

GLOBAL CONFLICT INTERVENTION: CURES OR IATROGENIC DISEASES?

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Abstract: In medical language, an iatrogenic disease is one that resulted from the treatment of some other disease. About one sixth of the hospital patients in Scandinavia lie there for diseases that they have gotten from the treatment, often at the hospital. This may sound bad, but actually signifies a great improvement: it is only a century ago since the probability of survival if taken to hospital became greater than if not. There are several factors behind this development. Medical practice has improved, with the idea of Ignaz Semmelweiss that medical staff should wash their hands between different operations as a first major breakthrough (it spread quicker among midwives than among his doctor colleagues). Medical research and theory has taken great steps ahead, dramatically improving the prognoses of formerly lethal diseases. Medical practice and medical theory have moved from being virtually separate fields to close interaction. Medical ethics has given increasing emphasis to the illegitimacy of the doctor putting his own interests before those of the patient. So while there is still a long road to travel in medicine, the road already travelled is impressive. This paper discusses the effects of attempts by international intervention to “cure” domestic conflicts in various countries in what has been described as an age of globalization. Has any progress been made that is comparable to that in medicine? What can we expect? What results do we actually find?

Key words: conflict, globalization, intervention, iatrogenic effects

The Notion of Globalization

First, a word of warning on the term “globalization”. It emerged in the language of politicians and journalists, not in the scholarly world, and can therefore mean anything or nothing when serving as an umbrella term for a plethora of different developments and processes in international trade and finance, international communication, international law and politics, culture, and so forth. Yet each of these processes is certainly there, as is their interaction, and we can find more qualified terms than “globalization” for the single processes, try to identify

¹⁹ The editorial board of *Security Dialogues* has decided to publish posthumously the following manuscript of Hakan Wiberg (1942-2010). It was written in 2008, especially for this journal but remained hidden among his numerous unpublished manuscripts. This is a way to thank him for all his academic support and cooperation with the Institute for Security, Defence and Peace at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje.

their essential features and study how these developed over history and how they are related to each other. We have to study who is globalizing whom and at what costs and benefits to whom.

In many cases, the verdict will be “not much new”. We have had transoceanic trade for five millennia and attempts at building vast empires for about as long time as that. We have had instant transmission of messages across the globe for some 150 years, starting with the telegraph. The proportion of GDP of major states that goes into international trade is not dramatically much bigger than a century ago (but was much smaller in between due to world wars and depression). Radio and TV have by now been around for generations. My own bid as to what is really quite new would focus on a few things. Telegraph and TV are old by now, but the possibility to transmit from anywhere to everywhere is new, and even newer is Internet with its enormous capacity for individuals and groups to communicate directly with each others all across the world, liberated from the restriction to have to pass mass media with their attention criteria, gatekeepers, external or internal censorship, and so forth. This looks inescapable, at least for the time being, even if some states try firewalls and other forms of censorship under various moral; and political pretexts. Second, while international trade and international finance are very old, the current attempts at imposing a single international set of rules on them is relatively new. There is nothing inescapable about these, however: in some cases, the rich and strong states do not have sufficient common interests to agree on what to impose on the others; and even when they do, success is far from guaranteed. There is a growing global opposition against the WTO and at its last conference, major players like India and Brazil walked out when they could not get an acceptable result. The IMF lost quite a bit of its norm-setting power when states in south and east Asia and in Latin America set up their own regional banking systems after their catastrophic experiences of the IMF in the 1990ies. There are good reasons to believe that the international system will eventually be able to find better rule systems than the allegedly inescapable ones that are peddled right now by USA with various allies and institutions, and thus greatly improve the conditions of globalization.

