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**FOR AND AGAINST: ANALYSING THE DETERMINANTS
OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION.
LIBYA (2011) AND SYRIA (2011–2013) COMPARED**

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ORCID no. 0000-0003-4974-7618**e-mail:** arkadiusz.domagala@uwr.edu.pl**Abstract**

While the normative and legal aspects of humanitarian intervention have been explored in great detail, scholars have usually overlooked the more practical question of when military humanitarian action can be undertaken. To shed light on this question, the first section of the article investigates the conditions and circumstances that should be taken into consideration by the potential interveners. The conditions and circumstances are mostly external in nature which means that the interveners capabilities are important but not a fundamental issue. One of the crucial conditions, often neglected, seems to be clear political situation in the state that is the object of intervention. Preventing or stopping mass killings as a desired outcome is dependent on generating political will that is interlocked with the prospect of success. In the next section, itemised conditions and circumstances are examined in the context of a revolution in Libya in 2011 and of the early years (2011–2013) of the civil war in Syria. It appears that, in the case of Libya, the internal and international situation was definitely to the interveners' favour. By contrast, the risk of failure in Syria was perceived as very high. A humanitarian intervention in Syria for Western powers could have led to sticking in the quagmire and would have in fact served the interests of local players. The conclusion is if certain conditions and circumstances are absent, the interveners refrain from taking action. Subsequently, humanitarian intervention is more likely to take place when the potential interveners see a higher chance of achieving their operational and political goals by using military force.

Keywords: humanitarian intervention, use of force, prospect of success, just war, Libya 2011, Syrian civil war

Introduction

Accompanied by an advancement of human rights principles, the euphoria that followed the end of the Cold War culminated in attempts to implement humanitarian intervention¹. The idea was successfully introduced in northern Iraq (*Provide Comfort*), however,

¹ Humanitarian intervention is the threat or use of force by a state or group of states aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the human rights of individuals other than its own citizens (R. Jennings, A. Watts 1992, 400–402; W. Verwey 1998, 190–191; J. L. Holzgrefe 2003, 18).

the course of events in Somalia (1993–95), Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1994) showed humanitarian disasters to be insufficient grounds for effective humanitarian intervention (Kuperman 2001). By definition, such an intervention cannot be justified on the grounds of receiving a benefit understood as a vital national interest. A decision to undertake intervention appears to be far more complex, making it reasonable to assume such a reaction to human rights violations is, in fact, a function of multiple variables (Krieg 2013, 43–46).

The aim of this article is to identify the conditions and circumstances that ought to be taken into consideration by potential interveners, powerful states that are expected to make a decision on intervention. Meeting particular conditions under specific circumstances may serve as a justification to use force while also giving grounds for humanitarian intervention. Conversely, if such conditions and circumstances are absent, the states should refrain from taking action. It follows that the reasons *à rebours* for humanitarian intervention also define its barriers to commit to intervention.

The starting point for determining the reasons for and against launching humanitarian intervention will be one of the criteria of a just war – a reasonable prospect of success. This part of the study relies on the rational policy model that stresses the role of calculated decisions that maximize values and benefits to the state giving intervention.

Next, a developed conception of the prospect of success will be employed to track the decisions made in favour of or against undertaking humanitarian intervention in Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2013, when intervention in Syria was the most probable after the chemical attack in Ghouta (Abboud 2016, 144–145). Subsequently, the methodological approach in this part of the study is based on comparative case study analysis that, like the rational actor model, can be situated in Foreign Policy Analysis.

Occasionally acting under the auspices of international organizations, the only conceivable agents of humanitarian intervention are the world's great powers who are ready to intervene when the chances of a favourable resolution are high (Jakobsen 1998). The assumption behind such an intervention is that it entails low costs and minimal damage to the great powers' foreign policies, while also increasing their prestige on the international arena. This perspective takes into account of the interveners' fears and expectations rather than focusing exclusively on the victims of grave violations, a stand that is merely an expression of political realism. As a consequence, humanitarian intervention is all the more likely to take place when the potential interveners see a higher chance of achieving their operational and political goals by using military force.

In other words, humanitarian intervention is undertaken, generally, in the interest of the people whose rights are violated and not because of the intervener's vital interests. It makes it difficult for decision-makers to justify a long-term use of its resources. States are not willing to act against their own national interests and, subsequently, they are reluctant to launch humanitarian intervention that seems to be costly in a political sense. These assumptions, that are the combination of neorealist and neoliberal ideas, fit the so-called neo-neo synthesis (Waeber 1996, 163–164).

