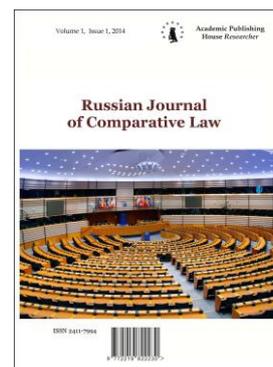


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## Politics and the Use of Force: the Analysis of Academic Opinions Regarding the Motives behind US Military Interventions from the Perspective of Neorealism

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### Abstract

Since the end of the World War II, military intervention and the use of force have taken many modes of recognition in international law. While its justification as a means of self- or collective defence remains the most commonly used, not all academicians have considered this objective as the only justification for interventions. This article analyses the opinions of researchers espousing that some powerful states can assert their dominance in other sovereign states in pursuits of national interests. This is what neorealism is concerned with and what it inevitably seeks to understand and explain. Against the opinions of scholars sharing neoliberal approach, the author analyses the examples military intervention in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century particularly focusing on US and NATO military intervention. The article attempts to examine the claims for the existence of other possible political justifications for the use of force which are different from self- or collective defence.

**Keywords:** international law, international politics, military intervention, NATO, use of force, United Nations Security Council.

### 1. Introduction

Military intervention in international law refers to the introduction of one state's military forces into that of another sovereign state. Unilateral intervention extends to include also the sphere of economy and diplomacy. Military intervention is considered a mode of the use of force exercised on international arena. The development of military intervention since the end of World War II has seen its expansion with its inherent use of force and the possibility of its abuse attracting much attention over its authorisation and legitimacy. With the increase of the role of non-state actors, international organisations have also increasingly become involved in the process of the use of force in international law.

### 2. Materials and methods

This article considers the opinions of researchers who espoused that some powerful states can assert their dominance in other sovereign states based not on the rule of law but on the dominance of power and the exertion of force in pursuits of national interests. This is what neorealism is concerned with and what it inevitably seeks to understand and explain. This paper predominantly focuses on military intervention and the use of force in contemporary international law, specifically outlining the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (hereinafter: NATO)

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military interventions over the past two decades. It examines the threat and use of force by one or more states and international organisations against other sovereign states, primarily examining the military interventions into Kosovo and Libya, as well as the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. An attempt is made to explain military intervention using a post-neorealist approach by analysing and interpreting these military interventions against the fundamental assumptions of neorealism.

Within the context of this paper, military intervention is considered broadly as an intervention in which military force is used by one or more states or international organisations against another sovereign state or states or international organisations. This can often be driven by the pursuit of both, internal and external interests of the intervening state, other states or organisations. Although such intervention can be authorised or unauthorised, most commonly the argument of self- or collective defence is most commonly used for its implementation.

Particular cases of military interventions are studied in this article in attempt to outline a framework of military intervention in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The role of the United Nations, its Security Council (UNSC) and NATO in the context of military intervention and use of force is scrutinised. A vital question regarding whether military action by states and organisations which lack UNSC authorisation are legal or legitimate is then addressed.

Finally, the issue of expansion of NATO and US military influence geographically is addressed to in bridging a connection between such expansion and the maintenance of global hegemonic system.

### 3. Discussion

Military intervention in international law within the context of the neorealist approach, is not uncommon. This contribution compares the military intervention of Kosovo, Iraq and Libya, examining on a case-by-case basis historical facts in each region and justifications for such interventions. A neorealist approach is applied in determining what these justifications are, and whether they should be considered legitimate or contributing factors to these cases. This determination is based on US interests in sovereign states, both as a demonstration of geopolitics and the use of force in international law.

Since its founding in 1949, NATO has grown to become what is considered the most powerful international military alliance in history. NATO was initially established to counter soviet expansion as Lord Ismay, the first NATO secretary general said, NATO's goal was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" ([Reynolds, 1994: 129](#)).