The Notion of Intervention

Second, we need a quick look at the terminology and taxonomy concerning international intervention in conflicts. Other states have intervened in domestic wars or conflicts between two states for millennia (but traditionally less so concerning conflicts inside other independent states). Sometimes they were just another warring party, sometimes they were invited, or invited themselves, to one or more of the roles of, e.g., roles of good offices, mediator at some level (between low-key and high pressure), arbitrator or even adjudicator. Empires sometimes did this to conflicts at their peripheries, the Pope has served as arbitrator in many conflicts between Christian states, heads of state have been invited to mediate or arbitrate, and so forth. The idea of some international organisation taking on such roles is not really new: Dante came with such ideas in the 14th century, William Penn and the Duke of Sully in the 17th, Hume and Kant in the 18th, and so forth. Attempts at implementation are more recent however: the Concert of Europe in the 19th century can be seen as a relatively long-lived precursor (primarily busy with preserv-

ing the status quo). The Berlin Congress in 1878 had more ad hoc character (and managed to create three permanent problems: Macedonia, Bosnia and Cyprus), The League of Nations was a first universal attempt at implementation, followed by the United Nations as a second. For a long time, the two latter largely limited themselves to activities related to conflicts between two states (or quasi-states), including a whole spectrum of activities: fact-finding missions, good offices, low-key or more intrusive forms of mediation, invited or self-invited arbitration, occasionally even as a war party (Chapter VII of the UN charter speaks of "enforcement" - the phrase "peace enforcement" was later added by others for Public Relations reasons). To these should be added various "post-conflict" activities such as monitoring, peace-keeping (traditional, that is - it was only in the 1990ies that the term was altered so as to include war-fighting) and various civilian activities under the headline 'peace-building' Only in very specific conceptual terms (especially apartheid) did the UN take any stand on intra-state conflicts and only in very few cases, such as (ex-Belgian) Congo or (post-independence) Cyprus, did the UN take on an active role. Military interventions there were many: East Germany; Hungary, Czechoslovakia in the case of USSR (sometimes together with satellites from its organisations), and a much longer list for USA (sometimes with satellites from its organisations), plus British and French interventions in their former colonies. But as permanent members of the Security Council they could always veto any critical resolutions there, just as they could veto UN interventions they saw as harming their interests. In order not to drown in too many very diverse cases in different eras, this paper focuses on post-Cold War military interventions or explicit threats of them that were initiated, led or made unilaterally by the United States (a somewhat wider definition would also have included EU in Albania in 1997, Australia and other under UN mandate in East Timor in 1998-99 and a few African cases with predominantly African troops).

The end of the Cold War around 1990 was also the beginning of a new trend, even though it remains to see how long time it lasts. The UN intervened with full force against the Iraqi aggression on Kuwait (the military forces were largely from USA, but the mandate from the UN). It also took action on domestic wars in Iraqi Kurdistan, Somalia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina (plus East Timor and a few African cases). In other cases, UN was disregarded: the US intervention threat against Haiti in 1994; its escalation (together with the UK) of the bombing of Iraq in 1998; its attack -with NATO in its first war under its own flag - on Yugoslavia in 1999; its attack - with a "coalition of willing", having learnt that NATO running a war was too complicated - on Afghanistan in 2001 (legitimacy would have called for a second Security Council resolution); and - with another and largely overlapping "coalition of willing" - on Iraq in 2003. We may also include Russian interventions (usually of a more unofficial character) in Moldova, Caucasus and Central Asia. Several questions now arise: why all these new interventions? Could they be expected to be successful - and in what terms? To what extent were there hidden agendas behind them? Were they indeed successful - or did they create more harm than good? Do we see an increasing trend, or is it rather a dwindling one?

What to Expect on Success?

Let us go back to the parallel with medicine. In its terms, curing domestic conflicts by (threats of) military interventions lies more than a century behind and it is questionable whether the “doctors” have even learnt to wash their hands between operations. Empirical research gives little ground to believe that intervention practice has improved during recent decades. Theory and empirical research on domestic conflicts have taken major steps ahead during the last few decades: we now know much more than then about causes of onset, magnitude and duration, as well as about the effects of various types of background factors. Yet this “we” is primarily the specialised academic community, even though simplified versions occasionally appear in mass media: there is little or no indication that it includes decision makers about the “cures” and to the extent it includes some of their civil servants, these seem to be systematically not listened to – if something goes seriously wrong, it hurts politicians if it can be documented that they had clear warnings in advance. There is virtually no interchange between practice and analysis, to the general detriment of political learning capacity. As for ethics for practitioners, finally, this is a complex issue: there is no Hippocratic oath for them. Without any deeper discussion I would stipulate that the UN system and other international organisations have had some success in establishing new norms in the field – but the result of this is sometimes changed patterns of behaviour and sometimes (and probably more often) increasing hypocrisy (“the tribute of vice to virtue”), making agendas hidden, or even more hidden than before. The increasing disregard for the UN system when starting military interventions is an indication of the wrong direction.