Prospect of success: from just war tradition to humanitarian intervention criteria

There is considerable consensus in the literature on humanitarian intervention criteria derived from the just war tradition. Generally, the discussion is focused on the legitimisation of intervention (just authority), humanitarian grounds for intervention (just cause and just intention), last resort and *jus in bello* principles such as proportionality, discrimination and impartiality. Contemporary discourse on the criteria has been more and more oriented to the issue of potential abuses and excessive use of force. Subsequently, the criterion of the prospect of a successful operation and the conditions that constitute this criterion have been marginal in the debate and have not yet become the subject of comprehensive and systematic study (Seybolt 2008, 26; Stromseth 2003, 267–268). The absence of such investigations is also a result of certain political incorrectness, as the action that ought to be grounded in a sort of moral obligation is in fact conditional on the circumstances and expectations of the potential interveners². A lack of discussion on the conditions that incline great powers to undertake intervention is particularly conspicuous in the official documents of the United Nations (UN) concerning the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

The discussion on the prospect of success is too often boiled down to platitudes like “military intervention is not justified if protection cannot be achieved” or “intervention cannot do more harm than good” (ICISS 2001, 37). As a consequence, it is difficult to ascertain what the prospect of success actually means.

The prospect of success is the least moral principle of just war criteria. The essence of the prospect of success is that it is sometimes not reasonable to wage war, although there are moral and just reasons to do it. Therefore, implementation of the criterion is giving consent to further suffering of innocents. The goal of humanitarian intervention is not to confirm the intervener’s moral superiority but to bring specific and real help to the suffering population. It follows that such an intervention must neither prolong the conflict nor lead to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. When treated as the main criterion, the prospect of a possible success prevents moral triumphalism and action taken in order to prove that “we were right”. In other words, the interveners ought not to base their actions solely on their intentions, with little or no reference to the international circumstances and limitations.

Defining the prospect of success needs three general comments. First, the criterion is which initial conditions to initiate humanitarian intervention should be met and not about how to wage a war. It suggests adopting the consequentialist, not a deontological, perspective. Accordingly, humanitarian interventions take place because they are doable and profitable for intervenors and not because there were atrocities that shocked the conscience of mankind. Second, the prospect of success remains inherently in tension with other just war and humanitarian intervention criteria. Generally, just war and humanitarian intervention are a reflection of the imperative to protect fundamental human rights and to justify the use of force. Meanwhile, the significance of the prospect of success is overestimated and abused by sceptics who argue that humanitarian intervention could

² Such a marriage of morality with the prospect of success lies at the heart of consequentialist ethics. See, for example: Hooker 2010, 444–455. For more on adding consequentialism to the debate on humanitarian intervention, see: Pattison 2010.

be a fatal mistake when implemented without a sober consideration of its consequences (Kuperman 2000, 118). Finally, the prospect of success is something more than “necessary means”. The deployment of military forces with a clear mandate and resources is only one of factors that should be taken into account before the decision on the humanitarian intervention. The conclusion is that the prospect of success is the *ex ante* evaluation of relevant circumstances that affects the political will to intervene.

Reasons for and against undertaking humanitarian intervention

Among the small number of researchers who emphasise the need to scrutinise the prospect of success in launching humanitarian intervention are Michael O’Hanlon (1997; 2002), Taylor Seybolt (2008), James Pattison (2010), Chantal de Jonge Oudraat (2000) and also Robert Pape (2012). Their work, as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from the interventions undertaken so far, allow for developing a set of conditions and circumstances that make the successful completion of an intervention all the more achievable, thus making the decision to intervene far easier to take. As it can be easily seen, while they share a common feature of interdependence, a significant proportion of these interventions were undertaken independently of the potential interveners’ will. The ten reasons, or sub-criteria, below are regarded as the sub-criteria of the prospect of success.

