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Spring 4-29-2022

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### Recommended Citation

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**Humanitarian Intervention and American Public Opinion: An Analysis of the  
Motivations to Intervene**

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PSCI 491H

April 28, 2022

## ***Introduction***

Currently, the world is watching a humanitarian crisis ensue, as on February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded the sovereign nation of Ukraine. A humanitarian crisis, according to scholar Taylor Seybolt, occurs when a community is deprived of essentials necessary to survive (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 38). These essentials include “food, water, shelter, health care and protection from violence” (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 38). The people of Ukraine are experiencing the extremity of this deprivation. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated that since the invasion in February, four million Ukrainians have fled the country and six and a half million Ukrainians are displaced within the country (“Humanitarian Crisis in Ukraine and Neighboring Countries,” 2022). Civilians in cities with high violence, such as Irpin and Mariupol, have no food, water, shelter, electricity, or heat due to the destruction of homes and critical infrastructure, and relief resources are not able to reach isolated and trapped civilians (ICRC, 2022). Additionally, the crisis is spreading to neighboring states in the region, as Ukrainian refugees pour into their borders. Before the invasion began and the humanitarian crisis quickly escalated, President Biden deployed troops to some members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Germany, Romania, and Poland, and made sure to state the reasoning for deployment: to solely defend NATO allies in the region if they come into conflict with the Russian Federation (The White House, 2022). It is now April of 2022, this policy has not changed. The White House announced on March 24, 2022, that the United States was ready to “...provide more than one billion [dollars] in new funding towards humanitarian assistance for those affected by Russia’s war in Ukraine and its severe impacts around the world, including a marked rise in food insecurity, over the coming months” (March 24, 2022). This will fund food supplies, water,

medical supplies, and other necessary assistance that those impacted need (The White House, March 25, 2022). Furthermore, President Biden announced an additional eight hundred million in security assistance to Ukraine on April 13, 2022 (Estrin, 2022), bringing the total aid provided to Ukraine to two billion dollars since the beginning of the Biden administration (The White House, March 16, 2022).

From April 7 to April 11, polling firm Dynata, in cooperation with Quinnipiac University Poll, surveyed 1,256 American adults about the conflict in Ukraine (Malloy and Schwartz, 2022). When asked if the United States has a moral responsibility to do more to stop the killing of civilians in Ukraine, 68% of respondents said that the United States does have a responsibility, while 24% said that it does not and 8% said that they were unsure or did not respond (Malloy and Schwartz, 2022). Additionally, when the respondents were asked which perspective most fit their view of the conflict, 19% said that the United States should provide more support to Ukraine, even if it increases the risk of war with Russia; 52% said to provide more support to Ukraine, yet not to the extent where it will increase the chance of war with Russia; and 22% said that the United States is already providing the right amount of support (Malloy and Schwartz). It was observed that the American public sees Ukraine's dire need for help, but President Biden has not inserted the United States as a militaristic actor in the conflict to stop the humanitarian crisis. This discrepancy raises questions about the differences in motivations to intervene in humanitarian crises between the American public and the American president and the public's influence on the president's decision to intervene.

So, does American public opinion influence the President of the United States' decision to militarily intervene in humanitarian crises? To examine this, the research will analyze the alignment of humanitarian strategies between the American public and the American president,

which will expose the motivations of the public's approach to intervention and the motivations of the president's approach to intervention. Within the exposed motivations, it is expected to find that national interest is the most influential motivator in determining whether or not to intervene militaristically. Moral obligation is the other motivator expected to be found when shaping opinions and approaches for humanitarian intervention, but it is not expected for moral obligation motives to trigger the President to authorize militaristic intervention. *Thus, it is expected to find that national interest is a necessary motivator for the President to intervene militaristically on humanitarian grounds.* Since the national interest motivator must be the President's motive for intervention and there is no necessary motivation on the American public's side that incites militaristic intervention, *it is expected that public opinion will not influence the President's decision on humanitarian intervention.* Moral obligation may also be an additional motive subsequent to national interest, but it will not incite the authorization of militaristic intervention alone.

With this expected finding, the research estimates seven variations of motivations and outcomes by the public and the President, which can be seen in Table 1. The first variation assumes that if both the public and the President see national interest as a motive supporting militaristic intervention, then it is possible for militaristic intervention to occur. The second variation assumes that if both the public and the President sees moral obligation as a motive supporting humanitarian intervention, then it is expected that militaristic intervention will not occur. The third variation assumes that if the public sees a moral obligation motive to militaristically intervene and the President sees a national interest motive in support of intervention, then it is possible that militaristic intervention will occur. The fourth variation assumes that if the public sees a national interest motive in support for intervention and the

President sees a moral obligation motive, then it is expected that militaristic intervention will not occur. The fifth variation assumes that if the public sees a moral obligation motive to militaristically intervene and the President sees both national interest and moral obligation motives in support of intervention, then it is possible that militaristic intervention will occur. The sixth variation assumes that if the public has both a national interest and moral motive to militaristically intervene and the President solely has a national interest motive in support of militaristic intervention, then it is possible that militaristic intervention will occur. Lastly, the eighth variation assumes that if the public sees both national interest and moral motives in support of militaristic intervention and the President only sees a moral obligation, then it is expected that militaristic intervention will not occur.

**Table 1.**

*Motivations and its Expected Outcomes*

<b>The Public's Motive</b>	<b>The President's Motive</b>	<b>Expected Intervention Response</b>
National Interest	National Interest	Possible Militaristic Intervention
Moral Obligation	Moral Obligation	No Militaristic Intervention
Moral Obligation	National Interest	Possible Militaristic Intervention
National Interest	Moral Obligation	No Militaristic Intervention
Moral Obligation	National Interest/Moral Obligation	Possible Militaristic Intervention
National Interest/Moral Obligation	National Interest	Possible Militaristic Intervention
National Interest/Moral Obligation	Moral Obligation	No Militaristic Intervention

The United States is a known active and influential state in the international community and historically has participated in humanitarian interventions around the world through humanitarian aid, diplomacy, threats of sanctions, threats of the use of force, and military assistance. The definition of humanitarian intervention that will be used for the context of the paper comes from scholar Johnathan Moore. He defined humanitarian intervention as, "...action by international actors across national boundaries including the use of military force taken with the objective of relieving severe and widespread human suffering and violation of human rights within states where local authorities are unwilling or unable to do so" (Moore, 2007, pg. 169). Humanitarian crises that create the need for intervention include disasters that are man-made and natural, along with outbreaks of diseases. Man-made disasters include armed conflict, forced displacement, and mass refugee flows (Kohrt, et.al. 2019). Natural disasters include unpredictable events such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and droughts (Kohrt, et.al. 2019). Unfortunately, most severe humanitarian crises have multiple of these events occurring simultaneously. Yet, as seen in the Ukraine case, the United States does not always intervene militarily when large scale human rights atrocities and human suffering occur.

By analyzing American public opinion of the humanitarian cases of Darfur, Sudan in 2007, Libya in 2011, and Syria in 2013, the motivations of the American public on humanitarian intervention can be better understood. The analysis of public opinion is an important indicator, as the core of democracy in the United States is rooted in the voices of the people in both domestic and foreign affairs. American democracy was founded on the idea of proclaiming unalienable rights in 1776, which has led to a longstanding tradition of the United States being a "beacon of human rights" around the world (Schlesinger, 1978, pg. 505). It has been argued that this

foundation has created a national identity, linking the United States to humanitarian intervention overtime (Donnelly, 2013).

