

Third-Party Intervention in Intrastate Conflict: A Cost Benefit Analysis

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GIVEN THE RECENT PROLIFERATION OF INTRASTATE CONFLICT, THE ROLE OF THIRD-PARTY INTERVENTION HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM. HOWEVER, THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO MILITARY FORMS OF INTERVENTION MAY HAVE SEVERE COSTS FOR BOTH THE TARGET OF INTERVENTION AND THE STATE CHOOSING TO INTERVENE. PAST LITERATURE HAS FOCUSED ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUCH INTERVENTION WITHOUT PROPERLY EVALUATING THE REASONS WHY A THIRD-PARTY CHOOSES TO COMMIT MILITARY RESOURCES TO SUCH ENDEAVORS. THIS STUDY WILL EXAMINE BOTH THE RELATIVE CAPABILITIES OF THE ACTORS INVOLVED, AND THE STATED REASONS FOR INTERVENTION, IN AN ATTEMPT TO DISCOVER WHAT SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSE AGGRESSIVE FORMS OF INTERVENTION. COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS IS EMPLOYED BY THIRD PARTIES AND IS ASSUMED TO DICTATE THE WAY IN WHICH INTERVENTION TAKES PLACE. ULTIMATELY, THE MATERIAL INTERESTS OF THE INTERVENER SEEM TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE DECISION TO TAKE AGGRESSIVE ACTION IN A TARGET STATE.

Introduction

Since the conclusion of World War II, the nature of military conflict has been dominated by clashes between internal state actors. Indeed, as much as 80 percent of the wars and casualties since World War II have been caused by internal conflicts (David 1997). Each day the world is presented with a tragic loss of life connected with the instability of sovereign states. In the six-day period between October 8th and October 13th of 2003, the Wall Street Journal reported a disturbing set of events.

Tribal fighters in the Congo shot and hacked to death 65 civilians; a car bomb in Bogotá, Colombia, killed at least six people including two police officers; gunmen in Indonesia killed 9 people targeted for being members of the Christian faith; and Bolivia was forced to declare martial law in a city just outside its capital because of violent demonstrations^[1]. Although such events may not independently warrant intervention, disturbing instances of violence present the members of the global community with difficult decisions regarding intervention. Given the severity and continuousness of such violence, there can be no doubt that some action is warranted, but the question this study attempts to illuminate is what conditions of internal conflict warrant the use of direct military intervention by a third party.

The Intervention Problem

Regan (1996) defines intrastate conflict as conflict between two groups within the boundary of the state and further requires that such conflicts must have resulted in greater than 200 casualties. This requirement of a minimum level of violence serves to eliminate most demonstrations, coups and riots from consideration as internal conflict (Regan 1996). While this definition fails to offer any specific insight into the complexities of internal conflict, such factors will be illuminated by the focus of the study, which is to establish which characteristics of internal conflict are likely to produce third-party interventions.

Given the proliferation of internal conflict in the last half-century, members of the international community are often faced with the decision of whether to intervene in domestic disputes. Intervention by state actors is a topic that has received much attention by the academic community; although, with few exceptions, this work has focused on the effectiveness and nature of intervention rather than the reasons it is undertaken (Fisher 1983, Pearson 1974, Levi and Benjamin 1977, Regan 1996). Between April and July of 1994, an average of 8,000 people were being slaughtered each day in Rwanda, and the international community took little if any forceful action to prevent further loss of life (Carment and Rowlands 1998). The over 800,000 dead in Rwanda represents not only the most tragic failure of the international community to date, but also the very best evidence that the issues surrounding the choice to use military force for intervention must be closely examined. How can it be possible that military intervention occurs in situations far less severe than Rwanda, but not in the attempt to prevent such devastating loss of life?