1) **The strength of the potential intervener.** A power of a state should be assessed in relative, not absolute, terms. Accordingly, the potential intervener’s strength is defined by comparing their potential, *hic et nunc*, with the potential of the state engulfed in the humanitarian crisis. It is only when the intervener is in a position of considerable advantage over the adversary that they will consider exercising force to ensure the respect for human rights (Pape 2012, 56; Pattison 2010, 266). Having insufficient potential could provoke a stronger resistance on the part of the adversary, leading to increased losses for both parties involved as a consequence. All the resources available ought to be taken into consideration when assessing the adversary’s potential, whereas the potential of the intervener should be assessed only based on the resources available to them at the particular moment (Oudraat 2010, 18). Humanitarian intervention would be possible only if the intervener’s massive superiority is guaranteed. This sub-criterion is strongly connected to others. The less favourable the geographical and infrastructural conditions, the more resources the intervener should have at disposal. Another matter is that the intervener needs unique capabilities if the only possible strategy of humanitarian intervention is relying on the air power and precision guided munitions.

2) **Strategy adopted for neutralizing the potential adversary.** The intervener’s actions should lead to achieving a humanitarian goal by correlating the resources available with the intervention goals (Seybolt 2008, 23–45). Two model scenarios generally take place. In the first scenario, conventional expeditionary forces are deployed and given the support of other types of forces, primarily including the air force and the navy, both with smart weapons at their disposal. Intervention goals are pursued by effectively controlling a given territory by the use of ground forces (O’Hanlon 1997, 7). In the second, airborne and naval forces are deployed, which make use of the electronic systems for identifying and tracking targets. There is no need for the intervener to exercise control over the territory, while the intervention goals are accomplished by striking enemy targets with great precision and ensuring they affect the adversary state’s (where intervention takes place) decision-makers

severely. Any type of operation that doesn't dispense with deployment of ground troops is currently preferred. However, this type of operation is a less-than-ideal solution from the vantage point of applying the principles of humanitarian outcome, proportionality and discrimination, which are nevertheless more likely to be accepted by potential interveners. Undoubtedly, the strategy ought to be adjusted to the intervener's capabilities, the strength of potential allies on the ground and infrastructural and geographical conditions.

3) **Possibility to precisely define political and humanitarian goals.** The goals should be set with care in order to avoid the situation when there is more and more targets in an adversary state to achieve the political aims of intervention. From the intervener point of view it is obviously unnecessary as it renders intervention more unforeseeable and necessitate assigning more material, military and personnel resources ("mission creep") (Oudraat 2010, 5–6; O'Hanlon 1997, 5). In the event that such clear-cut and measurable goals are difficult to define, the state will be reluctant to take military action. The goals should be easily identified in the operational dimension as well. This is because the more difficult it is to strike the potential enemy and the more risk there is of collateral damage, the more likely it is for the potential intervener to refrain from undertaking coercive action (Pape 2012, 58–59). Where humanitarian intervention is involved, the intervening state will want to achieve the goals as quickly as possible, with a view to quick political consumption of the intervention success, both internationally and domestically, and for fear of "getting stuck in a quagmire" (Bert 2011, 207–209). A set of precisely-identified goals and a coherent strategy are conducive to developing a clear strategy for leaving the state that is the object of intervention (the exit strategy). A potential intervener is more likely to take action when convinced that it will result in creating a favourable international environment or achieving other, not necessarily the main aims of their foreign policy. Subsequently, a regime-change in a state where human rights abuses take place seems to be an attractive, although very risky, political aim (Reisman 2004, 525). The strategy adopted for neutralising the enemy is interrelated with this sub-criterion and interveners should seek a strategy that is helpful to implement visible and clear politico-military goals (Kanter 2000, 19).

4) **Conditions related to the climate, geography and infrastructure.** Favourable environmental and geographical conditions may be deciding factors for how efficient the intervention is. A potential intervener should take into account of the climate (rainfall, the cloudiness of the skies, temperature levels and amplitudes), geographical conditions (the lie of the land, the rate of afforestation, hydrological network) and the level of infrastructure development in the state where the intervention is intended. The climate is of particular importance in the operations that require the use of conventional military forces (the climate should preferably be similar to the one in the intervening state) and operations based on airborne forces and the use of guided missiles (the preference is for the climate with little overcast and a greater number of sunny days. Unfavourable weather could be a factor making interveners' decisions more precarious (Fryar 2013, 59). Interventions may be significantly facilitated by favourable geographical and natural conditions, such as large swathes of lowland area with natural vegetation of low density. The more developed urban infrastructure the intervener is expecting to encounter, the less likely they are to launch the intervention, as this renders the operation more complex and increases the risk of collateral damage, which in turn entails higher political costs of intervention. The

severe climate, large area to control combined with infrastructural flaws are able to deter potential interveners from action (like in Darfur in 2003).