Throughout the rest of the paper, starting with the literature review, there will be further explanations from scholars regarding the four types of humanitarian interventions, national interest and morality as motivations to intervene, why interventions occur, and how public opinion on foreign policy is shaped. The following section lays out three case studies of humanitarian intervention in Sudan, Libya, and Syria. Of the three cases, only Libya had a militaristic intervention outcome. Speeches from American presidents to the American people are used to depict the crisis and used to give a timeline of events that occurred as the crisis unfolded. The discussion that follows looks at the empirical evidence observed from the case studies in connection with scholarship from the literature review, which sees if the expected findings were shown. Finally, the conclusion goes over the two main findings of the study, which are that public opinion does not impact the decision of the United States to militaristically intervene and national interest must be a necessary condition for militaristic intervention to occur. Additionally, the limitations of application of the study will be stated.

## ***Literature Review***

### **Types of Humanitarian Interventions**

According to Seybolt (2007), governments' interventions on humanitarian grounds have different considerations, strategies, and goals. In general, there are two considerations that governments must address: humanitarian considerations and political considerations. (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). Humanitarian considerations include addressing the lack of essential necessities that are needed to survive, such as food and water, and addressing the violence that the victims

are facing. Political considerations specifically focus on the victims and the perpetrators (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). Simply, humanitarian considerations focus on the “*what*” aspect of intervention and political considerations focus on the “*who*” aspect of intervention. In creating a humanitarian intervention response, whether militaristic or not, humanitarian considerations and political considerations must be used together.

The strategies for humanitarian intervention according to Seybolt (2007) include avoidance, deterrence, defense, compellence and offense (*Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*). Avoidance is simply defined as the “conscious effort not to engage an adversary in hostile confrontation” (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). The strategy of deterrence is the threat of taking forceful action if a specific action is taken by the adversary (Seybolt, 2007). The threat must be thought to be credible by the opponent for the strategy to succeed (Seybolt, 2007). The defense strategy is the physical action of using force to protect “something or someone” from an action that the adversary is taking (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 41). Compellence has the specific goal of persuading the adversary to exhibit “good behavior” and it is not used to “destroy the opponent” (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 41). The compellence strategy can be used by either the threat of the use of force or the actual use of force. Once the “good behavior” is exemplified by the adversary, the threats or the use of force will cease (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 41). The last strategy of offense must include the use of force and has the intention of defeating the opponent or occupying a specific place (Seybolt, 2007). Seybolt (2007) says that offensive action is rare when trying to save people, but it is not impossible (*Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*).

With these considerations and strategies in mind, Seybolt (2007) argues that there are four types or goals of humanitarian intervention: assisting aid delivery, protecting aid operations,

saving victims, and defeating perpetrators (*Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*). None of these types of interventions are exclusive from one another, as there can be multiple types of interventions occurring at the same time, but each requires different strategies to achieve the desired goal. The first type of humanitarian intervention, an intervention with the exclusive goal of assisting in aid delivery, has a humanitarian consideration of addressing essential needs of those suffering and requires the strategy of avoiding conflict. The political consideration is focused on the victims (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). The second type of humanitarian intervention, intervention with the exclusive goal of protecting aid operations, has the humanitarian consideration of providing those suffering with essential needs, but the political consideration is now on the perpetrator. The strategies required include deterrence and defense to ensure that the aid gets to the victims (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). The third type of humanitarian intervention, intervention with the exclusive objective to save the victims, has the humanitarian consideration of addressing the violence and a political consideration focused on the victims, causing the strategies to include deterrence, defense, and compellence (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40). Lastly, the fourth type of intervention, intervention with the exclusive objective to defeat the perpetrator, has the humanitarian consideration of addressing the violence and the political consideration of focusing on the perpetrator. Strategies then change to include offense, along with compellence (Seybolt, 2007, pg. 40).

The expected findings of this study rely on this categorization model of humanitarian intervention, as the research will be using the objectives and strategies to determine the American public's and the American president's motivations to intervene. Then, comparison of the two groups' motivations can occur, allowing the research to assume whether a militaristic intervention will occur. It is expected to find that if the political consideration in a humanitarian

intervention is focused on the victims, the first and third approaches to intervention, then the motive to militaristically intervene would be a moral motive. If the political consideration is focused on the perpetrator, the second and fourth types of intervention, then it is expected to find that the motive of intervention is out of national interest.

### **Types of Motivation Used for Humanitarian Intervention: National Interest**

There is a debate among scholars regarding which school of thought explains why the United States takes part in humanitarian intervention: realism or liberalism. Starting with realism, scholars in this school of thought generally have a pessimistic take towards the international system (Yoshida, 2018). Offensive realist scholars believe that states intervene in another country's affairs to gain power on the international level, thus benefiting their national interests. On the other hand, defensive realist scholars believe that a country intervenes specifically to protect the national interest that the state already has (Yoshida, 2018). Yet, these theorists have differing opinions on which identifiable factors cause national interest to be their motivations. Hans Morgenthau, a traditional neoclassical realist, says that human nature itself is power seeking (1967). He wrote, "Intervene we must where our national interest requires it and where our power gives us a chance to succeed. The choice of these occasions will be determined...by a careful calculation of the interest involved and the power available" (Morgenthau, 1967). In the neorealist theory, led by Kenneth Waltz, scholars believe that national interest is a motivator because the international system is anarchic (2010). With no overlooking world government controlling or monitoring the actions of independent states, there is no hierarchical order. This forces states to act in their interest because they are in a self-help system (Forsyth, 2011). Therefore, under these realist perspectives, humanitarian interventions

are not initiated because of the humanitarian crises that are occurring in another country, but they are initiated because of the need to protect their interests or gain more interests (Donnelly, 2013).

The 1994 American intervention in Haiti that avoided large flows of refugees to the United States and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to secure American oil supply are examples of the differing realist perspectives (Choi, 2013). In 1994, under the Clinton administration, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorized the first resolution that allowed the use of force to restore democracy and peace to a member nation of the United Nations: Haiti (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Operation Uphold Democracy, the official name of the Haitian mission, had the goal of reinstating the first popularly elected government of Jean- Bertrand Aristide back into office, as a coup overthrew him in September, 1991. The non-democratic Haiti threatened the democratization and economic development of Haiti and nations in the Caribbean, causing the United States and other UNSC members to see this as a threat to their economic and political interests. Thus, Operation Uphold Democracy was created out of defensive realist motives. By removing the military led government and reinstating the Aristide government, threats of an increase in instability in the Haitian economy and a large influx of Haitian refugees coming to the United States were prevented, saving the United States from addressing these threats (Office of the Historian, n.d.).

The humanitarian intervention in Iraq in 2003 depicts the offensive realist theory. In general, there are many debated factors as to why the United States decided to intervene in Iraq, such as the country's link to terrorism, ridding of any possibility for Iraq to create weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the United States wanting to visibly show its military might (Heinrich, 2015). But, the United States also needed to secure more open relations with Iraq to ensure American access to Iraqi oil supply (Heinrich, 2015). Although securing oil supply was

an unofficial reason for the intervention, it was an important motivator. This depicts offensive realism in that the United States acted forcefully to gain a benefit that they previously did not have: access to the second largest oil supply in the world (Heinrich, 2015). The other determining factors of Iraq providing support to terrorism and creating weapons of mass destruction, would incite defensive realist responses, as the United States was acting militarily to prevent new threats of terror attacks and widespread killings using WMD.

By analyzing the case studies chosen, it is expected to find that the United States President will authorize militaristic intervention on humanitarian grounds when the President sees national interest as a motive to intervene. Specifically, it is expected to find that if either offensive or defensive realist motives are present, then intervention will occur. From 2008 to 2013, the United States was still involved in actions limiting global terrorism and ensuring that the United States will never endure another terrorist attack similar to 9/11. American national security, a national interest motive at the forefront of this foreign policy agenda, incites both offensive and defensive realist actions. Humanitarian crises specifically would provoke these actions if governments who are actively creating the crisis are negatively impacting or have the potential to negatively impact the security of nations outside of their borders.

