# The Impact of Foreign Interventions on Democracy and Human Rights

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# The Impact of Foreign Interventions on Democracy and Human Rights

EDITED BY

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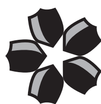


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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AL | Arab League |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| AU | African Union |
| CEN-SAD | Community of Sahel–Saharan States |
| FSI | Fragile States Index |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GNA | Government of National Accord |
| LNA | Libyan National Army |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NFZ | No-Fly Zone |
| NTC | National Transitional Council |
| OAU | Organisation of African Unity |
| PM | Prime Minister |
| R2P | Responsibility to Protect |
| SADR | Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic |
| SC | Security Council |
| SCR | Security Council Resolution |
| UE | European Union |
| UfM | Union for the Mediterranean |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| US | United States |
| WMD | Weapon of Mass Destruction |

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# Prologue

Since the 1970s, the fields of Human Rights, Development and Democracy have been challenged by the increasing presence of transnational non-state actors and the activity of powerful states beyond their own borders.

This debate cannot be understood without revisiting the past. The first major efforts to construct and popularize a universalist framing of human rights, dating back to the French Revolution, paved the way for colonial and imperial justifications for intervening in foreign states. Liberalist Internationalism, as it was later known, was the doctrine that saw it as a responsibility to encourage and impose liberal policies in foreign states. The goal was a world order that promoted peace, individual rights and the rule of law, achieved through domestic policies of free trade and liberal economic and political practices.

The reality could not have been further from this image. As recent scholarship has shown, the consequences of these supposedly well-intentioned interventions were often devastating. Mike Davis' *Late Victorian Holocausts* demonstrates with undeniable clarity the relationship between the classic liberal-utilitarian policies of the British Raj and the starvation of millions of Indians. It was the intervention of Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India, who tackled the Madras Famine of 1876–1878 and declared that reducing the price of grain and granting relief to starving peasants would create bad habits that threatened liberal values. The better option, delegated to Sir Richard Temple, was to force starving populations to travel vast distances only to work and die in labour camps. Liberal trade and its infrastructure raised the price of much-needed staples for locals and dictated the price of the grain that was being transported away via British railway systems, making them dangerously vulnerable to global market fluctuations.

This kind of interventionism gave way under the contradictions of Western Europe's scramble to salvage something of its former prestige – and budgetary efficiency – following WWII. The Allied victory had been won in the name of freedom, sovereignty and self-determination, leaving many of the colonial-African soldiers who had fought on their side wondering when they would get their own. For around two decades following the end of WWII, multiple former colonies declared independence, while global and regional bodies institutionalized the concept of non-intervention as a pillar of global shared values. Reflecting these debates, in late 1965, the United Nations General Assembly published The UN Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States, condemning any form of intervention, be it direct or subversive, military or economic, in the internal and external affairs of any State.

Despite these advances, the same period saw a rise in interventions that were arguably both economic and subversive. Guided by a political anti-communism that served the rising global power of the United States and the anti-capitalism of its contender, the Soviet Union, this kind of interventionism involved the financing, military training and armament of rebel groups and authoritarian regimes of the Global South. Particularly severe situations, like the US involvement in Vietnam or Latin America, triggered a global solidarity movement that increasingly wielded the language of human rights and democracy to fight back against claims that intervention was necessary to protect them. Both concepts were scrutinized and expanded in scope to defend countries' right to shape their own developmental trajectories. By the late 1970s, US foreign policy had turned its back on the Southern Cone Latin American military regimes that they themselves had helped to install; declassified documents have in recent decades evidenced how the covert training and financing of military intelligence and operations contributed to the systematic torture, rape and disappearance of tens of thousands of citizens across the region.

The 1990s saw a new iteration of Liberal Internationalism, most clearly through the revitalized mandate of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Here, the question was humanitarianism, through which military intervention and assistance has been used to defend against major potential and ongoing human rights violations. Underlying all of this was the argument that the failure to protect, i.e. non-interventionism, could in some cases be a greater threat to humanity than any intervention itself.

As countries of the Global North now face their own social, political and economic turmoil in the long recovery from COVID-19, funding for humanitarian assistance is falling. In its place, the pressing matters of vaccine equality, climate change and resource scarcity. At the time of writing, the 2021 G7 Summit has only recently taken place in my home country of England and has committed to collectively donating 870 million vaccines by the end of 2021. And yet, damaging international patenting laws and persistent economic sanctions on particular states continue to limit their ability to cope with the pandemic. Cuba, a country that continues to contend with a range of sanctions from the United States, is meanwhile attempting to develop vaccines that will be sold affordably to the world's most impoverished nations.

We sit today at the intersection of military, economic, social, political and humanitarian (non)interventionisms, and as academics must navigate the complex relationships between the motivations, justifications, forms and consequences they entail.

It is both fascinating and encouraging that the social and political sciences are able to evaluate these processes in such clear terms. In the field of history, human rights and solidarity activists of the mid-twentieth century are too easily dismissed as voices of ideology and conspiracy. For them, the fact that economic or humanitarian intervention could be bad for human rights and democracy would be laughably obvious.

This collection of works places scientific evidence and evaluation at the centre of the debate. Access to a much broader and more transparent range of empirical

resources means it is no longer necessary to rely on state officials' claims as to the motivations for intervention. While discourse will often suggest, in line with current-day normative doctrines, humanitarian and security-based motivations, there is no question that these are interwoven with the underlying strategic and economic interests of intervening nations.

