the negative global impact of war and the inability of

military solutions to solve the repeated tensions that lead to their respective wars. Additionally, this paper examines the potential effectiveness and risk-mitigation of non-violent alternatives and urges international alliances for higher capability in mitigating the issue of human rights violations.

Introduction

Globalization has been a powerful means to deal with crucial issues integral to the sanctity of human life by bringing international attention and support from around the world to violations of human rights. After World War II, the United Nations formulated an inclusive “international human rights law” to combat existent and potential violations of human rights, such as genocide (CNN Wire, 2020, p. 1). Countries have adopted the United Nations’ principles and therefore bear the responsibility to ensure that individual citizens retain their fundamental human rights. No matter what, human rights should be valued above national interests as means to a successful cosmopolitan society. A growing number of people are examining egregious human rights abuses and ethnic persecutions (Coady, 2002, p.1). For example, North Korean defectors reported torture and other atrocities committed by the North Korean regime to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2013 (Keesing’s Record of World Events, 2013, p.2). North Korean defectors and South Korean governmental members have advocated for an international action on North Korea. However, over the past decades, the politics and ethics of military intervention in response to humanitarian issues has been controversial. Americans debated whether armed intervention in Vietnam was morally justified, having demonstrations against the brutal violence of the war effort. This paper examines the scholarship on armed interventions and argues that military interventions even for humanitarian purposes are not justifiable for two reasons: the negative global impact of war and the inability of military solutions to solve the repeated tensions that lead to their respective wars. Additionally, this paper examines the potential risk-mitigation of non-violent alternatives and urges international alliances to take on the obligation in remedying the issue of human rights violations.

Background in International Human Rights Scholarship

Every person is equally entitled to their human rights regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, religion, language, or any other status. The United Nations (UN) defines this principle in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (The United Nations, 1948). The Canadian philosopher Kimberley Brownlee points out that a violation of human rights is a matter of cardinal importance; with globalization, international organizations and governmental actors increasingly address and attempt to prevent human rights violations as a priority matter (2013). For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Human Rights Council (OHCHR, 2020) established the International Human Rights Treaties. The OHCHR issues publications to raise awareness of human rights violations in the world. Despite international efforts, human rights abuses still occur in countries around the world. Human Rights Watch reports that female genital mutilation has been globally practiced on more than 140 million females, mostly on young girls under 15 years-old, for non-medical reasons, but for cultural or religious reasons such as the coming-of-age ceremony (2010).

Scholars disagree about whether human rights abuses justify international armed intervention. While some scholars maintain that international armed forces should intervene in cases of human rights abuses, they often argue that war should be the last resort (De Waal & Omaar, 1994, p. 6). Alex De Waal and Rakiya Omaar illustrate that if military forces are needed to intervene, they should maintain a neutral position (p. 8). However, people should think about whether military intervention is an ethically justifiable method; preceding military intervention, De Waal and Omaar claim that relief and diplomatic efforts should be prioritized (p. 7). Ironically, military intervention can result in more human rights abuses in the end, leading to higher casualties and refugees. Beyond thinking about the rationale for military interventions,

they also call for accurate and independent evaluations of the scale and nature of humanitarian needs (p. 7). Additionally, they point out that military intervention may not necessarily address the strategic context of a disaster (p. 8). Finally, they state that intervening forces should strive for neutrality and be accountable (p. 8). In summary, De Waal and Omaar assert that international military intervention for human rights abuses can work, but it should be the last resort.

Many scholars think that even though the aim of military intervention is to stop human rights abuses, armed intervention cannot be justified. For example, Political Science scholar Dursun Peksen argues that regardless of the intentions of the intervening force, foreign armed intervention of any kind does not help human rights abuses (2012). Indeed, supportive, neutral, or hostile interventions all promote domestic instability across the nation. Interventions in general only increase the occurrences of human rights abuses via “more violence, humanitarian disasters, and other instabilities given the inherent link between the respect for human rights and the maintenance of peace and security” (Peksen, p. 568). Military interventions—regardless of their intention or strategic approach and despite their humanitarian goals—lead to violence, instability, and further human rights violations.