### **Types of Motivation Used for Humanitarian Intervention: Morality**

The moral argument for humanitarian intervention in its most simplest form is that by partaking in intervention, it shows fundamental respect to other human beings. According to Rorty, human solidarity, or the mutual respect of human beings that is within every person, is our essential humanity (1989). This theory is at the core of the human rights and humanitarianism, as when people purposefully avoid addressing brutal attacks, genocides, and human rights abuses, they are deemed inhumane (Rorty, 1989). Thus, they are not acting to the fullness of their

humanity and respecting others as human beings (Rorty, 1989). With this, all humanitarian crises are supposed to create moral outrage universally, causing there to be some type of intervention out of respect for those suffering. Along similar lines, classical liberals believe individuals have fundamental natural rights, but they also believe that each person has the right to liberty, property, and ethical treatment (Charvet and Kaczynska-Nay, 2008).

On the other hand, the focus of contemporary liberal internationalists is to explain how intervention based on national interest is not a determining factor in humanitarian interventions. Walzer (2010), a theorist in this section of liberalism, states that humanitarian interventions must be multilateral operations with given authorization by the United Nations Security Council (Doyle and Recchia, 2011). Through multilateralism and authorization from an international organization, contemporary liberal internationalists believe that it prevents states from acting on the basis of national interest, as a state cannot only take into account their interests when working with another state or organization (Doyle and Recchia, 2011). Additionally, working with international organizations who have a focus on humanitarian work will influence the acting state to promote humanitarian relief as its motivator (Doyle and Recchia, 2011).

Yet, although the fundamental aspect of humanity would call for intervention out of this moral element, there is a variance in when the United States decides to intervene. The variance of intervention can be explained by the common humanity theory. This view states that a nation is only responsible for the security and welfare of its own citizens and the state's moral duties are thus limited only to those citizens (Rorty, 1989). Under this view, the United States has no moral requirement to help those in humanitarian crises in other nations, yet it does create the option for them to choose when to intervene. The responsibility to protect doctrine, or R2P, is a liberal principle that gives member states of the United Nations the ability to intervene if they see fit.

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty created the doctrine due to the insufficient responses to genocides and ethnic cleansings that took place in the 1990s, referring to the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. The non-interference of sovereignty principle arguably halted outside countries from stepping in (Thakur, 2011). R2P, according to the ICISS, has three elements: "...states have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens from crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and war crimes, the international community has the responsibility to assist states in fulfilling their responsibility to protect citizens, and the international community has the responsibility to react to human rights violations if states are unable or unwilling to fulfill their responsibility through political or economic sanctions, and use of force as a last resort" (Bellamy, 2010). This doctrine is said to have emerged out of the idea of moral responsibility, but some scholars question the claim.

Moses critiques the responsibility to protect from a realist perspective. With the permanent members of the UNSC consisting of China, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and France, realists argue that the decision to intervene does not represent the entire international community (2013). With these five countries being consistently involved in crises and expected to respond through the United Nations, they are able to let more of their national interests influence them. The other ten countries in the security council, the non-permanent members, are regarded as not having enough consistent influence in interventions and do not have the power to veto decisions. Therefore, not all of the regions are represented and the national interest of specific nations is able to be identified (Moses, 2013). Additionally, some realists say that national interests are more important than moral duty, making them less likely to respond in the principle of responsibility to protect (Yoshida, 2013).

Based on this literature, it is expected to find that there may be apparent moral motivations for militaristic humanitarian intervention by both the American public and the American President, but the moral motivations alone will not be enough to authorize a militaristic operation. Therefore, if moral motives are the sole motivators among the public and the President, militaristic intervention will not occur. The absence of a doctrine requiring any type of humanitarian intervention in the international community in addition to the United States aligning with the common humanity theory and agreeing to the R2P doctrine allows for the United States to intervene when they deem it necessary, regardless of moral motives.

### **Public Opinion on Intervention**

Historically, there has been a debate in literature on whether public opinion within democracies had a measurable impact on foreign policy decisions (Soroka, 2003). According to earlier literature, it was believed that public opinion on foreign policy related issues was not reliable, as their opinions were “volatile and lacked coherent structure,” while assuming that the public mainly followed and agreed with the decisions that elites made (Almond 1950, Lipset 1966). In the 1990s, scholars started recognizing that public opinion on foreign policy was constant, as the public’s individual and collective behavior is “efficient and rational” (Page and Shapiro 1992, Popkin 1994). Although the latter perspective is becoming more recognized, there is not a widespread consensus among scholars that makes it the most prominent approach. (Soroka, 2003).

The United States, being one of the permanent members of the UNSC and one of the most active interventionists in the international community, has a democratic foundation that recognizes public opinion when making decisions regarding foreign policy. This includes humanitarian intervention. In general, when there is public support for humanitarian intervention,

it means that Americans believe that it is in the United States' interest to protect foreign civilians and the cost is worth it (Kreps and Maxey, 2018). But what causes Americans to think this way? Goldsmith and Posner show that instrumental calculations are used within humanitarian interventions (2005). If these instrumental calculations are the main drivers of interventions, the government must convince the public that the cost of deployment will be low and national interest is at stake (Goldsmith and Posner, 2005). Other literature says that moral obligation is at the forefront of public opinion. With this perception, evidence of human suffering and violence would be sufficient evidence to gain support for intervention (Finnemore, 2003).

By looking at this literature on public opinion on intervention, it is expected to see that the formation of public opinion on militaristic intervention was formed by instrumental calculations, such as cost and benefit. With these instrumental calculations forming opinions, the opinion will be created with national interest in mind rather than moral obligation. If moral obligation was at the forefront of opinion, then costs and benefits would be taken into account. Yet, during 2008 to 2013, American foreign policy had shifted to be very security focused, causing the United States' actions to be even more focused on national interest rather than morality. By looking at the case study analysis and public opinion analysis of Sudan, Libya, and Syria from 2008 to 2013, the national interest and the moral motives in support of intervention by the public and the President will be revealed. It is predicted that when the President has national interest motives to intervene, there will be a militaristic intervention. Additionally, it is expected to see public opinion not play a role in the decision to intervene, as only the President's national interest motive is necessary for militaristic intervention to occur.

## *Case Studies*

The scholarship has shown that there are two main motives involved in humanitarian intervention, national interest and moral obligation, and there are debates as to which is used during these crises. Regardless of the debate, it is possible for both national interest and moral obligation to create high public support for humanitarian intervention. The research examines which motive receives the most support for humanitarian intervention, but based on the literature presented, there is an expectation that there will be more public support for humanitarian intervention based on the grounds of national interest.

In this section, cases of humanitarian intervention from 2008 to 2013 will be examined, including the United States' response to the ethnic cleansing in Sudan, the United States' response against the Qaddafi regime in Libya, and the United States response to the al-Assad regime in Syria. Each case study is presented chronologically. Each step the United States chose to take during the humanitarian crises comes from the White House archives of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, which contain transcripts of speeches and press releases from each president during the time of the crises. The answers and addresses to the American public give insight to the president's motivations and reasons as to why intervention should or should not occur. Additionally, by breaking down each decision leading up to the final decision to intervene or not, it allows for analysis of public opinion at different points in time during the crisis. Changes in public support for intervention will then be more apparent.

These cases were chosen due to the use of multilateralism and the final decision on whether to intervene on the behalf of the United States. Multilateralism, specifically authorization by the UNSC, is a necessary element for an acceptable intervention in the international community, but it is not a sufficient element to cause intervention. This allows for a

comparison of similar cases with different outcomes. Also, if each case was not at this standard, the motivations found would have taken the research away from specific motivations to intervene on humanitarian grounds, as the research would be led in the direction of finding the motivations as to why multilateralism should or should not be used. The second reason these three humanitarian crises were chosen was due to the United States' different response method and how it aligned with the American public's support for intervention. The case in Sudan ended with a low militaristic response by the United States, yet militaristic intervention had very high support by the American people. The case in Libya had a high militaristic response by the United States, but moderately low public support for military intervention. Lastly, in the case of Syria, there was a low militaristic response by the United States and low support for militaristic intervention by the American people. With each case having varying outcomes which did or did not align with public opinion, it creates a broad study that will help show differences or similarities in motivations across studies. The study may also show findings that are contradictory to the research question. The motivations expected to be found are national interest and moral obligation, yet it is possible that neither of these motives will be found in the three cases examined, or that there may be a mix of both within the three cases.