Intervention Theory

Cooper and Berdal (1993) concluded that the choice to intervene is so tied to situational characteristics that strategies of intervention can only be determined on a case-by-case basis. However, attempts have been made to provide a theoretical framework by which intervention may be conceived. Studies have suggested that the principle goal of an intervener is the long-term reduction and elimination of violence in the target of intervention, and that the decision to intervene will be largely based on the feasibility of this goal (Regan 1996). Regardless of specific goals, intervention does not occur without costs to the intervener in the form of human life and economic resources, and therefore these factors must also be considered as affecting intervention choices (Maoz 1990).

Such costs are easily illustrated by the current situation that involves the United States of America and Iraq. As of March 22, 2004, 572 United States military personnel have died in Iraq, and the total cost of the occupation is increasing at an estimated 3.9 billion dollars a month (CNN online). The personnel and financial costs of the war have had additional costs for President Bush's administration, which saw its approval rating drop from 71 percent in April of 2003—just after the war in Iraq began—to 48 percent in the second week of March 2004 (Newsweek poll). The political, economic, and human costs of war are obvious.

The beginning of an intervention situation is a choice on the part of the potential intervener. In each situation the potential intervener must develop a calculus according to which the decision will be made. The factors listed or mentioned above lead to several assumptions about the process of deciding to intervene. Proceeding from the assumption that states are rational actors, it follows that they will choose strategies that maximize their interests. Here the leaders of a state can be reified and we can assume that they are chiefly concerned with maintaining political control. Leaders must play to both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, loss of support among voters has obvious repercussions for elected officials. Internationally, the support of allies and the international community is crucial to the success of any government's foreign policy agenda.

Hence, we can posit that decisions to intervene will be tied to a cost-benefit analysis regarding the effect of intervention on political leaders' goal of maintaining office (Carment and Rowlands 1998; Pearson 1974a; Carlson 1995). The cessation of violence and creation of regional stability fits this goal, but the creation of stability that holds material benefits for the state will certainly be viewed as a greater success than intervention in which the intervener has no material interests. Such benefits might include protection of economic, strategic, and territorial interests (Pearson 1974). In addition to the material interests of the state, intervention for humanitarian goals may also hold benefits for the intervener. Intervention to protect the humanitarian interests of a state closely tied to the intervening government may garner greater support from the intervener's domestic population. Such relationships might include those that are colonial or alliance based. From the perspective of the political elite, voters are far more likely to support an intervention that aides a former colony or alliance partner.

In addition to the possible benefits of intervention, the political elite—or decision makers—of the intervening state must also take into account the potential costs of intervention, which would serve to limit the perception that the government of the intervener is acting in the interest of its people. It must be assumed that the end result of an intervention is a determinant of whether the intervention will be deemed a success or failure by the intervening state. This is to say that an intervention will not ultimately be supported simply because it began for accepted reasons. The threat of failure is assumed to be a factor in the decision to intervene.

Relative Military Capabilities

The basic premise of cost-benefit analysis is simply that some factors of a certain decision will yield negative outcomes to the decision maker (costs) and some factors positive outcomes (benefits). The goal therefore is to choose the path that leads to the highest level of benefit in exchange for the lowest levels of

cost. Carment and Rowlands (1998) suggest that the relative military capabilities of the intervener and the combatant groups play a major part in determining the cost for a state deciding to aggressively intervene. If the intervener is militarily superior to the conflicted state, direct military intervention will have relatively low cost. Conversely, if the combatant groups have a powerful military relative to the intervener, the likelihood that intervention will yield the type of benefits described above is low, and the danger that the intervention will be costly is increased.

As previously stated, the effect of a failed intervention can be disastrous for the political elite of the intervener. In democratic regimes, the loss of life that accompanies long-term commitments of military personal polarizes the people against an administration. The likelihood of this type of opposition is greatly increased by the increased loss of life associated with conflict against a military power of close parity (Carlson 1995; Pearson 1974a). Even for authoritarian regimes, the costs of failed intervention are high. Given the importance of the military in such regimes, it is important that the leadership of the state take into account the possibility that an intervention will be viewed as a misallocation of military resources. Such waste could elicit a backlash from the military officers or troops against the government. This leads to the first hypothesis. *H₁: The greater the relative military capabilities of the conflicted state, the lower the likelihood of aggressive third-party intervention.*