Looking more specifically for sources of error in practices, we may note at least the following general ones:

1. *Case ignorance*: The politicians making the interventions and the civil servants that are to implement them tend to be, or pretend to be, greatly ignorant about the conflicts they appropriate for experiment. One general factor behind this is the “Hollywood filter” in mass media and politics that reduces complex multi-party and multi-issue conflicts between complex actors to simple two-party and single-issue conflicts between personifications of the actors: one Good Guy and one Bad Guy. This may to some extent be a residual of the Cold War with its need for mobilising simplifications, it may be a general structural feature of mass media and news criteria, and it may in some cases be a matter of politicians and journalists with gate keepers being unusually ignorant due to difficult languages, scant background knowledge, low preparedness, etc. Whatever the case, it does great harm to understanding and practice that politicians believe in – or, by the power of mass media - have to act as if they believed in these simplifications. The dynamics and logic of three-party conflicts are quite different from two-party conflicts, e.g. by the possibility and likelihood of shifting coalitions. Trying to mind read a leader is one thing, trying to understand the restrictions and necessities imposed upon the leader by a complex political system is a very different thing. And the need to have a Good Guy as opposite number to the appointed Bad Guy has transformed many crooks of largely equal magnitude into saints. One illustrative anecdote can be found in David Owen’s memoirs “Balkan Odyssey”, where he tells that one year into the Bosnian war he

had to tell Al Gore that one third of the inhabitants are Serbs – he had no idea. Another anecdote from personal experience: when after a couple of years of war I summed up a small study by Johan Galtung, Jan Oberg and myself on how miserably informed the EU had been all the time to a former German ambassador in Belgrade, he replied, “It was the same here – both I and my successor and his successor tried to explain to our foreign ministers, ‘Herr Minister, if you do that with that proclaimed intention, the result will be just the opposite – but nobody would listen!’”

2. *Theory ignorance*: Apart from ignorance about facts and history, most of those behind interventions are manifestly ignorant about conflict analysis and conflict resolution, or at least have no education in it. They often demand from the conflict actors to do what they would never do themselves in the same situation, e.g. entrust important parts of their security to the opposing actors without rock bottom guarantees, or expect the actors to react to threats and vilification in the very opposite way of how the interveners would have reacted themselves.
3. *Superficial goals*: It is open fighting, shown on TV, that primarily disturbs the decision makers. Due to lack of factual knowledge, not to speak of previous analysis, the fighting also tends to come as a complete surprise to them. The immediate goals, laudable in themselves, therefore tend to be to stop the fighting and/or prevent its escalation. Since little or nothing is done about the underlying conflicts (which often are not even seen and equally often greatly misunderstood), the “solution” resulting from military means has slim chances of surviving the presence of intervening troops for long – and Afghanistan and Iraq are the latest examples that their presence may actually make the bloodshed even worse than before.
4. *Indifference due to hidden agendas*. In many cases, the main function of the intervention has little to do with the targeted conflicts – the important thing is that it can be made to look like intended to handle them - and more with power struggles among or within Great Powers, often with adverse effects on the conflict. In several cases, the US administration seems to have been prioritized (mostly successfully) to get a war before resolving a conflict, as demonstrated by meeting concessions with more demands, by brushing away all attempts at mediation or negotiation, etc. The Yugoslav conflicts in the first years were victims of several uncertainties and strategies in them: the trans-Atlantic balance of influence, the new relations of Russia to the West and the new position of the united Germany in the EU. There are several other ways in which the hidden agendas behind conflict intervention tend to exacerbate rather than ameliorate conflicts.

Hidden Agendas

There has presumably always been some divergence – as well as some overlap - between what Great Powers say they are trying to achieve by military interventions and what their actual priorities were. If anything, the divergence may even have increased due to the stronger norms against war and the accompanying hypocrisy. States refer less and less to national interests, not to speak about “national honour” and increasingly invoke whatever international norms they can (try to) use somehow.