NATO's new membership has largely been from central and Eastern European states. Currently, three candidate states are in the process of joining the alliance – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. The Russian Federation, under President Vladimir Putin, has fiercely opposed what it described as NATO's eastward expansion. In 1999, NATO introduced a formalised membership invitation programme called the Membership Action Plan (MAP). Stemming from Article 10 of the Treaty, MAP was divided into five chapters assessing the potential of an aspiring state to join the alliance. The state of Montenegro is expected to be the latest state to join the alliance, having been invited on 15 December 2016.

US interest in the Alliance is considerable. According to NATO statistics for 2016, the US provided the highest contribution to NATO, with 3.61% of its total GDP going towards defence. This translated to the US spending \$650 billion on defence in that year; more than double the amount all of NATO's 27 other members spent together ([Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries, NATO Website](#)). Comparatively, US military expenditure is the highest in the world, exceeding the top seven other countries combined (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). Further, the US has the highest number of armed forces in the alliance, standing at 1 370 000 active personnel, with a further 850 000 reserve personnel ([NATO Defence Financial and Economic Data](#)). It is evidently clear that NATO represents a significant portion of US interests, consequently resulting in massive US investment into the organisation.

The military intervention into Kosovo was a 78-day air campaign by NATO against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The military intervention had come shortly after the Kosovo war in which FRY forces, Serbian military and police forces were accused of persecuting the Albanian population of Kosovo. At the time, US President Bill Clinton had stated on national television that the US was upholding its values and protecting its interests, while also advancing the cause of peace. Led by the US, the NATO campaign was supported by 12 other NATO

members, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Turkey. The NATO intervention into Kosovo was also the first instance it had conducted unilateral enforcement action without UN Security Council authorisation, a fact many considered to be against international law.

The air campaign eventually ended on 10 June 1999, although under dubious circumstances. The 11-week campaign against the FYR has prompted extensive analysis as to what interests the US or NATO would have in the region. Noam Chomsky seems to give a compelling argument against the claim that 'humanitarian intervention' was necessary in upholding the human rights of the Albanian Kosovars'. Describing western nations as being 'enlightened,' Chomsky is sceptical of the west's values as a guiding factor for military intervention. While contrasting the circumstances in the lack of US intervention into the Turkish attack on the Kurds, Chomsky defines several non-humanitarian, US/NATO interests which could explain NATO'S involvement in Kosovo. Perhaps one of Chomsky's greatest arguments against the intervention being humanitarian, is his stance regarding NATO's own interpretation of the Peace Accord and its demand for peacekeeping forces in Kosovo under NATO command (Chomsky, 1999: 106,107). Chomsky elaborates on this ulterior motive by quoting Alexander's Solzhenitsyn: 'we must recognise the fact that the world today is often ruled by the rule of power, and not the rule of law (Chomsky, 1999, 9). 'As Solzhenitsyn adds, there should be no indulging about NATO's aim in defending Kosovars in Kosovo, in that if protection of the oppressed was NATO's real concern, it could have defended the Kurdish population from decades of military attacks. Instead, NATO favours Turkey because it is a NATO member and a 'paying ally (Chomsky, 1999: 10).'

Chomsky draws a line between two kinds of interventions, i.e., those carried out under the auspices of the United Nations and with authorisation by the UNSC, and those carried out unilaterally without UNSC authorisation (Chomsky, 1999:10). Chomsky, who refers to the emerging norms of justified intervention as a new humanism, poses a simple test for interventions: 'is it guided by power interests, or by humanitarian concern? (Chomsky, 1999: 13).' A further point is assessed. The impact of the intervention on those it was supposed to protect – a radical escalation of the alleged ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, as well as the displacement of many thousands more Kosovars. Prior to the bombing of FYR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had reported no data on refugees in Kosovo. After three days of bombing, on 27 March 1999, the UNHCR reported that 4 000 people had fled Kosovo. By the time the Peace Accord had been signed, the number of refugees had been reported at 671 500 to be beyond the borders of FYR.