5) **Intervener's capacity for an effective use of logistic resources.** As a rule, the intervener relies on the infrastructure that they either provide or control. The geographical proximity of the intervening and adversary states makes for a more cost-effective operation due to the easier use of transport and logistic resources (Pattison 2010, 267), although being geographically close is a feature that has been made less significant by contemporary technology. Having access to one's own military bases or allied territory is now equivalent to such geographical proximity, while a major advantage can also be taken from the proximity of large bodies of water (high seas). Only if the intervener has stable access to its military infrastructure and assets is humanitarian intervention possible.

6) **Intervener's predicted determination in pursuing the goal.** States are seldom willing to take the risk of humanitarian intervention solely for humanitarian reasons, which is why the humanitarian goals of intervention are also usually pursued with national interests in sight. Even though they are of secondary or even tertiary importance compared with the humanitarian goal, these national interests may still be crucial for the intervener. In fact, the more valuable the interests are to the intervener, the less the temptation to withdraw before fulfilling the established goals. With little political will, the intervener's motivation to suffer the costs of intervention can run low and gives prominence to the role of public opinion, which is an indispensable element of the intervention effort (Kanter 2000, 17; Hildebrandt 2013, 243–266). Public opinion can also exert influence to make the intervener more determined or more discouraged to launch the intervention (the so-called “CNN effect”) (Natsios 1996). There is considerable feedback between this sub-criterion and others. The more favourable the conditions are for the intervener, the greater the intervener's political will is. Even if the intervener's particular interests are not present, the situation in which humanitarian intervention seems to be doable with fast, visible effects can provoke states to act for human rights protection.

7) **Clear political situation in the state that is the object of intervention.** By analysing the political situation in a given state, the intervener is able to identify its potential allies (and their support) and enemies (and their resistance) in the state where intervention takes place (Pape 2012, 57–58). The factors to be taken into consideration include the coherence and degree of representativeness of particular political factions, the support of the civilian population they enjoy and the military resources placed at their disposal. Ideally, for the intervener, the civilian population whose rights are violated in a given state should support a single, relatively coherent political option with their own (para)military structures. The political scene and opposition that are divided and heterogeneous make for a difficult military intervention and demanding post-intervention stabilisation efforts. Conversely, a stronger military stance of the political opposition – as manifested, for instance, in the scale of the territory under its control – facilitates the intervener's actions to a considerable extent (Pattison 2010, 267–268). An intervener who chooses to use strategies involving aerial attacks is ultimately bound to rely on a local ally to control the territory and the local population. It is also in the intervener's interest to delegate such control and military action on the ground, as it helps them transfer the risk of taking losses to the local forces they support (Shaw 2005, 95–97). It is worth pointing out, however, that the presence of a large and coherent opposition faction in a violating state is no guarantee of the intervener's taking action. The decision on intervention is also made conditional on the ideological

and programmatic profile of that faction, which is particularly relevant with respect to the intervener's foreign policy. A further issue of vital importance is also the incumbent authorities' level of consolidation and the social support they enjoy. The sub-criterion is quite independent from others, however, it is very dynamic. The position of the faction supported by the intervener may be vulnerable to political and military developments. Without any substantial support from reliable actor on the ground, humanitarian intervention seems to be a step into a quagmire.

8) Scope of the political and international legal agreements signed by the state that is the object of intervention. A decision in favour of the intervention is less likely where there are strong and long-lasting relationships between the state struggling with a humanitarian crisis and other states, especially those with considerable political and military potential (in particular, the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council). Likewise, the decision is much more likely to be positive where the potential adversary state has few friendly states in the immediate international environment and no strategic relationships with great powers. The scope of a state's international relations is measured by the level of international support it enjoys. Presumably, the lower this level is, the stronger the support for the intervener and greater the chance of their making a positive decision to intervene and attaining an intervention success.