Intervention Goals and Cost Tolerance

The willingness of a state to incur costs in the pursuit of its goals is termed cost tolerance (Carlson 1995). Those states that have the highest cost tolerance, according to Carlson, are therefore most likely to escalate conflict. Conversely, those states that are less tolerant of cost will escalate conflict on fewer occasions (Carlson 1995). I equate the choice to aggressively intervene with Carlson's conception of escalation because aggressive intervention, more than a choice for passive intervention, represents a willingness to increase levels of violence towards the goal of conflict resolution.

The specific goals of intervention may determine the extent to which an intervening state will accept the material and political costs of intervention. Some studies have posited that the goal of intervention is not only to eliminate violence and create stability, but also to do so in a manner that favors the longer-term economic and territorial goals of the intervener (Pearson 1974a). If such goals are included in a third-party's rationale, the perceived benefits of intervention increase. To the political elite making the decision to intervene, it is more likely that the people will accept greater material losses for more profitable goals that have been agreed to by the people. Here again I invoke a realist notion that the individuals in a state and therefore the state itself will support actions that support their economic interests. A liberal view of politics might suggest that the people do not support intervention for profit on the principle that peaceful interaction is more desirable (Gilbert 1992). Ultimately, the second hypothesis is aimed at testing this tension between liberal and realist ideology, and is therefore: *H₂: Intervention that occurs for the stated purposes of territorial or economic gain will increase the possible benefits of intervention and thus increase the instances of aggressive intervention.*

Material interests may be indirectly enhanced by a specific relationship held by the two states. A past colonial relationship, for instance, may imply a continued economic interdependence that would tend to increase the interest of the intervener in target state (Pearson 1974a). However, it is inappropriate to categorize such relationships as purely material. The intervening government and, more importantly for democratic regimes, the people may hold a historical commitment to the safety of a past colonial holding. This type of relationship might be described as a type of paternalism on the part of the intervener. As such, protection of a past colony may be viewed by the political elite as increasing the necessity of intervention and, therefore, its benefits. Similarly, aiding, by intervention, an alliance partner may have such benefits as increasing the possibility of a future material relationship. It may also be the case that the populous of the intervening state feels more compelled to support intervention that is for the purpose of helping a "friend" in the international arena. Certainly this mentality was pervasive during the Cold War, where the United States public, if not the government, evaluated intervention against the Soviet Union as necessary not only

to prevent the spread of communism, but also to protect “free” or democratic states. Since alliance partnership often occurs because of similar ideological stances, this seems to be a plausible explanation of the desires of the intervener. Therefore: H_3 : *Intervention that occurs for the stated purposes of aiding an alliance partner or past colonial holding will raise the benefits of intervention and thus increases the instances of aggressive intervention.*

Research Design

Given the importance of examining as many instances of military intervention as possible, I choose to rely on Fredric Pearson and Robert Bauman’s (1993) data set, “International Military Intervention, 1946 – 1988.” This source catalogs 533^[2] usable cases of military intervention, which comprises the universe of cases during the time period of 1946 – 1988.^[3] As defined by Pearson and Bauman (1993), military intervention consists of “the movement of regular troops or forces (airborne, seaborne, shelling, etc.) of one country into the territory or territorial waters of another country, or forceful military action by troops already stationed by one country inside another, in the context of some political issue or dispute.” The large number of cases provided by this data set will allow for a statistical design that will provide significant leverage with regard to evaluating the motivation behind aggressive forms of military intervention.

Operationalization of the Dependant Variable

It is important, at this point, to reiterate a distinction mentioned earlier in my assessment of the intervention literature. All of the cases used in this study are instances of third-party intervention. As such, the dependant variable of this model is not whether intervention has occurred, but rather at what level such intervention has taken place. Additionally, this study gives no attention to the effectiveness of intervention. While this topic is certainly worthy of research, and has indeed received great focus in the field, I am chiefly interested with the decision-making of the intervener. For the purposes of this evaluation, the outcome of such decisions is irrelevant. I therefore conceive of levels of intervention operationally by using a composite measure that includes type and amount of troop incursion in the conflict, and the type of air and naval incursion that took place. What follows is an explanation of the summative scale used as representative of intervention.