In assessing the intent behind the intervention into Kosovo, Chomsky proposes a simple test, i.e. to check the same states acted elsewhere. Chomsky elaborates on this test referring to it as to the principle of selectivity – why intervention into one situation of human rights violations is undertaken which in another situation the same state abstains from action (Chomsky, 1999: 38, 40). On 10 June 1999 the Security Council Resolution No. 1244 was passed which mandated a NATO presence in Kosovo. From the initiation of the Peace Accords, however, it was evident that NATO demanded full command of any peacekeeping forces in Kosovo (Chomsky, 1999: 105, 107, 118, 125). Yet another object of the Kosovo intervention was maintaining NATO and US credibility within Europe and abroad. A 1992 draft of the Pentagon Defence Planning Guide detailed US foreign policy's importance in maintaining a significant presence in Eastern Europe. The intervention further allowed the US a platform to expand its influence and reduce any insecurities it may have had in the area, as well as expanding its ideology of democracy and the free markets (Belzil, 2013: 3, 5).

Another consequence of the intervention was, according to Chomsky, the benefit of military production and sales. Military intervention and war boosted the Pentagon defence spending, i.e., almost roughly \$1 billion in military weapons such as the Tomahawk cruise missiles which were needed to replenish military stocks after the Kosovo intervention (Chomsky, 1999: 138). As Chomsky demonstrates, military interventions go further than benefiting military spending and the high-tech industry. Major US companies had shortly after the war made their interests clear in rebuilding infrastructure in the affected areas. The UK's own initiative to rebuild Kosovo after the destruction amounted to some \$ 2 – \$ 3.5 billion (Chomsky, 1999: 139).

While several UN Security Council resolutions regarding the situation in FRY were passed (Resolution No. 1160 (1998) and Resolution No. 1190 (1998)), no resolution explicitly authorising military intervention was adopted. As De Wet phrases the term, the closest such a matter would come to was *ex post facto* legitimisation of the Kosovo intervention, and certainly *ex post facto*

authorisation through UN Security Council Resolution No. 1244 (1999) was not an acceptable conclusion (De Wet, 2004, 65, 66).

In March 2003, the United States supported by the United Kingdom launched operation in Iraq. Dubbed 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' began on 20 March 2003 and lasted until 1 May of the same year. On 12 September 2002, then US President George Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly expressing US concern over situation in Iraq. Among such concerns were the claims that Iraq had been in violation of the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1373 in supporting terrorist organisations, that there had been grave human rights violations under Saddam Hussein's rule, and most notoriously, that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction.

The intervention occurred shortly after the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1441 (2002), pursuant to several other Security Council resolutions, prompted Iraq a final opportunity to comply with certain disarmament obligations (UN Security Council..., 2002). The UK contributed its troops.

While both the Bush and Blair administration accused Hussein of developing weapons of mass destruction, no conclusive proof of these allegations was found. Further, both the US and UK faced harsh criticism for their involvement in the invasion, which has since been broadly regarded as illegal and illegitimate. While sophisticated arguments were presented justifying the intervention, such as justifying the intervention based on previous UN Security Council resolutions, a military attack (even when under the guise of 'military intervention') based on UN resolutions (Taft, Buchwald, 2003: 557, 558) and lacking explicit authorisation does not seem to be acceptable for all the academicians (Lowe, 2003: 52). While the US and its allies continuously put forward arguments based on human rights violations committed by the Hussein government and the threat to international peace by the Iraqi regime, ulterior motives for the invasion of Iraq have been a common topic among scholars and academics of international law and politics. Several arguments are put forward in academic literature asserting that the said interventions could be based on other than human rights-oriented considerations. Such arguments are, in particular, linked to the attractiveness of Iraq's oil reserves. As Hinnebusch maintains, powerful strategic, political, and economic factors for the invasion of Iraq must have existed for the US to conduct military operations in the country (Hinnebusch, 2007: 212). Hinnebusch holds that the argument that oil was not a decisive factor for the invasion is so contradictory that the burden of proof would lie with those who deny this fact, adding that it was no coincidence the country had the second largest oil reserves in the world (Hinnebusch, 2007: 212).