**Table 2.**

*Public Support of Intervention Compared with U.S. Response*

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Amount of Public Support</b>	<b>United States Response</b>	<b>Did public support align with the U.S. Response?</b>
Sudan, 2003	Majority in favor of using force	Sent humanitarian aid and supported United Nations peacekeeping forces	No
Libya, 2011	Low support for use	Force was used:	No

	of force	multilateral airstrikes	
Syria, 2013	Low support for use of force	Diplomacy: implementation of a United Nations weapons monitoring program	Yes

The method of surveying consisted of questioning through telephone calls and questioning through a fully online platform. With the expansion of technology occurring from 2004 to 2014, polling centers and networks who fielded the studies, such as Zogby America, Knowledge Networks, Princeton Survey Research Associates International, Gallup Poll, Globe Scan, and the Program on International Policy Attitudes, were able to incorporate online surveys rather than solely using the telephone method. Random sampling was used in each survey and each of the respondents were paneled based on whether households had a telephone. This included either a landline or a cellular phone. For those surveys that were solely using an internet platform, each polling network made sure to not have over-representation of respondents with computers in the household. Therefore, they continued to do their random sampling using telephone paneling and provided all households willing to participate with the internet and a computer to fill out the survey. The data from the Sudan case study was collected by a mixture of telephone interviews and internet surveys from 2004 to 2008. In data presented from the Libya case study, all of the surveys used were conducted by telephone interviews in 2011. Similarly, all of the surveys administered for the Syria case study were telephone interviews conducted from 2012 to 2013.

Limitations that can come about when using telephone interviews is the mode effect and the recency effect. The mode effect is when the respondents of a survey are less likely to be honest in their answers on sensitive topics. The method of surveying face to face or through

telephone interviews makes it more likely for respondents to not give their honest answers, as there is a slight pressure put on the respondent by having another person conduct the survey (Kennedy, 2019). Honest answers by the respondent may offend people or hurt the respondent's reputation, making it more likely for them to change their answer to present themselves as a good person (Keeter, 2015). Examples of sensitive questions have to do with family life, social life, income, and minority groups, but it has also been shown that political questions create this effect, too, as a result of social desirability bias. For example, when asked if George W. Bush was very favorable, favorable, unfavorable, or very unfavorable in a split survey with 1,509 internet surveys and 1,494 telephone surveys, 22% of phone interviews said that he was very unfavorable compared to the 31% of the internet surveys (Keeter, 2015). Additionally, 19% of phone interview respondents said that Hillary Clinton was very unfavorable, whereas 27% of internet survey respondents said that she was very unfavorable (Keeter, 2015).

Another limitation that may come as a consequence of the method of polling has to do with the wording of the questions, the wording of the responses, and the length of the responses. When partaking in a telephone interview, there are complex questions that may not be fully understood when read aloud to a respondent. Additionally, the respondent must understand the answer choices and have to attempt to remember each choice as they are being read through. Thus, the recency effect comes into play, where the last answer choice is favored (Keeter, 2015). Respondents taking an internet survey are less inclined to run into trouble with complex questions and answers, as they can reread and take the time to understand each.

The difference in outcomes of telephone surveys and internet surveys is important to note when looking at the case studies presented. With telephone interviews being the sole surveying method in the Libya case study and the Syria case study, it must be kept in mind that there may

be answers that do not truly reflect the respondents true thoughts, as there are risks of the respondent misunderstanding the question and the respondent answering with one of the last questions they heard. In the Sudan case study, both telephone interviews and internet surveys were used in the research. Regardless, these random samples allow for the research to have public opinion data on the entire American population, without having to survey the entire population.

Another factor that many also affect public opinion are prior events. The last military intervention on humanitarian grounds that the United States pursued before the three cases presented was the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003. This invasion under the Bush administration is highly contested for being motivated on humanitarian grounds, as some humanitarians say that it failed to meet the standard of humanitarianism (“War in Iraq: Not a Humanitarian Intervention,” 2004). The Bush administration was adamant about removing Saddam Hussein from office to set the Iraqi people free, ridding all weapons of mass destruction from Iraq, and protecting those innocent civilians and neighboring countries from the use of those weapons (Bush, March 18, 2003). Yet, as Human Rights Watch noted, there were no ongoing killings or imminent threats to Iraqi civilians by weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, there was no threat to the Iraqi people at the time and it delegitimized the need for militaristic intervention. The Iraq war was not primarily about saving civilians, which hurt the United States’ justification of the military invasion and it only made the motive of national interest and security more apparent (“War in Iraq: Not a Humanitarian Intervention,” 2004).

The Iraq war being the last militaristic humanitarian intervention by the United States is important to note before diving into the cases of Sudan, Libya, and Syria. The United States declaring war on terrorism after the 2001 terrorist attacks gives context into why the motives

regarding support of militaristic intervention in Iraq was high. This shift in American foreign policy also heavily impacts the expected findings of the case studies. Declaring a war on terror in response to the United States enduring the aftermath of the 2001 tragedies shows that the United States had their national security at the forefront of their foreign policy. Additionally, American allies' security was prioritized also, as it was in the national interest of the United States. When an American ally is attacked by a perpetrator, there is immediate damage to the security of the United States, as they lose an able partner that helps ensure the United States' security. This, in addition with the Iraq war, makes it expected to find that from 2003 to 2013, militaristic intervention will likely take place if national interest is at stake, as American resources are being saved and prioritized for those occurrences due to shifts in foreign policy.

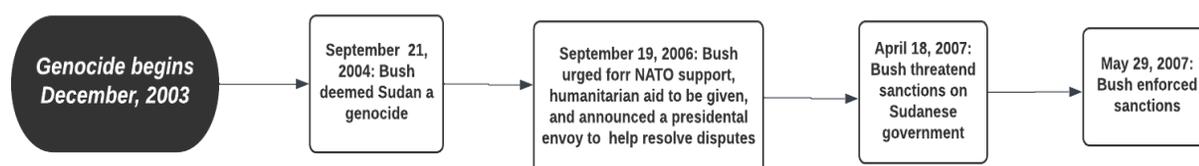
### **Case Study: Darfur, Sudan 2003**

The poor conditions of the Sudanese government in 2003 originated not only from continuous historical conflict, but from the specific transition of leadership to Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir in 1989. Al-Bashir led a military coup that removed Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi from office on June 30, 1989, which allowed al-Bashir to take control of the government and implement the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) as the main political coalition ("The Republic of the Sudan," n.d.). One of the primary goals of the new leadership was to forcefully influence the Sudanese people to live under Islamic law and standards, which created a divide between northern and southern Sudanese regions. Northern Sudan at the time had a population that was largely Muslim, whereas southern Sudan held more Christian and animist populations ("The Republic of the Sudan," n.d.). Since the forceful transition of power, the international community recognized and condemned human rights abuses that occurred in the country, such as the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemnations in 1998. Political violence

continued to be prevalent with recognizable clashes in the cities of Omdurman in 2000, Kassala and Aroma in 2001, and between the ethnic tribes al-Muaalia and Reizagat in 2002 (“The Republic of the Sudan,” n.d.).