Claims to the superiority of Western, liberal, democracy are no longer at the forefront of justifications for intervention. Rather, it has been human rights. Built on the notion that non-intervention can sometimes be worse than intervention, the concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P) has deemed military-humanitarian interventions to be necessary in situations where genocide, ethnic cleansing and other war crimes become a threat. Often, such interventions seek the approval of the UN and the agreement of local governments, who might not have the resources for addressing the issue themselves. Yet this is dangerously subjective. The decision to intervene in such instances requires a moral judgement to nominate the legitimate state and the offending rebel group, which can often become embroiled in the economic or resource-based interests of the intervening nation. A prime example here would be Russia's military interventions in Syria: while legitimizing its actions with the invitation of the Syrian government and the principles of R2P regarding Syrian sovereignty, the country is adamant that intervention by other powers on the grounds of human rights protection would threaten the principles of non-intervention.

The multiple ways in which intervention can be administered is just as problematic. Today, institutionalized norms mean that overt and direct military interventions rarely take place on the part of individual major powers. Rather, they are carried out through regional organizations such as NATO or the EU, but also other ad-hoc coalitions between countries with shared interests. Indirectly, intervention can also take place through economic means, such as sanctions, blockades or embargoes, as well as diplomatic persuasion and encouragement. The more sinister use of subversive intervention is even harder to capture. Florian Zollman's *Media, Propaganda and the Politics of Intervention* provides a solid and convincing attempt, demonstrating how Western powers tend to apply one ethical standard of reporting for their friends, and another for their enemies, with clear intentions to legitimize and justify military interventions.

We might also include humanitarian aid and assistance as intervention, which, alongside conditional financing from states, foreign actors and global organizations, indirectly interfere in the domestic affairs of a nation by controlling the way in which a country or domestic group manages its economic activities. Contested to this day, for example, is the role that a series of IMF loans to Latin America imposed Washington Consensus ideals at the cost of social and economic developmental equality.

The problem becomes even more nebulous in the transnationalised, digital age in which new players enter the scene. It is clear that we must consider and re-evaluate the definition of foreign interventionism in light of the rising economic might of states such as China.

Similarly, do we consider the actions of those major transnational companies, who, through lobbying and bribery can sway a country's developmental

trajectory? Often already disadvantaged, countries like Bangladesh have relaxed labour laws, trade restrictions and taxation policies in ways that benefit foreign companies and endanger the human rights of their own citizens. The Rana Plaza incident of 2013 springs to mind. And what of the SCL Group, who claims to have successfully influenced Indonesia's 1999 election and promoted peaceful, democratic values in the process?

None of the above is to say that there have never been any positive outcomes of foreign intervention, only that they are frustratingly hard to come by. What this volume demonstrates is that the human rights and democracy-based implications of foreign intervention rest heavily on the combination of intentions and mode of delivery; at best, sadly, findings seem to propose that it is rarely a question of whether or not intervention has been detrimental, but *how* detrimental.

This volume is a testament to the merit of transdisciplinarity. It examines the relationship between intervention, human rights and democracy through five distinct perspectives. Chapter 1 takes on the highly impressive task of measuring the short- and long-term impacts of direct military intervention on a range of measures of democracy from 1970 to 2005. Furthermore, the chapter's methodological framework differentiates four major motivations for intervention: security interests, economic and resource interests, strategic interests and humanitarian protection.

Taking a closer look at a single case study, Chapter 2 tackles interventionism in the context of post–Cold War globalization. More specifically, it addresses the commonly overlooked – and perhaps intimidating – question of 'interventions which link informal shadow elites, multinational companies, [and] private military companies in collaboration with official states to exploit natural resources'. The case study is the Democratic Republic of Congo, which allows for a close examination of the particular methods of interventionism that have arisen since the 1990s and allowed intervening countries to incite conflict and systematically exploit natural resources under the banner of humanitarian intervention.

Another case study finds that as well as the exploitation of natural resources, interventionism in the name of human rights and democracy can also significantly destabilize a country. Chapter 3 looks at Libya. Today the recipient of an internationally supported political stabilization plan, this is a country that is still hoping to see the back of the harmful effects of interventions. In 2011 began an eight-month NATO-led mission that left the country in shatters; the chapter demonstrates how basic security, government services, national income and budget deficits worsened, as the country became more violent, fractionalized and less democratic.

Taking a longer historical period into consideration, Chapter 4 provides a comparative analysis between the democratic transitions of West and Central French-African countries. Recognizing their shared experiences of French colonialism and persistent post-independence 'umbilical cords', the author asks whether any of these countries gained anything from the promise of democracy. The answer is sadly no. The colonial interventionism that lasted until, in most cases, the early 1960s established a system of centralized, predatory power. The

decades that followed independence did little besides replace that form of rule with a native leader. It was not until the 1990s that France declared it would no longer support relations with Africa's non-democratic nations. Thus while interventionism called for the systems that it had worked so hard to install and maintain to be removed, three decades have demonstrated that little has changed for the state of human rights and democracy in these regions.

Chapter 5 brings the volume to a close and looks ahead by questioning the delivery methods of interventionism, shining light in particular on the forms of intervention stemming from a relatively new player, China. Comparing the longer-standing trend of US military interventions in Latin America with the more recent 'soft power' economic and business interventions of China, the chapter examines consequences for multiple variables of democratic institutions through the case studies of Nicaragua, Cuba and Brazil. While economic intervention carried out through trade and markets has some adverse effects on democracy, these are not as adverse as those carried out through military means.

All of this brings us back to the fundamental questions of this volume: How do we identify and define the most subversive forms of intervention? How do we conceptualize foreign intervention in a day and age in which non-state actors play such an extensive role in transnational affairs? How, methodologically, do we fully capture and evaluate the short- and long-term consequences of foreign intervention? Can foreign intervention still be considered a sensible mechanism for promoting human rights? And, what happens when what it leaves behind is worse than what it found?

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