As several other authors maintain, one of the US key interests in maintaining security and ultimately survival, are resources. In line with interests in oil, naval bases could, in the opinion of Bromley, be attractive for maintaining crucial military power (Bromley, 1991: 105). According to the 2016 BP Statistical Review of World Energy, the US is the largest oil consumer in the world, with 2015 estimates putting its oil consumption at 19 396 000 barrels per day. China is placed in the second position, with an oil consumption just over half of that of the US at 11 968 000 barrels per day ('BP Statistical Review...', 2016). Although the possible attractiveness of the Middle East oil reserves is regarded by the said researchers as substantial argument for intervention, there is objectively less need in invading Iraq for securing oil supplies since Hussein posed no threats to Gulf oil exporters, neither did he exert control over the oil market. While oil supplies could have played some role in the motive for intervention, Hinnebusch puts forward the argument that the US operation in Iraq was greatly centred around hegemonic stability (Hinnebusch, 2007: 213). Its involvement in the promotion of democratic course, in the opinion of Hinnebusch, allowed it to predict environments and enforce property rights needed for global capital accumulation (Hinnebusch, 2007: 213). Combination of US hegemonic influences in global markets with the internationally acknowledged power of US dollar, and the presence of vast oil reserves in Iraq, arguably presented an interest for the US to control and maintain control over the territory of that state. The occurrence of the 9/11 attacks on the US, preceding the Iraq invasion, further allowed those who believed in a war with Iraq to advance their interests. After the 9/11 attacks, those advocating for military action against Iraq saw justification in intervention, and the hurdle of legitimisation of a war against a state which did not pose a threat to the US was bypassed by allegations of Hussein's alleged link to Al-Qaeda and the production of weapons of mass destruction (Hinnebusch, 2007: 220).

On 17 March 2011 UN Security Council Resolution No. 1973 (2011) was adopted on the situation in Libya. The resolution was approved by 10 Security Council members, including the United Kingdom, France, and the US. Permanent members, i.e., Russia and China, as well as Brazil, Germany and India, abstained from voting on the resolution. The adoption of Resolution No. 1973 (2011) came in the wake of nationwide Arab Spring protests of 2011, leading to a civil war and the eventual capture and death of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Among other things, the said Resolution authorised member states that had notified the Secretary-General acting nationally or through regional organisations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians, imposed a no-fly zone over Libya, enforced an arms embargo, imposed a ban on all Libyan designated flights and imposed an asset freeze on assets owned by Libyan authorities ([UNSC Resolution 1973 \(2011\)](#)). Criticism of intervention into Libya was widely shared, even among some western states. Moreover, the opinion of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had been remembered who was saying Gaddafi would be remembered as a martyr, accusing global superpowers of only wanting to 'grab Libyan oil,' while Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe accused the US and NATO of hunting down Gaddafi, later adding that South Africa and Nigeria had betrayed Africa when they voted in favour of Resolution. Both Cuba and North Korea, as well as many other states and their leaders condemned the intervention into Libya.

Nonetheless, the question as to what interests Libya posted to the US and NATO members is merited. Chomsky refers to the Middle East in answering this question. The primary concern in the Middle East remains its incomparable energy reserves. Chomsky reiterates that 'control of [the energy reserves] would yield substantial control of the world.' Chomsky argues that due to Libya's wealth of oil reserves and a government that is neither reliable nor obedient, an undesirable situation was presented to the US and its allies ([Chomsky, 2011](#)). Oil specialists believed that Libya may have had vast unexplored reserves of oil, which a more dependable (and obedient) government would open up to 'Western exploitation.'