*Figure 1.*

*Timeline of President Bush’s Actions in Sudanese Humanitarian Crisis*



In 2003, black African Muslims of the western Darfur region retaliated against the Arab Muslim leadership. The rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, demanded new development and infrastructure in the region, to stop government’s arming of ethnic Sudanese Arabs, to work to bridge the economic inequality between African Muslims and non-African Muslims, and to allow for equal representation of Africans and Arabs in the government (Sudan: Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur, Archives 2004). Instead of making reforms to help these communities, the Sudanese government responded by arming 20,000 Arab militiamen. The militia, known as the Janjaweed, operated mutually with the government, who allowed for the mass killings of civilians from the Fur, Masaalit, and Zaghawa ethnic groups (Sudan: Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur, Archives 2004).

On September 21, 2004, President George W. Bush gave a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, where he stated that the American government had deemed Sudan’s crimes a genocide (United Nations General Assembly Address, G. W. Bush September 2004). He urged

the government to stop the killing in Darfur and stated that the United States was sending humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people (United Nations General Assembly Address, G. W. Bush September 2004). But, according to a public opinion poll from the Department of State in 2005, a majority of the American public believed that the best solution was a multilateral United Nations operation, which would “step in with military force to stop the violence in Darfur” (Relief Web). 61% of Americans supported a military intervention, while 32% opposed it (Relief Web). Additionally, from a public opinion survey from Zogby International in 2005, it was found that of the 84% of American respondents who were in favor of using American military assets and believed that the United States should not tolerate extremist governments, 81% of them were in favor of implementing tough sanctions against Sudanese leaders (International Crisis Group). Similarly, 80% of them were in favor of a no-fly zone (International Crisis Group).

On September 19, 2006, during his United Nations address, President Bush urged the international community to aid those suffering in Darfur through humanitarian aid and by strengthening the African Union, the peacekeeping force that was in Sudan at the time (“Transcript of Bush U.N. Speech,” CNN). Bush asked NATO members to provide logistical support, such as transportation and supplies, to increase the effectiveness of the force and also announced Andrew Natsios, a former USAID administrator, as the presidential special envoy to aid in settling disagreements in the Sudanese crisis and help bring those agents in conflict to peace agreements (“Transcript of Bush U.N. Speech,” CNN). At this time, public support for military intervention had decreased, but a majority of Americans were still in support of it. When asked if they favored or opposed the use of American troops as a part of a multinational force to help end the ethnic genocide in a Pew Research Center poll in 2006, 53% of respondents favored

the use of troops, 38% opposed the use of troops, and 9% either “did not know” or refused to answer (Pew Research Center, 2006).

It was not until April 18, 2007, that President Bush discussed more aggressive steps the United States would take to bring peace to western Sudan. At this point in time, over 200,000 civilians had died from the conflict and two million people had fled from the country (White House Archives). With help from the United States, the Sudanese government and the largest rebel group came to a positive agreement where the government would stop arming the Janjaweed and would also punish those who violated the cease-fire. The rebel group agreed to dispersing into designated areas around Sudan (White House Archives). To the international community, this agreement brought optimism for peace and stability in Sudan. Additionally, a new agreement was authorized by the United States, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the government of Sudan, and twelve other nations that strengthened the cease-fire agreement and created a United Nations and African Union joint peacekeeping operation to be enacted to increase the number of peacekeepers patrolling Sudan (White House Archives). Overtime, these agreements were violated by the Sudanese government as arms continued to flow to the Janjaweed militia and more civilians were killed. It was then that President Bush urged President Bashir to meet his commitments or else the United States would block American dollar transactions from Sudan in the United States financial system, sanction individuals found committing human rights violations, cut violent actors access to the American financial system, put an embargo on American arm sales to Sudan, and prohibit Sudanese military flights over Darfur (White House Archives). On May 29, 2007, President Bush implemented those sanctions. Shortly after the Presidents threat of sanctions in April, President Bashir of Sudan bombed a meeting where rebel commanders were deliberating on making peace with the government

(White House Archives May 2007). Additionally, he continued to support attacks on rebels and civilians, he opposed the peacekeeping force coming into the country, and did not take any steps to disarm the government backed militias (White House Archives May 2007). Interestingly, public opinion on the genocide in Darfur changed within two years. In 2007, Americans were less likely to be in favor of the United States' partaking in a multilateral military intervention, as only 45% favored it (Rosentiel, 2007). This can be explained by compassion fatigue, meaning that interest in the issue lessened due to the assumption that African states are constantly in a cycle of violence.

The American government deemed genocide in Darfur continued to be an international crisis in 2008, as new peacekeeping forces had to be implemented. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1769 in July, which authorized the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and added support to the small African Union Mission in Darfur (AMIS) (U.S. Response to the Situation in Darfur 2008). The United States continued to support the peacekeeping mission and provided humanitarian assistance to those in the Darfur region. From 2005 to 2008, the United States provided \$4 billion in humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping assistance, along with \$100 million to equip and train those a part of UNAMID, constructed 34 base camps for peacekeepers in Darfur, and provided 40,000 metric tons of food monthly to Sudan (U.S. Response to the Situation in Darfur 2008). This was the full extent of the United States' aid to Sudan, which ultimately did not include military intervention.

As it was presented, the United States provided large amounts of humanitarian aid and was dedicated to strengthening peacekeeping forces in Sudan, but in the end, the United States government did not respond in the way that the American public wanted. There was a change in

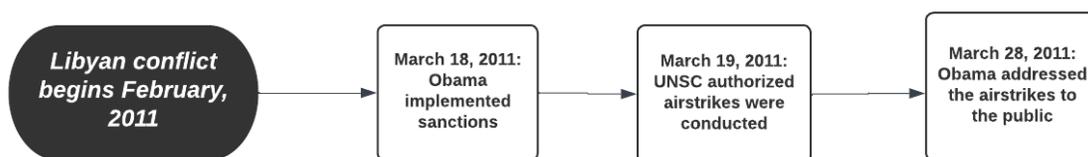
public opinion regarding the United States being a part of a multilateral force in Sudan to end the ethnic genocide, as in 2004, 61% of Americans favored it and in 2007, 45% favored it.

### **Case Study: Libya, 2011**

In 1969, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi led a coup that removed King Idris al-Sanusi I, a British supported leader, from being the leader of Libya and Qaddafi himself inherited the ruling power of the country (Kafala, 2011). During his forty-two years of ruling, Qaddafi made changes that were considered radical to the previous government, as he started a new cultural revolution in 1973. By banning private enterprises, public foreign investments, and private foreign investments, along with squandering the right to freedom of speech, Qaddafi implemented a socialist government which led to sharp economic decline (Kafala, 2011). Libyan socialism did provide free education, healthcare, transport, and subsidized housing, but wages are extremely low for the general public. On top of these policy changes, Qaddafi's regime was openly murdering those civilians in Libya and abroad who were against his policies (Kafala).

### **Figure 2.**

#### ***Timeline of President Obama's Actions in Libyan Humanitarian Crisis***



The Arab Spring, anti-government civilian protests and uprisings that started in Tunisia and spread to Arab nations in the Middle East and North Africa, led to the Libyan civil war in 2011. The Arab Spring, which started in 2010, was seeing success in ousting disliked leaders, such as the Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (Holmes 2020). Muammar Qaddafi, the leader of Libya at the time, had taken away basic human

rights from his people, abused their wealth, and detained or killed those who opposed him (White House Archives, March 2011). Inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan people started protesting the government in hopes to take back their basic freedoms, but Qaddafi responded by forcefully attacking them. Although the international community condemned the actions of Qaddafi, he launched military operations through the use of ground forces and air assaults against the Libyan people, where hospitals and civilians were targeted; journalists were detained and killed; water, food, and energy supplies were shut off from the people; and mosques and housing were destroyed (White House Archives, March 2011).