9) Legitimisation of the intervener's actions. Legitimisation needs to be considered in both the domestic and international aspects. Before taking the decision to intervene, the state should obtain the support of their domestic public opinion, while also gauging domestic reaction to the potential unforeseen and unfavourable occurrences that can take place in the course of the operation. The chance of taking a decision to intervene is more likely in a state characterised by a higher political consensus. Similarly, the intervening state should be able to form a broad international coalition against the state facing a humanitarian crisis, seeking first and foremost the support of partners from the target state's civilisational circle (Kanter 2000, 18). In the institutional dimension, it is crucial that the intervener wins the favour of regional and international organisations, such as the United Nations, and ideally also secures the Security Council's authorisation under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (Oudraat 2000, 19; Pattison 2010, 266). An important source of legitimisation is also the opinions and preferences of the society that is to benefit from the humanitarian intervention (Pattison 2010, 140–146). The internal dimension of legitimisation seems to be the least stable and vulnerable to changes. This is another argument that humanitarian intervention is effective only if rapidly implemented. Unsurprisingly, that is why clear political and military aims to achieve are necessary from the intervener's perspective (see sub-criterion no. 3).

10) Intervener's internal consistency. The chances of taking a decision in favour of launching the intervention are increased if there is a high level of solidarity among the members of the intervening organisation (coalition) who also share a similar position on the humanitarian and political situation (Jakobsen 1998). Conversely, the chances are substantially decreased where the members of the organisation (coalition), in particular its key members, differ in a) their perception of the situation, b) the goals of the potential operation and c) the strategy to be adopted. If the intervener's consistency in action is affected, it may have negative impact on efficiency and, consequently, duration of the mission.

The catalogue of conditions and circumstances given above is by no means an exhaustive one. It contains the circumstances that are partly responsible for tarnishing the image of humanitarian intervention as a disinterested effort primarily taken in response to mass violations of human rights. A part of the sub-criteria is rather independent from the intervener. Climate and geographical conditions, the political situation and the international position of the state that is the object of intervention are objective limitations of the decision on the use of force. The more powerful the potential intervener is, the more possibilities it has to reduce risks resulting from these circumstances. The intervener's determination, strongly interrelated with the internal legitimisation, and the importance of the issue (that is human rights violations) from the intervener's perspective positively affect the intervener's power.

Lending weight to the potential intervener's perspective and showing how crucial it is when taking the decision to intervene, these sub-criteria of the prospect of success have considerable analytical value as well, as they may be used in each particular case to measure how many of the reasons for humanitarian intervention have been satisfied. The conclusion seems unavoidable that the greater the number of reasons satisfied, the more effective the intervention can be, leading to a humanitarian outcome and boosting the intervener's prestige.

Reasons for and against intervention: Libya vs Syria

Much attention has been given to the differential way in which the international community reacted to the humanitarian situation in the Arab Spring countries (Cronogue 2012; Tocci 2016; Zifcak 2012; Berman and Michaelsen 2012; O'Shea 2012; Nahlawi 2016). The following analysis adds to the existing debate by offering a systematic identification of the reasons for or against the decisions to intervene, or, to use the UN's standards, to activate the R2P mechanism.

Libya

In the case of Libya in 2011, the internal and international situation was largely to the interveners' favour. As well as being particularly vulnerable to destruction, Libya's war potential was much lower than that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) states. The coalition *ad hoc* were able to assign more than 300 combat aircraft with the necessary naval, aerial refuelling and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to the mission. The Libyan aircraft were "antiquated and decrepit", and an integrated air defense system was nonexistent (Mueller 2015, 63–64).

The climate and geographical conditions (lowlands and plains in the seaside areas, lack of natural barriers), as well as the proximity of the Mediterranean Sea, were favourable to the interveners. Libya's towns and cities had low population density and were characterised by relatively modern and dispersed building development, making it easier for the intervening military forces to identify targets and avoid civilian casualties. All these circumstances allowed for implementing an intervention strategy based on high-precision air strikes, one that was particularly favoured owing to the interveners' reluctance to deploy their own troops and risk unnecessary casualties. The humanitarian goals of the intervention were formalised by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973

(2011), although the interveners did certainly also have political goals in sight. From the interveners' and their domestic public opinions' point of view, the most straightforward indicator of the mission success was the overthrow of Libyan Prime Minister Muammar Gaddafi, widely recognised as the source of human rights violations and a hindrance to implementing democratic changes in the country. In March 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron stated that the purpose of the intervention was to "end the violence, protect civilians and allow the people of Libya to determine their own future, free from the brutality inflicted by the Gaddafi regime" (Black 2011).

The violations were to be stopped and prevented by taking "all necessary measures" which, taking account of the emerging cooperation of the potential interveners and rebel groups, led to the overthrow of the Libyan government. It was very controversial as the theory of humanitarian intervention developed after 1945 generally precludes the change of the political regime by the intervener. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) didn't allow the interveners to overthrow the Libyan government and Gaddafi's authorities. Although the regime-change was the effect of opposition forces offensive, the dominant view of the course of events was that a temptation to remove the Gaddafi regime was at least partly at odds with the doctrine of R2P and humanitarian intervention (Pattison 2011, 272; Payandeh 2012, 388).