Generally, armed conflict has damage global societies in numerous ways. Political scientist Arben Qirezi shows Serbians used “self-determination strategies” against Albanian populations, which called for the genocide of the Kosovo War (2016). Three years after the Bosnian War, the Serbians repeated this genocide against a different target, Albanians. Qirezi delicately described the aftermath of the war and international military intervention against Serbians’ human rights abuses. For example, Qirezi highlights that during the Kosovo War, there were a lot of civilian deaths and a mass exodus to neighboring countries due to the effect the war had on the population (2016, pp. 39-22). Political science professor Richard Regan provides specific numbers of refugees from the aftermath of the Bosnian war (2013). In both cases, the sudden and heavy influx of refugees into countries that were unprepared, stressed, and taxed of their resources, made Kosovo, Bosnia, and other neighboring countries unstable.

While military intervention may seem to be an immediately effective option, Haggard and Noland argue that the international community should work together towards a non-violent interventionist approach to resolve the underlying issues of conflicts and put pressure on a country that repeatedly violates human rights; one example being North Korea (2011). They also show possible effective non-violent strategies in terms of international financial and diplomatic isolation through sanctions to compel the target to listen to the international community (2011).

Scholarly Positions for Intervention

Scholars point out violations of human rights that have been committed around the world. North Korea has rampantly infringed for some time on personal rights such as forced labor, murder, torture, rape, forced abortion, religious and racial persecution, and deliberate starvation (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 360). Therefore, the UNHRC established a committee in 2013 to carry out formal inquiries to examine the human rights situation in North Korea (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 360). International communities have been appealing for help to stop and to prevent systemic human rights abuses under the totalitarian regime. Given these ongoing human rights abuses and countries’ involvement, such research is significant in making non-violent interventions more palatable.

Nevertheless, there is some disagreement in scholarship on international armed intervention for humanitarian purposes. Some scholars have the point of view that armed

intervention can work to discourage human rights abuses, but they believe that armed conflict should be the last resort. Alex De Waal and Rakiya Omaar are of this opinion and believe that when armed forces intervene, they should maintain a neutral position focusing on verifying facts without bias (1994, p. 8). In contrast, Dursun Peksen refutes Waal and Omaar's idea pointing out that supportive or even neutral interventions cannot solve human rights abuses (2012). Military interventions, which take a supportive or neutral stance towards the government of a country, make extrajudicial killing, disappearance, political imprisonment, and torture more likely to occur (Peksen, 2012, p. 558). Notably, Dursun Peksen's stance is an argument against taking a neutral position when it comes to international military intervention for humanitarian purposes. To illustrate this point, Richard Regan notes that the neutral intervention does not work because, in the Bosnian War, even though the Security Council created six "safe areas" for people in Bosnia, these were attacked by Serbians who continued to violate human rights of Bosniaks (2013, p. 207). The UN attempted to maintain neutral positions. Yet, this did not have a desired result as the Serbians did not acknowledge the neutrality of the UN.

Military intervention is not without its fault. De Waal and Omaar highlight that war leads to other mass human rights abuses by creating high rates of casualties, orphans, and refugees (1994). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UNHCR provide specific numerical information to support this. The OHCHR examines the number of unlawful killings to civilians due to armed conflicts between both parties (2015). During the Sri Lankan Civil War, the government estimated the number of people who were affected by the conflict to be only 100,000, but later acknowledged an estimated 300,000 people were affected (p. 51). The UNHCR points out that post World War II, wars and conflicts have caused around 51.2 million people to seek refuge in neighboring countries (2014, p. 5). Altogether, the consequences of armed intervention are further abuses to human rights, which counters the aim of the international military intervention to reduce human rights abuses.

Even De Waal and Omaar are aware of the seriousness of this aspect, and they think that the most important part in terms of international military intervention, is whether or not the military force can do the job (1994, p. 7). They maintain that even if military intervention takes place for human rights abuses, armed intervention cannot be the preferred strategy (p. 7). In other words, since most modern armed forces utilize highly developed weapons and technologies to win a war in a short period of time, they predict that there would be more or worse violations of human rights during or after the war (p. 7). De Waal and Omaar describe armed intervention for humanitarian purposes in Somalia in 1992 and show the drawbacks of international military intervention to solve human rights violations (1994, p. 7). This is why they believe that international military intervention for humanitarian purposes should be the last step to resolve violations of human rights.