Before President Obama made an official statement about the Libyan conflict, the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,001 Americans on March 10, 2011. When asked if they would favor or oppose the United States and its allies increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Libya, 51% favored the sanctions, 40% opposed the sanctions, and 9% “did not know” or refused to answer (Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya, Pew Research 2011). Furthermore, when they were asked if they would favor or oppose the United States enforcing a “no-fly zone” over Libya, 44% favored the action, 45% opposed the action, and 11% “did not know” or refused to answer (Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya, Pew Research 2011). At this point, only an estimate of three hundred Libyans were killed, showing that the violence was limited (“Libya Protests: Defiant Gaddafi Refuses to Quit,” 2011).

President Barack Obama addressed the American public about the ongoing crisis on March 18, 2011, saying that the United Nations Security Council, which includes the United States, had imposed an arms embargo and sanctions on the regime. They warned that Qaddafi would be held accountable for his actions if the terror did not stop, but he only amplified his attacks and threatened Benghazi, a Libyan city that had a population of 700,000 at the time

(White House Archives, March 18, 2011). Qaddafi called on his supporters, “those who love Muammar Qaddafi,” to come out of their homes and attack rebels in their dens (“Libya Protests: Defiant Gaddafi Refuses to Quit,” 2011). Qaddafi assured the people of Benghazi that he would “cleanse Libya house by house” of rebels and protesters trying to divide Libya (“Libya Protests: Defiant Gaddafi Refuses to Quit,” 2011). This threat was a turning point for President Obama, as it made it clear that Qaddafi was thinking about committing more large-scale atrocities, which would make the humanitarian crisis worse, create regional instability, and destroy values of democracy (White House Archives, March 18, 2011). Thus, the decision to create a strong response to the regime’s actions through the United Nations was essential to specifically protect civilians and hold Qaddafi accountable. These were the two clear and primary goals of the United States (White House Archives, March 18 2011).

In response to a call from the Arab League and the Libyan people, the United Nations Security Council, with the United States taking the lead, authorized the use of force to stop the killing of civilians and to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya, while demanding the end to violence (White House Archives, March 18, 2011). President Obama assured the people that the use of force was not the desired American response, ground troops will not be deployed, and the United States would not be working alone, as their British allies, French allies, and the Arab League were prepared to enforce the resolution (White House Archives, March 18, 2011). Although there was indecisiveness among the public, forceful action was taken by the international coalition on March 19, 2011.

Days after the airstrikes occurred, Gallup Poll measured Americans' approval of President Obama’s decision. 1,010 Americans were asked if they approved or disapproved of the current military actions taken against Libya and 47% of Americans approved of the military

action, whereas 37% opposed it (Jones, 2011). 16% had no opinion on the issue (Jones, 2011). Five months later, in September of 2011, the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,001 Americans on the previous military actions in Libya. When asked if the United States and its allies made the right or wrong decision in conducting airstrikes in Libya, 44% said they made the right decision, 33% said they made the wrong decision, and 23% “did not know” or refused to answer (Pew Research Center 2011).

Throughout the quick progression of the decision making to act militaristically in Libya, it was found that the American public had a consistent stance on the United States’ actions, but there was no overwhelming majority in favor of using military force. In regards to the motives of the American people’s opinions on military intervention, it was found from the Pew Research Center survey conducted before the airstrikes that only 20% of Americans believed that the United States had a moral obligation to stop the violence in Libya (Pew Research Center, March 2011). The respondents were asked which was the best argument for using military force in Libya and 32% said that it shows the United States backs democracy and 21% of Americans said that removing Qaddafi would win support of the Libyan people (Pew Research Center, March 2011). Although many were against militaristic intervention, it can be seen from this poll that the highest percentage believed that the best reason to intervene militaristically was to back democracy. In liberalism, it is in the national interest of the United States to uphold and fight for democracy in the international community, as the focus of national interest in liberal theory is to create and enhance peace between nations (Manan). The United States aligned with the liberal view as promoting a democratic nation in North Africa would ensure more peace and stability in the region. Additionally, the respondents were asked which would be the best argument for not using military force in Libya. 51% said that the military was already overcommitted, 19% said

that the opposition groups may be worse than the current government, and 13% said that Libya is not an American vital interest (Pew Research Center, March 2011). Of these arguments, Americans believed that overcommitting the military is the best reason as to why the United States should not intervene in Libya. This is a defensive realist national interest motive, as the American public believed that the United States should not risk the security of other interests.

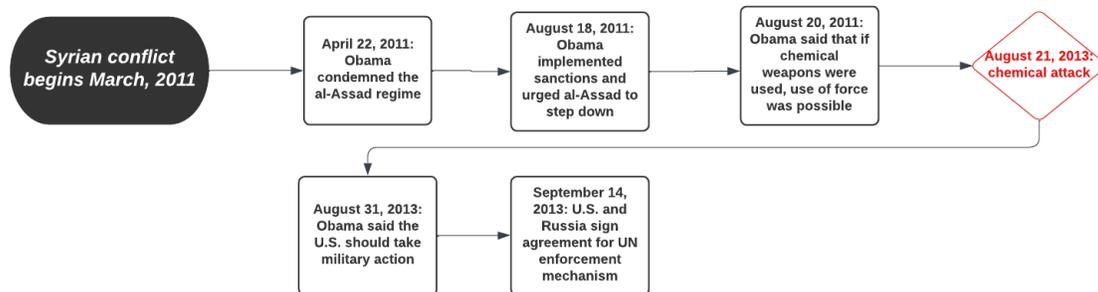
### **Case Study: Syria, 2013**

In 2000, Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father, Hafez al-Assad, becoming the new President of Syria. Syria had been under authoritarian control under Hafez al-Assad and Syrians hoped that Bashar al-Assad would break away from this trend, but oppression continued (“Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: Facing Down Rebellion,” 2020). Assad played with the idea of implementing new reforms, such as battling corruption, modernizing the economy, and allowing for a more democratic government. In 2001, he released over six hundred political prisoners, allowed for independent newspapers to begin publishing after three decades of oppression, and reformers were allowed to hold public meetings to discuss new policy (“Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: Facing Down Rebellion,” 2020). These small and newfound freedoms, known as the “Damascus Spring,” were short lived. The independent newspapers were shut down and political meetings were outlawed again. The liberal economic policies that were implemented only benefited a narrow group of elites (“Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: Facing Down Rebellion.” 2020). Seeing the impact of the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, along with experiencing freedoms being restored and then taken again only fueled Syrians with anger and the desire for consistent change, which led to hopeful riots and protests in March of 2011. But these protests only led to the start of the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian military put down

protests with force, arrested and tortured civilians, and open fired on unarmed groups, which created more internal fighting and international condemnation (Laub 2021).

**Figure 3.**

***Timeline of President Obama’s Actions in Syrian Humanitarian Crisis***



On August 18, 2011, President Obama released a statement calling for Bashar al-Assad to “step aside” as the Syrian leader (Phillips 2011). The brutal onslaught against civilians who wanted a peaceful transition to a democratic government showed the absolute lack of respect that the regime had for its people. President Obama stated that the United States understood that the country did not want foreign intervention, but the country would continue to support them in their fight for universal rights and the building of democratic institutions (Phillips 2011). To urge al-Assad to step down, Executive Order 13582 was signed the same day, prohibiting new American investment in Syria, exports of all American products and services to Syria, and imports to the United States of Syrian oil (Phillips 2011). On August 20, 2012, when it was suspected that the Syrian government was producing internationally illegal chemicals, President Obama stated that the use of chemical or biological weapons would call for the United States to change its calculations on how to respond, as chemical warfare puts risks the stabilization of American allies in the region, not only Syria (Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps, 2012). This was President Obama’s “red line” (Remarks by the President to the White

House Press Corps, 2012). In April of 2013, the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,003 Americans regarding the Syrian conflict. When asked if the United States and its allies should take military action in Syria if it was found that chemical weapons were used against the Syrian people by their own government, 45% of Americans were in favor of using military force, 31% of Americans were opposed to it, and 23% “did not know” or refused to answer (Modest Support for Military Force if Syria Used Chemical Weapons, Pew Research 2013).