The individual goals established by the European interveners showed their political will as well as their determination to carry out the humanitarian intervention. In France and Great Britain, the most important members of the coalition, proponents of decisive action against Libya outnumbered the opponents to decisive action (Bucher 2013, 534). They were supported in this endeavour by public support for initiating prodemocracy changes in North Africa and its aversion to Gaddafi. However, one cannot help but point out that the *ad hoc* coalition was not one of perfect consistency owing to the reluctance to intervene expressed by two NATO members, Germany and Poland, and the scepticism of the USA. Despite its declarations to support the European members of NATO, Americans clearly did not perceive their participation in the anti-Libyan coalition as vital to their national interests (Goodenough 2013).

The key fact that stimulated the potential interveners to act was that the Transitional National Council, the Libyan political opposition with its own armed forces, was constituted and quickly gained international recognition. The opposition was headed by moderate politicians Mustafa Abdul Jalil and Mahmoud Jibril, while the Free Libyan Army was numerous enough to control the eastern areas of the country. Moreover, the significance of radical groups, including jihadist ones, was limited, making it a firm indication of a successful future cooperation between the new government and the European states. The opposition's increasing control over the Libyan territory, gained with the aerial fire support of an international coalition, would be a guarantee of a humanitarian success as it would prevent crimes against humanity. A political one would be guaranteed as it would result in overthrowing the government. The division of the Libyan political scene between the Transitional National Council, with relevant international recognition, and the authoritarian Gaddafi regime made the situation clear and understandable to the interveners' public opinion. Additionally, it increased the internal and international legitimisation of the intervention. The crucial elements of the latter were the United Nations' unambiguous support for humanitarian intervention and, last but not least, the readiness of Arab states to join the coalition (Leiby R., Mansour M., 2011).

Libya's international standing had been gradually falling since the end of the Cold War. Due to Gaddafi's eccentricity and the state's former associations with world terrorism, Libya was deemed an unreliable economic and political partner, an *enfant terrible* of international politics and the Arab world. Neither the Russian Federation nor China had had any significant geostrategic and economic interests in North Africa, whereas international organisations, such as the League of Arab States, the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, had taken a critical stand on the actions of the Libyan government and were ready to impose severe sanctions on the state.

To conclude, Libya was an easy target in 2011 and the risk of intervention failure was perceived to be minimal. The reasons that drove the decision about launching the intervention in Libya included:

- a) a considerable advantage of the NATO forces over those of the adversary, who had no significant airborne forces or air defence and missile defence systems;
- b) the possibility to pursue humanitarian and political goals with no involvement of the intervener's own ground troops;
- c) the possibility to identify political and humanitarian goals along with an exit strategy (meeting the mission goals was identified as taking full control of the country by the opposition forces);
- d) the interveners' geographical proximity and access to a large body of water, identified as factors facilitating a large-scale use of the infrastructure at the *ad hoc* military coalition's disposal;
- e) the Libyan climate (sunny weather with little cloudiness), the lie of the land and the character of the country's urban infrastructure as factors reducing the risk of collateral damage and facilitating the use of tactics based on high-precision air strikes;
- f) Libya's low international standing and it having no allies among the regional and global great powers;
- g) support of the international public opinion for the democratisation of Libya and a high chance to gain international legal mandate for introducing military sanctions;
- h) the presence of politically moderate and relatively coherent opposition that enjoyed the support of the Libyan society and had its own armed forces.

Syria

In contrast, the internal and international situation in Syria, starting from the events of 2011, was by far more complex and ambiguous, making the circumstances facing the potential interveners served as barriers to, rather than reasons for, launching a humanitarian intervention.