On the whole, military intervention for humanitarian purposes is still a controversial issue. On one hand, scholars such as Dursun Peksen acknowledge the benefits of armed intervention. Other scholars such as Arben Qirezi, Regan, Haggard, and Nolan also provide realistic reasons why armed intervention is not justifiable even though it is to protect human rights. In contrast, De Waal and Omaar provide reasons why international military intervention cannot be justified for humanitarian purposes.

The Cost of Violent Intervention

Taking all the scholarly positions into consideration, international military intervention cannot be justified, even if it has humanitarian purposes, due to its usual severe negative global

impact. First of all, Richard Regan (2013) and Arben Qirezi (2016) elucidate the aftermath of war, making examples of the Bosnian War and the Kosovo War; wars which only settled after international military forces intervened. The Bosnian War occurred from April 6th in 1992 to December 14th, 1995. In 1992, the society was composed of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Bosnian-Serbians, and some other ethnicities (Regan, 2013, p.199). The incident began with the declaration of independence of Bosniaks. With the spread of nationalism, Serbians, who did not support and even resisted the independence of the Bosniaks, fanned the flames of their desire to create a Great Serbia. Serbians started the ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks in order to force them to flee. Regan pointed out that the Serbians committed vile atrocities on Bosniaks, especially in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, where Serbians massacred the civilians with artillery (Regan, 2013, p.199). Despite several attempts by the UN, Serbia's violation of human rights continued. To remedy the human rights abuses, NATO externally intervened by employing air strikes against the Serbians, after which the Serbians backed down (Regan, 2013, p. 210).

Ostensibly, the military intervention ended the Bosnian War, but the cost of the armed intervention must be taken into consideration. Throughout the violence, Bosnia lost many lives, and even after the war, Bosnians suffered. Richard Regan described that during the war, 2,000,000 Bosnians became refugees and fled to neighboring countries (Regan, 2013, pp. 203-204). The OHCHR defines a refugee as, one who is forcefully displaced “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” and stipulates how all different kinds of human rights should be protected (OHCHR, 2020). Regan also points out that most residential areas and cities were destroyed, and people suffered from shortage of indispensable resources (Regan, 2013, pp. 203-204). These repercussions are consistent with Brownlee’s description of human rights violations (2013).

Secondly, international armed involvement cannot be justified by human rights violations, since the military force cannot resolve the tension underneath the war or prevent repetition of conflict. The critical loophole of military intervention is that it can only be a temporary solution for humanitarian purposes as examined in the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars. Less than three years after the Bosnian War ended, Serbians again violated human rights against Albanian populations in Kosovo. The Kosovo War is considered to be another instance ethnic cleansing and occurred between May 5th, 1998 and June 11th, 1999. Serbia had an unfulfilled desire for the Great Serbia, so it wanted an annexation; however, Albanians fought for their independence. When a Serbian police officer who went out for patrol was killed by an Albanian, Serbian aggressors used his death as an excuse to massacre Albanians (Qirezi, 2016). Serbia sent troops to kill Albanian civilians. In June of 1998, the United States of America and the European Union demanded the withdrawal of the Serbian military and the termination of the massacre of Albanian civilians. However, Serbians ignored the ultimatum and occupied an Albanian military base. The bloodshed dragged on for a year until NATO intervened yet again to stop the escalation of the conflict.

The military intervention of NATO did not solve the core issue underlying the war, even if it was for a humanitarian cause. Serbians infringed upon human rights with the same reasons and with the same strategies in the Kosovo War as they did in the Bosnian War. Even though NATO stopped Serbians’ human rights abuses temporarily with its military attacks, Serbia repeated the violations later against another target. Therefore, the Kosovo War had most of the severe negative impacts not only domestically but also internationally. Arben Qirezi and Regan

show that military intervention has critical limitations to prevent further conflicts and human rights abuses by giving numerical information and specific events. For instance, Arben Qirezi highlights that during the Kosovo War, 13,321 of civilians died or went missing and about 164,000 people left Kosovo due to the aftermath of the war (Arben Qirezi, 2016, p.5).

Another inability of international military intervention that can be shown from both the Bosnian and Kosovo War is that if external powers is what it took to force an end of tensions, then the major fault that led to a war would have remained, so that continuous conflict would last for a long time. For instance, Arben Qirezi focuses on the discord between Serbians and Albanians after the formal peace agreement at the end of the war with an example of an outbreak of ethnic riots by Albanians against Serbians in 2004 (2016, p.57). Qirezi stresses the point that since the delicate relationship between the two groups was determined by external intervention, “this unresolved dispute continues to foster both group insecurity and regional instability” (2016, p.37). This demonstrates that external military intervention by force cannot solve main conflicts that initiated a feud between both parties. While the military intervention may work on the surface issue, it does not present as a sustainable and long-term strategy.