On August 21, 2013, the al-Assad regime unleashed the chemical sarin gas against its people, which has been deemed a weapon of mass destruction under international law (Laub 2021). It is at this point where President Obama releases a statement saying that he believed the United States needed to take military action against the regime, but only if Congress approved it (“Obama Seeks Approval by Congress for Strike in Syria,” 2013). Not responding was seen as risk to American national security, basic human dignity, and American allies (Statement by the President on Syria 2013). The forceful action proposed was said to be “limited in duration and scope”, would not include putting military forces on the ground to intervene in the civil war, and would be targeted to degrade the al-Assad regime’s capacity to carry out the use of chemical weapons (Statement by the President on Syria 2013). Days after the chemical strikes, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll and surveyed 1,000 Americans. When asked if there was clear evidence that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons against civilians, 53% of respondents said that there was clear evidence, 23% said that there was not clear evidence, and 24% “did not know” or refused to answer (“Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes,” 2013). Additionally, they were asked if they would be in favor or oppose the United States conducting military airstrikes against Syria in response to the government using chemical

weapons. Only 29% favored airstrikes, 48% opposed them, and 23% “did not know” or refused to answer (“Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes,” 2013).

In the end, President Obama did not ask for Congress’ approval and airstrikes on targeted Syrian chemical sites were not authorized, as the United States and Russia came to a diplomatic agreement where both countries would denounce the use of chemical weapons, pressure al-Assad to reveal his chemical sites, allow the removal of the weapons by the United Nations, and allow for a United Nations enforcement mechanism (Strobel and Karouny 2013). Overall, it can be seen that there was a change in support for military force against the al-Assad regime if chemical weapons were used. In April of 2013, before the chemical attack occurred, there was a plurality of Americans who were in favor of the United States and its allies using military force if any chemical weapons were unleashed. Yet, when the chemicals were authorized and used against the Syrian people, the plurality changed to being opposed to using military force.

## *Discussion*

### **Analysis of the Motivations of Each Humanitarian Intervention**

It was expected that the literature on the different objectives of the four types of humanitarian interventions from Seybolt (2007) would reveal the motivations of the public and the President supporting militaristic intervention, but this assumption was shown to be false. I assumed that specific goals and considerations would be particularly attached to a national interest or a moral motive. By looking at the objectives in each case study, national interest or moral motives for militaristic intervention were not apparent, as the objectives are too general to explain why the goal of intervention was established. In each case study, the question of why the

goal was established was left unanswered, showing categorizing the type of humanitarian intervention is not enough information to understand the motives behind the intervention.

In the Sudan case study, the public wanted the United States to use military force to stop the murders that occurred in Darfur, Sudan. This military force that the majority was in favor of included a “boots on the ground” approach. Therefore, the public’s wanted intervention approach had the goal of either saving the victims or defeating the perpetrators, as the strategies of offense, defense, and compellence would have been necessary to stop the genocide. Ultimately, this approach was not the response that the United States took. Instead, President Bush decided to use a strategy that avoided conflict unless it was in defense. The focus of President Bush’s approach was to provide essential supplies to the people of Sudan and to protect those peacekeeping operations delivering the supplies in the conflict torn region. The strategy used involved deterrence and defense, meaning that the use of force was only used if any of the perpetrators were trying to disrupt, damage, or take supplies provided for those suffering. The application of Seybolt’s (2007) objectives and strategies to the Sudan case study does not explain the motives behind President Bush deciding to take the route that protected aid delivery or the public’s desire to militaristically intervene in Sudan. It allows for moral arguments to be made as to why the public wanted militaristic intervention and why President Bush did not, as they could have been out of national interest or morality, but there is no information through the strategies or goals that explain the motive further.

Similarly in the case of Libya, the public and the President had different approaches for humanitarian intervention. The majority of the American public did not want the United States to authorize a militaristic humanitarian intervention in Libya, showing that the public wanted to take an avoidance of conflict approach. President Obama thought otherwise and the outcome of

the Libya case study shows that the objective taken was to save the victims and the strategies used were deterrence and defense, as the airstrikes allowed for area protection around Benghazi. Again, by simply looking at these objectives and strategies, it only allows for assumptions. Research can assume that protecting the people of Benghazi was out of moral obligation or it can assume that it was in the United States' best interest security wise to act militarily. Thus, it is not possible to understand what the motives were behind the goals, again showing that Seybolt's (2007) model cannot prove the motivations of national interest or moral obligation.

The case of Syria depicted Seybolt's (2007) first type of humanitarian intervention, as the goal was to assist in delivering aid and the strategy taken was to avoid conflict. Avoiding conflict was the ultimate strategy agreed to by both the public and President Obama, but when the public found out about the potential of a chemical attack in Syria, a plurality of Americans thought that the goal of saving the victims with the strategies of deterrence, defense, and compellence were best. Furthermore, when the chemical attack occurred, President Obama considered saving the victims as the best goal when he planned on asking Congress for approval on the airstrikes, but diplomatic opportunities came before that was necessary. Although the idea of a chemical attack creates an assumption that intervention is needed to protect the lives of the civilians, a moral motive, there is also an assumption that there is a motive to protect American or regional security, which is a national interest motive. Seybolt's (2007) model allows for these assumptions, but there is no way to find the true motive of wanting the militaristic intervention. Thus, research has to dissect public opinion polls and language in the president's speeches to establish a national interest or moral motive.

### **Analysis of National Interest and Moral Obligation**

In all three cases, it is seen that national interest or moral obligation were factors in the public's opinion and the American President's opinion to intervene with military force, but one weighed more than the other in each case. The case of genocide in Darfur, Sudan showed that the American public had a sense of responsibility to intervene and should use military force compared to the cases of Libya and Syria, which showed that the public did not believe the United States had a responsibility nor should use force. The language of the polls, referring to the term "responsibility," raises the idea of obligation out of some type of motive. National interest did not seem to be the motive, as President Bush focused on the killing and brutal treatment of civilians in his speeches. He appealed to the moral side of the issue. This case was a moral issue to the public, also. A 2007 poll of 1,044 Americans from the Pew Research Center asked about the public's news interest of the genocide in Darfur ("Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq"). From 2004 to 2007, when respondents were asked if they followed the ethnic violence in the Darfur region of Sudan very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely in the news, majority of respondents either answered "not that closely" or "not at all closely" ("Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq"). Furthermore, in the International Crisis Group 2005 survey of 1,000 Americans, 80% of respondents said that the Sudanese attacks "are crimes against humanity or genocide" ("Do Americans Care About Darfur"). With little knowledge on what was occurring in Darfur through the news, with many thinking that there was too little coverage of the violence in the region and a majority did not follow it closely, it shows that the motivator of humanitarian intervention was moral duty ("Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq"). Shifting from a majority to a plurality from 2005 to 2007, the American people believed that the United States should contribute troops to stop the violence with very little knowledge about the background

and factual information about the crisis. All they heard was the term “genocide” being used by the American government. Darfur is a great example of how use of the term genocide is a trigger word that causes Americans to feel as if they have a moral responsibility to intervene in humanitarian crises. Although American public opinion showed that a majority wanted military intervention out of moral obligation, the American President decided not to respond in this way, making his decision not align with public opinion. President Bush not ordering a militaristic intervention aligns with the expectation that if both the public and the president’s motive was based on moral obligation, then there would be no militaristic intervention.

