

# **The Effect of Humanitarian Intervention on States: A Political Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Humanitarian intervention has long been promoted as a tool to minimize suffering and resolve conflict, yet its growing use has produced mixed consequences that demand closer evaluation. This literature review examines the benefits, drawbacks, and long-term effects of humanitarian intervention through a political perspective. While technological advances and peacebuilding practices have strengthened certain interventions, evidence also reveals recurring patterns of instability, protracted violence, and threats to state sovereignty. The blurred motives behind many interventions—often shaped by political and economic interests—raise questions about the erosion of altruism in humanitarian aid. Historical cases such as NATO’s action in Libya highlight the dangers of poorly planned interventions, which can undermine independence and worsen conflict. This paper argues for reassessing the current system, weighing reforms that modify existing structures alongside proposals for a broader non-statist order, to ensure humanitarian intervention remains consistent with its original purpose of protecting human dignity.

## **Key Contribution**

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate by synthesizing diverse perspectives on humanitarian intervention and outlining reform strategies that balance state sovereignty with humanitarian responsibility.

## **The Current State of Humanitarian Intervention**

Humanitarian intervention is often described as the policy of intervening in a given problematic situation that causes alarm, either by force or diplomacy, in order to stop devastation in such an area. Unfortunately, over the last couple years the term humanitarian intervention has become synonymous with conflict, mandating an evaluation of the motives and effects associated with such humanitarian interventions. Proponents of the current system governing humanitarian intervention cite its efficacy in minimizing intense human suffering and resolving conflict seamlessly, thereby deeming it a laudable approach for making the decision to partake in such interventions. However, such critics fail to account for the inexplicably increasing utilization of intervention, ultimately causing more harm. Moreover, the utilization of humanitarian intervention has become strikingly more sporadic, raising questions as to the underlying motives behind such interventions; essentially, interventions are deviating from altruistic purposes and are more focused on selfish interests. Lastly, the long-term consequences of humanitarian intervention are becoming more noticeable, especially in regard to the independence of states that are being intervened in. Consequently, a reassessment and reexamination of the current system for humanitarian intervention becomes essential.

## **Benefits Associated with the Current System**

In light of the potential drawbacks that are being addressed in regards to the current system for humanitarian intervention, supporters of the current system attempt to defend its functionality. As stated by a meta-analysis published in the *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, the advent of technology is often considered “the prime enabler behind improved effectiveness and efficiency within the [humanitarian] sector” (Bruder & Baar, 2024). This is demonstrative of the

improvements that are being made to the current system for deeming the utilization of humanitarian intervention, however it is quite misleading to therefore assume that the current system is free of flaws. The World Economic Forum effectively questions this misguided rationale: “while technology undoubtedly offers a path to greater efficiency...its full capabilities remain untapped in the humanitarian sector” (Daba, 2024). Consequently, it becomes necessary to reconsider the possibility of improving the current system for humanitarian intervention and amending the liabilities associated with it.

### **Drawbacks to Consider for Refinement**

One of the most commonly cited concerns in support of the establishment of a different system for humanitarian intervention is the growing commonality of such interventions. As the frequency and the intensity of these interventions increase, it is only natural that a state of perturbation regarding the future of such conflicts arises. Inevitably, the use of humanitarian intervention often entails a period of ruination. The International Committee of the Red Cross mirrors these concerns as “vicious cycles of violence are leading to protracted conflicts where countries are in crisis for decades” (2021). The idea that humanitarian intervention actually results in more conflict is somewhat counterintuitive, as the reason for intervention is to minimize human suffering. However, this is the case for most interventions; “despite good intentions humanitarian intervention invariably leads to instability, occupation, and death of innocent civilians” (Ledwidge & Menon). This proves that simply the act of intervening inescapably leads to more destruction. Such a revelation calls for a reexamination of the current system for humanitarian intervention. While the regularity of humanitarian interventions is a valid argument to promote the restructuring of the current system, another problem needs to be

addressed: the motives behind the use of humanitarian intervention. According to *Humanitarian Intervention Today*, the concept of humanitarian intervention was initially “aimed at saving innocent people in other countries from massive violations of human rights” (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015). Unfortunately, the original definition of humanitarian intervention has become blurred, and the incentives behind such interventions often selfishly extend beyond the concept of humanitarian aid. An article published in *The Journal of Religious Ethics* echoes this idea—the author contends that interventions purportedly for altruistic purposes are frequently inconceivable, as nations are guided by self-interest, making genuinely altruistic interventions extremely rare (Miller, 2000). This exemplifies the notion that the purpose behind interventions cannot be readily assumed without the necessary attention to possible political and economic motivators. Consequently, it becomes of utmost importance to reevaluate and refine the current system of humanitarian intervention, especially to ensure the doctrine of humanitarian aid remains preserved. The final factor that causes concern when considering the current system of humanitarian intervention is its ability to exacerbate conflicts by posing a threat to state autonomy and sovereignty, essentially affecting its right to independence. According to Britannica, humanitarian intervention often results “in situations where there is no effective government and civil order consequently has collapsed” (Bell, 2023). The utilization of humanitarian intervention effectively and efficiently discredits existing state governments in the region, leading to a period of confusion and uncertainty, ultimately making the conflict worse. On that account, it becomes incredibly important to revise the current system of humanitarian intervention to avoid hastily planned interventions that only serve to worsen conflicts in the given regions. However, numerous supporters of the current system aim to establish credibility by pointing out its effectiveness in controlling underlying issues such as poverty, inequality, and

political oppression. Theoretically, current interventions possess the potential to contribute to stability by following “peacebuilding principles and best [practices]” (Lambourne & Herro, 2008). This coincides with the original purpose of humanitarian intervention—to address root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and dictatorial rule. While this may sound good on paper, the harsh truth is that most interventions fail to maintain such expectations, instead leading to unintended and undesirable negative outcomes. A simple look at historical interventions clearly illustrates this; “the NATO intervention in Libya was extremely controversial due to its failure in outlining what the true objectives were” (Green, 2019). Following this period, the Libyan government needed to be completely restructured to address autonomy concerns. This clearly highlights how an intervention that is improperly planned can easily lead to the worsening of conflicts within states.

### **Potential Solutions to Implement**

Having evaluated the factors to consider when discussing the current system for humanitarian intervention, it comes time to decide how to refine the current system. One possible solution is to attempt to combat the statist concept and deviate from centralized power structures. Instead, implementing a larger plan that disregards the need for powerful central authorities can prove to be more sustainable and less destructive. A paper published in the *International Political Science Review* expands on this idea—while “humanitarian intervention is justified under certain circumstances,” it needs to be “undertaken as part of a larger project of creating a just and non-statist global order” (Parekh, 1997). While such a solution undoubtedly solves many of the current issues with humanitarian intervention, the plausibility of implementing it presents a problem. Therefore, another solution that is more feasible is to modify the current humanitarian intervention system. Despite all its flaws, the current humanitarian system, to some extent, is

working, and it “can definitely [shift] towards [a system] that’s future ready” (2024). Perhaps tweaking the current system is all that needs to be done to avoid the issues with humanitarian intervention. Of course, the most critiqued part of such a solution is that it may not adequately solve the current issues with humanitarian intervention. The best approach would be to propose a combinatorial solution involving both strategies. As a move toward a drastically different system for humanitarian intervention is made, implementing larger changes as a series of smaller changes attempts to address not only the practicality of such an implementation but also the effectiveness.

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