Lastly, due to the negative consequences of armed conflicts, as shown above, international society should seek for sustainable, non-violent alternative strategies of intervention and cooperation for humanitarian purposes. For example, by collectively putting pressure on a target country and by isolating it from the global society—financially and diplomatically—in order to weaken the target regime and protect its citizens’ human rights.

What could be a good alternative or remedy for the international community in regard to the severe drawbacks of military intervention? Haggard and Nolan point out “the difficulty the United States had in mobilizing pressure on North Korea” (Haggard & Nolan, 2011, p.14). As the United States has a much weaker trade relationship with North Korea than China and South Korea, non-violent interventions like sanctions have little effect and are not very persuasive (p.14). However, if stronger trade partners like China and South Korea, who account for “55 percent to 80 percent of North Korea’s trade,” were to sanction North Korea, their efforts would be much more effective in pressuring the regime (Haggard & Nolan, 2011, p.16). Haggard and Nolan also argue that the international community should team up against the target country financially and diplomatically with an example of North Korea (2011, p.14). They highlight that China’s commerce made about 2.7 billion dollars of trade with North Korean commerce in 2007 (Haggard & Nolan, 2011, Figure 4). This enormous foreign capital enables North Korea to maintain their communist regime, which leads to systemic human rights violations. As North Koreans are educated to worship the Kim dynasty, anyone who defies Kim’s regime will be tortured or even killed (Larsen, 2020; Edwards, 2015). The unique structure of the dictatorship of North Korea, which concentrates power in the hands of a single dynasty, enables systemic human rights abuses such as torture, murder, rape, and arbitrary detention (Choe, 2020). Therefore, it is important to financially and diplomatically isolate North Korea from the international community in order to protect human rights.

Haggard and Nolan insist that the whole international society should cooperate to strategically isolate North Korea, forcing them to back down (2011, p.14). For example, the scholars highlight the decrease in trading between Japan/South Korea and North Korea as well as the increase in trading between China and North Korea. The author stresses the point that “despite the high partner concentration of North Korea’s trade, its vulnerability to sanctions has not necessarily increased. Those countries more inclined to sanction North Korea—the United States and Japan—have negligible economic exchange with the country” (Haggard and Nolan,

2011, p.16). That is to say, even though nations concerned about human rights violations are enacting diplomatic/financial non-violent interventions, such as sanctions, those nations, like the United States, do not significantly affect North Korea's earnings from foreign capital. Countries that are weak trading partners with the offending nation will have little pressure on the offending nation and thus have a small effect in their intervention.

The active commercial trade between North Korea and China is a large enabler of North Korea and its operations. If China and other significant trade partners of North Korea were to get on board with the rest of the world and sanction North Korea, this collaboration could become a method of putting pressure on a country for certain demands. The international community should be in alliance with each other by signing treaties which might allow them to backfill their economic losses that are derived from the economic sanctions against the target country to stop its human rights abuses. This means that if the global society does not work together and only thinks about their own interests, the financial/diplomatic isolation would not be as effective in getting any country to listen to the international community. The coalition should prioritize human rights over instant gratification, like economical gains, for the benefit of global prosperity. The international community should ensure to propagate the idea of human rights so that all of mankind can fully understand that they deserve to have human rights and human rights abuses should not be tolerated.

Conclusion: Violent Intervention is Never Justifiable

Infringement upon individual human rights should be combated with more effective and non-violent joint efforts of the international community. There are some disagreements amongst scholars whether armed intervention can be justified or not. International military intervention has been shown to have a negative global impact and to be ineffective at solving the tensions underlying the wars and situations in which human rights violations occur. Additionally, the global society should strive to improve non-violent alternative intervention strategies such as financial and diplomatic sanctions and cooperatively implement them for humanitarian purposes. The International community should fight against injustice in its society and regasp the ideal of inborn human rights, but this can only be done if it is pursued non-violently and in one accord. Should the international community choose to commit to joint, non-violent intervention for the sake of human rights, military intervention and all its downsides may never again be necessary.

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