In addition, the structural conditions have changed with the end of the Cold War. Previously, it was not possible to get a UN flag over an operation favouring the interests of one bloc if it was seen as harming the interests of the other bloc (and that left very few candidates for operations). The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR removed this “checks-and-balances system”, especially in the early years when Russia was still uncertain of what were its national interests and had the illusion that it would be accepted as an equal partner by the USA if it only behaved cooperatively. EU was looking for ways to demonstrate international actor capability, but not quite sure whether to do this in its own way or emulating the USA. NATO was gravely (and thereby one major US avenue of influence) was gravely threatened by the end of the Cold War, since grand coalitions are usually dissolved within years after perceived victory (e.g. the Napoleonic wars, WWI and WWII), and different ways of artificial respiration were tried. “Politicisation” died quickly when the Europeans discovered that this meant more US influence in Europe but not the other way around. In spite of the robust promises given to Gorbachev, enlargement soon came on the agenda and remains there, possibly even accelerating the dissolution process by the grand coalition getting even more grand. “Out-of-area operations” were talked about for years and finally tried against Yugoslavia for the first time – possibly also the last, since USA learnt how much difficult issues in politics and international law it involved to run a war by NATO, and has since preferred to run them its own leadership and vastly predominant participation, with whatever “coalition of willing” can be recruited by persuasion, bribes or threats. The end of the Cold War also threatened USA directly by lowering the importance and weight of military power (where it is more Number One than ever, and increasingly so after several years of accerelated military expenditures⁹ vis-à-vis economic power, where its relative position has gone down drastically since WWII, so that it is now at most the first among equals, with some uncertainty as to how long the “first” will last, Its repeated eagerness to get a war (especially Iraq 1990-91, Bosnia, Iraq 1998, Yugoslavia 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003) can be seen as having one component of looking for opportunities to try again to demonstrate to allies and others that military power is still by far the heaviest form and USA therefore Number One rather than first among equals: That these demonstrations have become less and less successful is another matter: international legitimacy by the UN system or even NATO is decreasing, the “willing” get fewer, the costs are skyrocketing and further undermining the US economy, the chance of even military victory slimmer and slimmer.

Success or Not?

Trying to assess the success of a (threatened) intervention is a very tricky matter, for several reasons: what criteria should we use? What sources of error are there? Should we relate results to costs? And so forth.

One criterion is the formal one that can be used when the intervention was mandated by a Security Council resolution stating demands that are to be achieved “by all necessary means”, which is the diplomatic code language to permit a war this covers Iraq 1990-1, Iraqi Kurdistan 1991-2 (although China later said they would have vetoed if understanding that the USA would

use it to intervene), Somalia 1992-3 and possibly the NATO bombing of the Bosnian Serbs in 1995 (but many questions surround this, also because there were several scores of sometimes contradicting resolutions) . To these may or may not be added Afghanistan, where there was a demands resolution but USA never bothered to get a "by all necessary means" resolution, and those where USA or some state representing it published some draft version of a resolution but never tabled it since it would be defeated (Iraq 1998, Yugoslavia 1999, possibly Libya in 2002 and Iraq 2003). The case of Haiti in 1994 was completely unilateral. There are problems with widening the cases beyond the first group however. We get a very mixed bag, where in several cases USA switched proclaimed goals when going from UNSC attempts to unilateralism. The first proclaimed aim concerning Yugoslavia was humanitarian, it then switched to getting it to sign the enlarged version of the Rambouillet demands that had been constructed to be absolutely sure to get a No from Belgrade and then to limiting the damage Yugoslavia could do in Kosovo (which was multiplied many times by the bombings), while the pattern of the bombings rather indicated an aim to destroy as much as possible of the civilian economy of Yugoslavia. In the latest Iraq case, the language in the UN was about weapons of mass destruction and demands that Iraq was to cooperate to prove 100,00 per cent that there were none. When the UN inspectors did not give grounds for any intervention and it became clear that no resolution would be forthcoming, the goals shifted immediately to "regime change".