Furthermore, Syria's military potential was far greater than that of the adversaries the Western great powers had faced before in their humanitarian interventions. Admittedly, a military interaction would by no means equate with a failure on the part of the USA or the European great powers, although it would nevertheless expose these states to considerable losses. Moreover, it would have made it necessary for the potential interveners to engage to a far greater degree than it was necessary, for instance, in Serbia in 1999 or Libya in 2011. Syria is among the countries with the greatest number of combat aircraft in

the region, which the state uses in cooperation with Russia (Pradhan-Blach 2012). Compared to Serbia, Libya and Iraq, Syria also possessed relatively modern missile systems, including the Pantsir S1/S-22, Buk/SA-17, and Tunguska/SA-22. Additionally, there were reports that Russia would begin transferring components of the modern, highly capable S-300/SA-20A to Syria, which underlines the ties between the countries (RAND 2013, 6). Even if the Syrian army were not ready to absorb the system, it had a much better air defense than Libya. Arguably, tackling Syria's considerable potential would require the use of airborne and naval forces on an unprecedented scale in the history of humanitarian intervention. According to General Martin Dempsey, who served as Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, it would have required 700 sorties to neutralise the "five-times more sophisticated than in Libya" Syrian air defence system and even 70,000 military personnel that should be deployed to impose a no-fly zone over the country (Goldberg 2013; Mazzetti, Worth, Gordon 2013; Shinkman 2013). Neutralising the Syrian air defense system was challenging but manageable. However, it was the only initial step to further risky, probably long-term operations – protection of safe areas, establishing a no-fly zone, air strikes against the Syrian army – that could have led to escalatory responses from Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's allies (RAND 2013, 16). Another disincentive for potential interveners is that the Libyan or Serbian forces were outnumbered by the Syrian army by at least three to one.

The temptation to intervene in Syria was additionally strengthened by the prospect of ousting Bashar al-Assad and introducing a new order in the Middle East (Averre and Davies 2015, 819–820)³. The majority of the region's states and US allies (Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel) were either in favour of a changeover of power in the state or supported Syrian anti-government forces directly, boosting the determination of the potential interveners only further. Also, the climatic and geographical conditions in Syria would facilitate the use of infrastructure that was necessary to conduct precise aerial attacks on government-controlled military installations. Conversely, a difficulty in determining precise targets in the densely-populated Syrian towns would add to the risk of civilian casualties – estimated as many times greater than in Kosovo and Libya – and undermine the interveners' efforts as a result.

The complex domestic situation unfolding in Syria also did not provide for a better prospect of success. The state's internal political divisions, the weak standing of the moderate and secular political opposition and the importance of the radical structures, which have been growing in power since 2012, all served to greatly discourage the great Western powers to take any enforcement-type action in order to protect the civilian population. Since 2013, the largest forces were those of the Islamic Front (IF), with around 50,000–70,000 fighters. The fastest growing ones were the structures of the Islamic State (IS), formerly calling themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with at least 30,000 fighters in 2014 (Cockburn 2014; TASS 2014; Al Jazeera 2014). Conversely, the opposition, which had organised around the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, could count on the support of around 45,000–50,000 members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in 2013. The increasing significance of the religious element

³ This temptation vanished in 2015, when Russia joined the conflict siding with al-Assad, thus reducing if not rendering altogether impossible the chances of launching a humanitarian intervention in Syria to a minimum.

makes the perspective of stabilisation ever more distant and contributes to the brutalisation of the uncompromising civil war.

Starting in 2011 around the dictatorial regime of al-Assad and the anti-government opposition of liberal and secular, or moderately religious movements, the conflict had soon developed to be interpreted as a religious one involving the Alawites, supported by Shia Muslims, on the one side, and the Salafist al-Nusra Front, the IF and the IS, on the other. The war in Syria had become a conflict of everybody against everybody, one of only temporary coalitions⁴. It is worth observing that the main goal of the dominant opposition forces of the IF and IS was to establish some sort of a sharia-based state. The soldiers and fighters involved in the Syrian conflict number approximately 250,000–300,000, indicating the conflict's vast scale and the huge proportions of the potential military intervention. By launching a "no-casualties" operation against such a complex internal situation, the potential intervener would only flame the existing chaos even further, much to the benefit of the radical Islamist movements.

The Syrian government had the invaluable asset in the form of connections with Russia and China, which both states blocked all UN Security Council discussions about potential military sanctions to be imposed on Syria. Consequently, the legitimisation of any military action against Syria remained weak. Russia had also been providing economic and military support to al-Assad's government by delivering weapons, technical assistance and, since 2015, also its military support in combating the opposition forces. The Russian connection with Syria is also reinforced by the presence of the Russian navy in Tartus, and Russia's critical evaluation of the NATO's intervention in Libya (Allison 2013). The international position of Syria in the region remains low, which is evident by the suspension of the membership in the Arab League in late 2011. The only important actor in the region that has supported Syria is Iran.