Regarding national interest in Libya and Syria, President Obama used national interest motivators to persuade the American people that military intervention on humanitarian grounds were necessary. For the crisis in Libya, President Obama discussed how the humanitarian crisis that would ensue after Qaddafi's large scale attack on his people would create destabilization in the region, endanger American allies in the region, and it would rid of democratic values that are trying to grow in the region (“Remarks by President on Situation in Libya,” March 18, 2011). After the international coalition bombed Qaddafi's troops going towards Benghazi and in neighboring cities and Qaddafi's air defenses to allow for supplies to be spread to the Libyan people and prevent a large scale attack on Benghazi, President Obama attempted to persuade the American people that this was the best choice for the United States’ national interest, although the American public did not initially want a militaristic interventionist response (“Remarks by President on Situation in Libya,” March 28, 2011). He notes that the United States has been a defender of human rights and freedom for generations, but when specific American national interest and values are at stake, action is necessary (“Remarks by President on Situation in Libya,” March 28, 2011). Again it is shown that President Obama partially had a moral duty to

help the people of Libya, as he wanted to save the people in Benghazi, but national interest was the primary motive that called for action. This case study aligns with the expectations that if the American president sees a national interest motivator in addition to a moral motivator, militaristic intervention will occur. It also aligns with the claim that public opinion does not truly influence decision making for humanitarian interventions. A plurality of Americans believed that the best argument for the United States using military force in Libya was to show that the United States backs democracy in the international community (Pew Research, March 10, 2011). Upholding democracy is a national interest motive. Therefore, both the president and the public had national interest motivators to intervene, yet since the president has the necessary condition of national interest, public opinion did not matter in the decision.

The Syria case study is an outlier regarding the expectations. Although President Obama saw many national interest motivators that he saw fit to militaristically intervene, a diplomatic route was taken. President Obama explained to the American public that by militaristically intervening in Syria, human rights abuses, failing democracy, regional destabilization, mass refugee flows, and the use of internationally deemed weapons of mass destruction would be prevented (“Statement by President Obama on Syria,” April 22, 2011). Even with proof of the use of sarin gas, the American public did not see it fit to intervene militaristically, as airstrikes would likely lead to long-term commitment in Syria (Gallup, August 29, 2013). This worry about military commitment is an instrumental calculation used for national interest and the public weighed the cost and benefits of intervention. In the end, both the public and the president had national interest motives, but they each weighed the costs and benefits differently, as the public saw the cost of intervention being too high and the president saw the benefit of intervention being higher than the costs. The role of the public having an impact on the decision

making to intervene is interesting in this case, as the public received the outcome that they wanted. This was not seen in the two previous cases.

### **Analysis of the Formation of Public Opinion on Intervention**

According to the literature, there are two prominent claims as to why humanitarian interventions occur. The first claim, presented by Jack Goldsmith and Eric Posner, say that the most prominent motivator of interventions are instrumental calculations (*Limits of International Law*, 2005). Instrumental calculations include national interest and the cost of interventions (*Limits of International Law*, 2005). The second claim, presented by Finnemore (2003), says that moral obligation is at the forefront of public opinion for humanitarian intervention as the evidence of humanitarian crises are sufficient for intervention (*The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force*). The case studies chosen show that instrumental calculations and moral obligations both are factors in the decision making of whether to intervene or not. In each case study, instrumental calculations and moral motives were found in all areas of public opinion, but each motivator is weighed differently on a case by case basis. For example, in the Sudan case, genocide caused for moral obligations to be at the forefront of public opinion, as the term genocide immediately triggers a moral obligation to save the victims. In the Libya and Syria case on the other hand, national interest was at the forefront of public opinion, as the cost-benefit analysis of committing the American military was important. Therefore, the expectation of instrumental calculations playing a role in the formation of public opinion did align, but the research found that it is not solely the use of instrumental calculations to form public opinion, as the calculations can be mixed with moral obligation.

Some scholars believed that the American public's opinion was unreliable as they would simply follow the beliefs of politicians and would change their stance on issues without substantive reasoning (Almond 1950, Lipset 1966). Yet, from 2003 to 2013, it can be seen that the public had differing views than the American President. Although mainly seen in the Sudan and Libya studies, this also was seen in the case of Syria. The American public in both the Sudan and Libya cases had differing views from the American President on how to approach each crisis. In the Syria case, it is initially shown that the American public and the President had differing views, but a diplomatic opportunity opened up to allow the President to choose the public's approach. This simply shows growth in American democracy, as after half a century from Almond (1950) and Lipset's (1966) research, Americans have been able to become more involved in politics and self-reliant in their thinking.

The second claim, that the public changed its view on foreign policy issues without substantive reasoning, is also not supported in the cases examined. Although in the cases of Libya and Syria there were noticeable changes in opinion, the reasoning was structured and was rational. In April of 2012, before the chemical weapons unleashed in Syria, 45% of Americans were in favor of the United States and its allies taking military action if it was confirmed that chemicals were used (Pew Research Center, "Modest Support for Military Force if Syria Used Chemical Weapons"). After the chemical attack on August 21, 2013, American support for military assistance dropped to 29% even though 53% of Americans believed that there was clear evidence that chemical weapons had been used against civilians by the Syrian government (Pew Research Center, "Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes"). During this time, the United States military was committed overseas in Afghanistan and the United States had just left Iraq in 2011. A public opinion poll showed that Americans had substantive reasoning for

changing their views, as 61% of Americans believed that airstrikes would cause the United States to likely have a long term commitment in Syria and 74% of Americans believed that the United States and its allies would receive backlash from the region (Pew Research Center, "Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes"). This aligns with the idea that public opinion on foreign policy is analytical and effective, which supports scholars Benjamin Page (1992), Robert Shapiro (1992) and Samuel Popkin (1994) claims from the presented literature.

## ***Conclusion***

### **Findings**

So, does American public opinion influence the President of the United States' decision to militarily intervene in humanitarian crises? As expected, the answer is no. It was revealed through this research that if the American president has a national interest motive supporting militaristic intervention, then it is possible that a militaristic intervention will be authorized. The national interest motive is necessary, but not sufficient. This means that simply because there is a national interest motivator does not mean that militaristic intervention is definitely going to occur. The research is unable to explain what the president's sufficient condition is, or what will produce the outcome of militaristic intervention, but there is an assumption that can be made. There was one case study that was proven to be an outlier: Syria. This case was the only case that showed the intention of President Obama asking Congress for approval, showing that public opinion would have been taken into account as the votes of Congress would have reflected their constituents views. Additionally, the Syria case had a successful diplomatic outcome, which then removed the need for a militaristic response. It is possible that the sufficient condition is the success rate of obtaining a diplomatic agreement to resolve a humanitarian crisis. This sufficient condition would also explain the militaristic intervention in Libya. With necessary conditions of

national interest motives at stake, along with the sufficient condition of the small likelihood that Qaddafi would come to an agreement with the members of NATO, it called for the United States and NATO to militaristically intervene. This assumption does not apply to the Sudan case, as moral obligation was the sole motive. Therefore, there was no necessary condition.

In addition to the two main findings, the research found three smaller findings. The first is that simply looking at the type of humanitarian intervention does not reveal the motives behind the intervention due to humanitarian crises being unique in each situation and the goal of the interventions in a generalized sense are too broad to have a motive attached. Second, public opinion is not only formed by either instrumental calculations or moral obligations, as they both can be present. It is typical that either the instrumental calculation or the moral obligation weighs more than the other, but both are still present when forming opinions. Lastly, the motive of moral obligation alone will not incite militaristic intervention. Moral obligation is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for militaristic humanitarian intervention, but the motive can be present with both the national interest motive and the sufficient condition. Therefore, it shows that it can play a role in deciding to militaristically intervene, but it would not be the primary reason.

### **Limits**

This research is extremely relevant to today's international community and the crises that are happening around the world. Although the Russia-Ukraine war is of high interest currently, this research can extend to all future humanitarian crises that threaten United States interests specifically. Also, while the case studies consisted of crises in countries in the Middle East and Africa, this study can be applied to crises in any country. Militaristic humanitarian interventions that threaten American interests are irregular, causing there to not be a reliable trend. This research was done with a specific question about the American public's opinions on the United

States' decision to militaristically intervene in a humanitarian crisis. Thus, this research will only apply to cases where the United States is the actor deciding to intervene.

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