Another criterion may consist in comparing what was actually achieved with the total costs for that. This carries some risk of subjectivity however, both in defining the achievements and costs to be included and in making the assessments where much information is kept secret and there are strong reasons to believe it falsified in some cases. Like the first kind of criterion, it also ignores hidden agendas.

One methodological problem lies in the very great need for USA, with (parts of) NATO and (in some cases) a handful of other temporary or permanent allies to look successful where the interventions are to demonstrate the importance of military power or occasionally other major things. This creates fairly thick walls for independent scholars to penetrate in order to get to the truth. The list below must therefore be taken with more than a grain of salt,

Iraq 1990-1. Formal success in relation to the initial resolution: Iraq pulled out of Kuwait (this might possibly have been achieved by giving Iraq at least some symbolic concession, but we do not know, since before the war USA stonewalled any attempts at mediation from the Arab League, France and the Soviet Union). We may add formal success with the subsequent resolutions on weapons of mass destruction: by the reports of the UN inspectors, there was soon – as far as could be judged – very little if anything left (before 1998 and 2003 USA accelerated verification demands to a level that they must have known was impossible to fulfill). In effects and costs terms, between one and two million people have been killed by economic sanctions, wars and violence in Iraq, with some four million refugees inside and outside Iraq, virtually everybody greatly impoverished, the security situation and welfare situation worse than ever and Iraq falling to several pieces who still have scores to settle. Practically all of this is due to things done after the Gulf War in 1991. Verdict: a failure of historical dimensions.

Iraqi Kurdistan 1991-2. In formal terms a success – there were no attacks from Baghdad then or later. In real terms: after the military withdrawal in 1992, the two main Kurdish regions had a war with each other for four years, although they now pretend to be a federation that pretends to be a part of Iraq represented in its formal political institutions. The Kurds are unlikely ever to let this mean anything in reality, and territorial issues remain to settle.

Somalia 1992-3. The mandate was humanitarian. In addition to Pakistani and UN troops USA sent in special forces under its own command to engage in war-fighting. When the Somalis fought back with some success, these forces were quickly withdrawn, as were the UN troops later. In most respects, most of Somalia is today in a worse situation than before the intervention. Verdict: fiasco

Bosnia 1992-95. The original resolution mandate was humanitarian, but scores of resolutions were later added. War-fighting intervention is mainly a matter of August- September 1995 (UNPROFOR had successfully dodged US attempts to get it at war with the Bosnian Serbs, France and Great Britain would not thus use their substantial forces there without company of US land troops, so it was the Army of Croatia that finally provided these). In formal terms and due to its UN blessing, the Dayton Agreements were seen as a clear success, where at least the “hard” parts (territorial division, demilitarized zones, limitations on numbers of troops and some categories of major weapons) have been implemented, as have some parts of some of the other agreements. In real terms, the welfare situation is rather worse than 20 years ago, and the attempts at creating a state by imposing a long list of state symbols has led to a world of pretense: the Croat and Moslem/Bosnjak parts pretend to form a Federation, which pretends to form a state together with Republika Srpska, while a High Representative with vast dictatorial powers and ultimately backed up by military presence of interveners is often removing democratically elected officers, forbidding political parties, overriding decisions by democratically elected bodies, etc. How long any of this will survive the military presence is an open question. Looking at the modest differences between Dayton and the Owen-Stoltenberg/Invincible Plan a couple of years earlier, or even the Lisbon Agreement before the war started, the question also arises whether a much less costly result could not have been achieved if previous plans and drafts had not been systematically sabotaged by USA. Verdict: success highly questionable.

Haiti 1994. Motivation humanitarian, but no UN blessing (in fact, criticism from the General Assembly). Some formal success, at least in the sense that the three ruling generals fled to their estates in France and handed power back to Aristide, who had won the latest elections. In real terms, whether security, political and human rights or welfare, the situation is worse than ever today – a total fiasco.

Iraq 1998. USA made the UN inspectors escalate the verification demands more and more, then pulled the inspectors out of Iraq and escalated the bombing (with UK as only willing collaborator). There was no UN blessing (not only Russia and China, but even France would veto). This did not lead to a single Iraqi concession, so a fiasco even in formal terms.