The goal of this scale is to distinguish between aggressive acts of intervention and passive forms. First, the type of ground troop activity engaged in by an intervener is separated into two categories. The passive category includes no troop activity, activity for the purpose of evacuation of troops, the transportation of negotiators, and the patrolling or guarding of interests within the target state. These forms of passive intervention are coded as 0. Aggressive intervention, coded as 1, includes only those activities by ground troops for the purpose of intimidation and combat. Second, the size of ground forces used in the intervention is separated again into two categories. Any incursion that includes the use of 1,000 troops or fewer is determined to be passive and coded as 0. Those incursions that included 1,001 troops or greater are deemed aggressive and coded as 1.^[4] Third, I divide types of air incursion into similar passive and aggressive categories. The passive measure includes instances where no air incursion takes place and occurrences of air incursion for the purposes of transport and support and evacuation. These measures are coded as 0. Aggressive forms of air incursion again involve either intimidation or acts of bombing and strafing. These acts represent a choice to intervene aggressively and are thus coded with a 1. Fourth and finally, naval incursion is, once again, separated into a dichotomous relationship. The absence of naval incursion and the use of naval forces for evacuation are coded as 0. All other forms of naval activity tend to be aggressive and are therefore assigned the value of 1. Such forms of naval aggression include the laying or removal of mines, the transportation and landing of combat troops, and the use of naval shelling.^[5]

The values of these four variables are then added together to form a four point scale with 4 being the most aggressive score possible and 1 representing the most passive form of intervention. For the purposes

of the scale, naval and air incursion will count towards only one point of the scale. The reason for this combination lies in the problem of using naval incursion as a measure of intensity. It is possible that intervention occurred in a land locked state. If this is the case, it is possible that no naval incursion occurred despite a highly intense intervention. For this reason, I will give a single point to any case in which naval or air incursion took place and only one point in cases where both types of incursion occurred. As such, the possible scores for the scale range from 0 to 3 despite the use of four variables.^[6] This composite measure of the intensity of intervention should provide meaningful representation of the will of the intervener.

Operationalization of the Independent Variables

Based on the literature and available data, the explanatory variables for the variation in intensity of intervention are the relative military capabilities of the target and intervener and the motivating forces behind intervention. A measure of each variable is available within the Pearson and Bauman (1993) data set. However, both of these concepts require the compilation of multiple variables and careful operationalization.

Within the International Military intervention data set, the Cox-Jacobson scale is used to measure the power size of the intervener and target. The Cox-Jacobson scale separates power size into five categories (Smallest, Small, Middle, Large, and Super). Cox and Jacobsen (1973) utilize five measures of state power, including Gross National Product, Per capita GNP, Population, Nuclear Capability, and Prestige, in order to categorize the power of each state during the time period selected. These categories are then converted into a five point scale with 1 being the smallest powers and 5 representing a super power. Using a comparison between the scales of the intervener and the target, I have developed my own 9 point scale with the goal of capturing both the direction and magnitude of the difference in power for each state. First, the power score of the target is subtracted from the power score of the intervener. The possible outcomes are, “-4, -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3, +4.” These outcomes are then assigned a value of 1 to 9 respectively. Using this scale I have captured the relationship of power between the intervener and the target. A value of 9 represents the greatest advantage for the intervener while a value of one represents the intervener’s greatest possible disadvantage. For clarity, it should be noted that a score of 5 represents an equality of capability between the two actors.