Chomsky further argues that there was no attempt in enforcing a no-fly zone but rather that Security Council Resolution No. 1973 (2011) was used as a tool for direct participation alongside rebel forces against the Libyan government. Similar to Iraq is the 'oil factor' in military intervention in Libya. Interests in oil reserves are invoked by Gleditsch as potential factors which could motivate the nation states to intervene in another state, especially where there are anticipated consequences of access to oil due to a civil war in such a state ([Gleditsch, 2016](#)). Empirical data has shown that military interventions occur more frequently in states with civil wars that are oil producers or that have large oil reserves, and that usually the intervening countries are oil importers ([Gleditsch, 2016](#)). Libya's oil wealth is, however, not the only possible hidden motive behind US intervention. According to International Monetary Fund data, in 2011 Libya held 4.6 million ounces of gold, translating to roughly 144 tons. Gold market prices in 2011 placed such a stockpile to be valued between \$6 – \$8 billion. While a relative comparison placed Libya in the top 25 states with the largest gold reserves in the world, Libya's small population relative to its gold reserve was significant. In this regard, arguments have been put forward that the military intervention into Libya was a result of Western governments preventing Gaddafi from establishing a 'gold dinar' – a currency meant to rival especially the US dollar. Within a neorealist approach, preventing any economic threat to Western currencies and particularly the US dollar as a global currency, while also ensuring further access to resources for the US economy, seem a desirable outcome for its military involvement in Libya.

#### 4. Results

The ability for the US to cover large geographical areas when conducting and involving itself in military intervention owes to its greater military presence outside the continental US and NATO members. The US outranks every other state globally in terms of military spending abroad. Officially, there are over 190 000 troops and 115 000 civilian employees across 909 military facilities in 46 states and territories ([Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 1](#)). These installations account for 795 000 acres of land with over 26 000 buildings and structures. These official statistics however, do not reveal the full extent of US military involvement abroad. It excludes troop presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as unacknowledged facilities in Israel, Kuwait, the Philippines and many other areas ([Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 1](#)). In the global context, Lutz and Enloe summarise US military bases abroad as follows: "Bases provide security for the United States by deterring attacks from hostile

countries and preventing or remedying unrest or military challenge (Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 21).” Further, the political purpose of US troops abroad is their use as tools for political change.

US military strength extends on a global scale and all such interests are vested in the survival and stability of the US in the global arena. In essence, the argument for global-wide bases consists of a neorealist outlook – ensuring internal and external interests of the state are secured. These interests vary from a defensive neorealist viewpoint, such as increasing capability by securing resources, to an offensive neorealist viewpoint, such as pursuing global hegemony. In the Middle East, US military presence ensures access and control of resources - oil fields (Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 54). In Japan, US military presence is meant to maintain the hierarchy of power resulting from World War II (Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 54). US bases in Korea, Japan and Australia encircle China, a perceived “superpower and competitor” to US interests in Asia (Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 55). A further dimension to containment includes the deployment of “missile defences”. A global network of missile defence weapons deployed in Greenland, Czech Republic, Poland, Israel, Korea and Japan (Lutz, Enloe, 2009: 55).

While more extensive lists may be drawn, with their own conclusions and inferences, it would suffice to say that US military power remains unrivalled, for the greater part. Owing to its vast military and also economic resources, it remains a global superpower continually striving for its own survival.

## 5. Conclusion

While the United Nations and its Security Council is a stable departure in consolidating a single global order, there are cases when nation states start military operations in other states in absence of explicit resolution supporting such intervention.

The adoption of the UN Charter was aimed at limiting unilateral military action, enabling the UN Security Council to collectively decide on the use of force by states; it has however never truly achieved this (Blokker & Schrijver, 2005: 65, 66). In an international system that is a ‘realm of high politics’ where state survival and security are concerned, international law’s impact on state behaviour is arguably limited (Glennon, 2005: 93).

Although the developments in international law have greatly curtailed state actions on the international arena, national interests remain the focal point of foreign policy and external state behaviour. As long as states are guided by their interests for survival, for stability and for capability, and for as long as international law remains a choice by states, following its rules and choosing to be bound by them will too remain a choice side-lined by the primacy of national interests. This is the main argument of neoliberal scholars cited in this article.

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