FR Yugoslavia 1999. The UCK/KLA, armed, trained and financed primarily by USA and UK, escalated the violence from mutual pinpricks to war in early 1998, apparently in order to provoke

Yugoslav over-reactions that could justify military intervention with humanitarian motivation. This was successful and the intervention by bombing started a year later after charades in Rambouillet. No UN mandate, but formal success after 78 days of bombing out the Yugoslav economy, at least in terms of NATO demands: Yugoslavia handed the administration of Kosovo over to UNMIK and KFOR after NATO capitulating from the extra demands that were added in Rambouillet in order to get a war: military occupation of all of Yugoslavia was limited to Kosovo only, guaranteed independence for Kosovo by asserting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and promising future political negotiations and the United Nations had to be let into the picture after all (UNSC Resolution 1244). In real terms, the numbers of killed and ethnically cleansed were multiplied by dozens of times during the bombing in comparison with the year before it, then receded to similar magnitudes as before the bombing for about half a year (the ethnicity of the victims now changed from primarily Albanian to primarily non-Albanian) and finally dwindled greatly. Refugees in neighbouring areas returned soon, those in other parts of Europe were more reluctant and were in some cases simply kicked out. No visible progress on unemployment, the vast criminal economy, etc. As this is written a couple of weeks before 10 December, no attempts are made here to predict the outcome of the ongoing game of bluff poker between USA, EU, Russia, Serbia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership.

Afghanistan 2001. After September 11, USA pointed at Afghanistan as guilty (in spite of the majority of the published perpetrators, including Osama bin Laden, being Saudi) and got a Security Council resolution asking Afghanistan for extraditions. Afghanistan replied that it was willing to extradite suspects to an Islamic court, provided that some prima facie evidence was presented against them and about their presence in Afghanistan. USA did not bother to go back to the UJNSC with this and ask for a "by all necessary means" resolution, but started the war and added "regime change" to the goals and imposed a new government in Kabul. Osama bin Laden has not been caught. In real terms, the regime change consists in the administration in Kabul having "live and let live" deals with many regional warlords, while Taliban is far from defeated after six years. The security situation has hardly improved, nor the welfare situation, the number of killed sums up to (very crudely) 100, 000 and there are about four million refugees in neighbouring countries, creating great burdens on Iran and Pakistan. In the "regime change" version of formal criteria, success can be presented by pretending that there is a democratic government in Kabul and pretending that this rules most of Afghanistan, except where USA and a minority among the "willing" are still fighting Taliban. In real terms, the intervention has been an unmitigated disaster. Afghanistan has thrown out the British Empire three times and then the Soviet superpower, so there may be some likelihood that the present interveners eventually escape too.

Libya 2002. This case has been little visible, perhaps because "nothing happened". USA presented a list of demands on possible preparations for nuclear weapons, limitations on and inspections of nuclear reactors, with no UN backing but some political support from Western Europe. The threatened intervention was successful in the sense that Libya accepted all demands, perhaps with the massive US and UK bombings in 1986 in memory. In real terms, Libya's con-

cessions may have cheated USA of a war it was trying to get by eliminating European support for it –but in general terms I would call this success rather than fiasco.

Iraq 2002-3. It appears that USA and UK agreed at least a year in advance to have a war, then went through a lot of motions in the UN to get it and went unilateral when they could not even get a simple majority in the Security Council, not to speak of a resolution. The war still goes on four and a half years after President Bush proclaimed “Mission accomplished”, and the arguments for seeing the intervention as a total fiasco have already been presented above.

Provisional Conclusion

The art of curing domestic conflicts by military interventions lies several generations behind the art of curing diseases by medical intervention. Successful cures are much fewer and the occurrence of iatrogenic diseases much higher. This is so already if we look at success in formal terms and much more so if we judge it in real terms. Today, the rational thing to do with a serious disease is to go to a hospital, unless very convincing arguments to the opposite effect. The rational thing to do with domestic conflicts is to try everything else instead of getting dragged into a military intervention, unless very convincing arguments stand up to systematic critical scrutiny. A first, but by no means final indication that this may be so is a unanimous UN Security Council resolution legitimizing it.