In order to test the remaining hypotheses, I will use a total of six dichotomously coded variables. The first three of these variables correspond to the material goals of intervention. Territorial expansion, strategic interests, and economic interests are each measured by variables within the International Military Intervention data set. These variables will be run independently of each other, but all three will be used as measures of the effect that material interests have on the choice to use aggressive forms of intervention. The remaining two variables are intended to capture the effect of the specific connection between the intervener and the target. For this purpose I again rely on two variables, each of which is dichotomously coded. The two variables are colonial connection and whether the target and intervener have a political alliance. Each of these variables is coded such that an affirmative answer is represented by a 1 and a negative answer by a 0. These measures should provide a meaningful representation of the relationship between the two actors and the ethnic circumstances of the target. In essence, these variables represent factors, not directly or necessarily tied to material interest, that increase the benefits of intervention.

Operationalization of the Control Variables

I will use two control variables, which are unrelated to the substantive claims of the study, but may effect the variance. First, contiguity or geographic connection is measured by a variable which has been recoded to capture a dichotomous, yes or no, relationship. The second control variable is instance of prior intervention. This variable is also coded dichotomously, and it is important to note that only the instances of repeated intervention will be controlled for. This means that the first instance of intervention is coded as a 0 despite being part of an intervention series.

What follows is a comprehensive list of the independent variables including the hypothesis they correspond to and the manner in which they are coded.

■ Relative Military Capability (H ₁)	Scale from 1-9
■ Strategic Interests (H ₂)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Economic Interests (H ₂)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Territorial Expansion (H ₂)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Colonial History (H ₃)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Political Alliance (H ₃)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Contiguity (Control)	Dichotomous 0 and 1
■ Prior Intervention (Control)	Dichotomous 0 and 1

Analyses and Results

To begin analyzing the data, I first found the frequency of each score for the two scales I assembled. Due to the large number of cases that have a relative military capability score of 5, I have chosen to log this variable. I then performed Pearson's partial correlation tests, which control for both contiguity and occurrences of previous intervention. The results listed in Table 1 represent the correlation between each independent variable and the dependant variable. Also included in this table are the degrees of freedom for each variable pair, and the 1-tailed significance of each test. Those relationships that are significant are bolded within Table 1.

Table 1: Data Results

Independent Variable	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Degrees of Freedom	1-tailed Significance
Relative Military Capability	.0679	299	.120
Strategic Interests	.2361	248	.000
Economic Interests	.2660	114	.002
Territorial Expansion	.2272	226	.000
Alliance Partners	-.1696	271	.002
Colonial Relationship	.0469	300	.209

Note: Degrees of freedom vary between tests due to the exclusion of missing data.

Analysis of the data suggests that there is no relationship between aggressiveness of intervention and relative military capabilities. The lack of significance of this finding suggests that even the small correlation found should be considered suspect. It is therefore difficult to comment on the validity of the first hypothesis. The lack of significant results in this area might have been explained by a problem with the way in which the original power scales for the intervener and target were combined into the scale used [\[7\]](#). However, after using similar analysis as above on each of the two parts of the power scale and my dependant variable, I found a similar lack of relationship among the independent parts as I did when using the power scale I developed. This leads me to believe that there is a disparity between what is measured by the Cox-Jacobsen scales and my conception of relative military capabilities. Although the first and primary

hypothesis resulted in insignificant findings, several other indicators seem to suggest a relationship between material interest and aggressiveness of intervention.

The data suggests a positive relationship between the existence of a material interest and the aggressiveness of intervention. The relatively strong correlations and high significance for the variables representing strategic interest, economic interest, and territorial expansion suggest that the relationship expected by Hypothesis 2 does in fact exist. I believe these three factors are also related to one another, capturing the idea of material interests. I expanded on the analysis of Hypothesis 2 by creating a linear regression model using these three factors. In order to verify that multicollinearity is not a problem, I included a test for covariance in this model. The results of this model show an R-square value of **.259** at a significance of **.000**. Additionally, I found tolerance values for each of the three variables that were above **.551**, and Variance Inflation Factors below **1.193**. This indicates that covariance is not an issue for this model. The result of this model suggests that about 26 percent of the variation of the dependant variable is due to the material interests of the intervener.