The coherence of a potential coalition was largely questionable owing to how the Western great powers, Turkey and Saudi Arabia differed on the shape of post-war Syria and the whole region. Coalitions opposed to al-Assad remained very differentiated – overthrowing al-Assad's authorities seemed to be only glue that bound the sides. Additionally, these actors, from Kurds and Iraq to Israel and Turkey, were too important to be ignored by the US, France and Great Britain. The magnitude of actors and their interests indicated an imminent inconsistency between potential interveners. Moreover, the public opinion in the main Western countries was definitely opposed to international intervention in Syria, even after the 2013 chemical attack in Ghouta (Goodman, Hasan, Boudet 2013).

In conclusion, the situation in Syria that had been developing since the Arab Spring (2011–2013) did not seem to indicate that any form of humanitarian intervention could be both feasible and desired by potential interveners, with the risk of failure and events getting out of control (resulting in "mission creep") perceived as very high. The barriers to launching a humanitarian intervention in Syria included:

- a) significant military resources at the disposal of the Syrian government;
- b) humanitarian goals made difficult to achieve by using high-precision air strikes;
- c) an unrealistic nature of the political goals assuming the overthrow of al-Assad and bringing moderate opposition forces to power;

⁴ This is why the Syrian conflict begins to increasingly resemble the civil war that has plagued Somalia since 1991.

- d) a high population density and the character of town infrastructure that increase the risk of collateral damage substantially;
- e) Syria's relatively high international standing, which is due to its connections with great powers globally;
- f) a low chance to gain international legal mandate for introducing military sanctions;
- g) an absence of politically moderate and relatively coherent opposition that would enjoy the support of a major part of the Syrian society;
- h) a complexity and a partial conflict of interests among the potential interveners and their allies.

Conversely, the reasons in favour of a decision to intervene include: a) the interveners' geographical proximity and access to a large body of water; b) the Syrian climate (sunny weather with little cloudiness) and the lie of the land as factors facilitating operations based on high-precision air strikes; and c) the interveners' determination to overthrow al-Assad and introduce a new order in the Middle East.

The potential interveners' main concern is the dynamics and military resources of the radical religious movements. In 2013, US Secretary of State John Kerry claimed that only 15–25% of the Syrian rebels were extremely radical. In the meantime, estimates indicated that IF and al-Nusra fighters amount to as much as over 60% of the rebels. If the IS were to be treated as part of the rebel forces, this value would increase to well over 75% (Michaels 2013). It was only at the very early stages of the civil war that the moderate forces along with the FSA were the core of the anti-government structures. Since 2012, the role of the opposition radical structures has been on the rise, while it remains very unlikely that any of them could side with the interveners and provide for an improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Offering no real perspective for stability in the country, a humanitarian intervention would in fact only serve the interests of local players, who remain hostile towards the West.

A complex regional balance of power is coupled with an immensely complicated political situation in Syria that is highly unfavourable to the supporters of democracy and liberalisation. As a result millions of civilians are condemned to unimaginable suffering, death, starvation or exile. This is a predictable, though undesirable, result of the sub-criteria that are adopted by states when considering the decision on humanitarian intervention.

Conclusions

Entangling humanitarian intervention and the R2P in a state-centric international system produce severe consequences for the conditions of using force in the face of a humanitarian crisis. Rather than limited to only achieving a positive humanitarian outcome, an intervention success must also offer a prospect of boosting the intervener's prestige or creating a favourable international environment. As such, humanitarian interventions remain to serve as a demonstration of power in action. From the intervener's point of view, it is beneficial and desirable that this demonstration should be quick, efficient and bear positive consequences for the future interactions that the state will get involved in.

A special role among the reasons for launching a humanitarian intervention is attributed to a clear political and social situation in the target state. In particular, this is related to the presence of structures that the intervener can rely on in the political and military dimensions, and which have a clear mandate while also enjoying a broad support of the

population. A lack of transparent situation and of a prospective intervener's agent in military operations constitute the main barrier to undertaking a humanitarian intervention. In the case of Libya, interveners met a conducive environment, both in the domestic as well as international aspects. By contrast, the analysis of the sub-criteria of the prospect of success showed that the risk of failure in Syria was very high. It follows that neither the particular national interests nor the proportions of the humanitarian crisis are decisive factors in making a decision to intervene.

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