The third hypothesis regarding the political relationship between the intervener and the target of intervention does not seem to be supported by the data. Although significant, the measure of alliance partnership seems to suggest a relationship opposite of the one suspected by Hypothesis 3. Additionally, the data suggest that there is little relationship between the existence of a colonial relationship and the severity of intervention. However, because I believe past colonial relationships may indicate a current economic interdependence, I included this variable with the other three statistically significant variables above to determine what, if any, influence the addition might have. I found the addition of the colonial relationship variable had little effect on the outcome of the model. The R-square value rose slightly to **.270**, and the statistical significance remained **.000**. Again, tests for multicollinearity proved negative.

Conclusions

The most interesting finding of this study is the apparent importance of material interests in determining the choice by a state to use aggressive forms of intervention. The presence of economic, strategic and territorial interests seems to increase the potential gains for the intervener, and thus states are willing to invest greater resources towards the end of successful intervention. This finding would tend to support the realist theory of international relations, which stresses the importance of states as rational actors seeking to maximize their share of limited resources. However, a point of caution in this understanding of the results of this study—and a suggestion for future research—is warranted. No attempt was made to test factors that might suggest a liberal view has been adopted by the intervener. In order to make any substantial claim about the tendency of the states to adopt one view over the other, both options must be included. As such, I suggest that future research in this field focus not only on the importance of material interests, but also on potential causes of intervention which may not fit with what is expected under a cost-benefit analysis. Studying the occurrences of intervention for the purpose of protecting ethnic minorities without specific connection to the intervener is an example of what realist theory might consider an irrational choice. This is especially true if the region in which the conflict is occurring is not of great strategic importance. A study of African interventions, for instance, would surely shed greater light on this issue.

The unexpected finding regarding the relationship between alliance partners may be due to a misunderstanding of the theory behind the hypothesis. Upon reflection, it seems possible that the existence of an alliance partnership might warrant less aggressive forms of intervention. Alliance agreements might include specific roles for assistance of an intervener, and it is doubtful such agreements would include the large-scale movement of troops into the conflicted state. Nor would an alliance partner be likely to bomb targets within its ally. Ultimately, it seems possible that alliances will promote instances of intervention, but not aggressive forms of it. In the future, the relationship between intervention and alliance should be studied without regard to the aggressiveness of such intervention.

It seems that the existence of a colonial relationship between the intervener and the target has some effect on the choice to intervene. However, it is difficult to determine which facet of such a relationship is

controlling this correlation. If it is simply the current economic ties, this finding adds little more to our understanding than the previous findings related to material interest. More work must be done, and better measures of the separate parts of a postcolonial relationship must be found, in order to extrapolate with greater confidence. However, it seems that this finding might suggest a sort of inertia in the relationship between states. This is to say that a previous close relationship between the intervener and target may be a factor, on its own, in predicting future cases of intervention.

Ultimately, it appears that the result of this study is to add evidence to the realist suggestion that, despite new waves of liberalism, political elites are making their foreign policy decisions based on what is in the best material interests of the state.

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[1] All references are from the Wall Street Journal front page news notes between October 8, 2003 and October 13, 2003.

[2] For the purposes of this study, the number of cases is reduced from 667 to 533 due to missing data for the dependant variable.

[3] Under optimal circumstances I would like to include more recent occurrences of military intervention. The data used for this study would be greatly improved if post-Cold War cases were available. However, given the limited amount of data on this topic, the current data set should provide a basis for drawing conclusions with regard to the decision-making criteria for an intervening state.

[4] While I fully recognize that the distinction between 1000 and 1001 troops is problematic, I believe this threshold better captures the distinction between aggressive and passive intervention than the 5000 or 10,000 troop thresholds. This is the best option given the distinctions offered by the available data.

[5] The number of naval vessels involved in these activities is ignored because the distinction between 4 and 5 vessels that is offered by the data is unhelpful for the distinction between passive and aggressive intervention.

[6] In order to avoid using a zero as part of the scale, I have automatically given each case one point.

[7] See "Operationalization of the Independent Variables" for a description of the scale created.