

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots. Most dots are light gray, but several are colored red, notably in North America, Europe, and East Asia. The title 'Multinational Intervention Strategies Revisited' is overlaid on this map.

Multinational Intervention Strategies Revisited

FES WORKING GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

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- Since the end of the Cold War, states have intervened militarily in regional crises and conflicts in various coalitions, acting in the name of the International Community. The political and military success of these operations is unconvincing, considering the goals pursued, the resources spent and the lamentable large scale of human sacrifice.
- NATO, the EU and the UN have developed a tendency to set very broad and abstract goals, allowing for multiple strategies to be pursued one after another and, in some cases, even diverging approaches of participating nations pursued at the same time. But this approach of stumbling forward, which prevailed during the conflict in Afghanistan, is no way out of the strategic dilemma: Improvised trial and error strategies are no strategy at all.
- Peacebuilding after an armed conflict should remain among the top priorities of international security policy. Successful peacebuilding requires necessarily and in any case that a coherent and common strategy is agreed among the different actors and the nations participating in this effort. Civil and military operational planning should be interlocked from the start.
- In case offensive military interventions can be expected to be counterproductive while merely staying inactive is considered to be no option, alternative intervention strategies should be considered. Such could be a strategy of »flexible containment«, which in no way rules out limited offensive military action, if necessary.



Multilateral security policy requires deeper strategic analysis

Since the end of the Cold War, states have attempted to intervene militarily in regional crises and conflicts through various coalitions in the name of the international community. In all these cases, a mixture of geostrategic interests and humanitarian considerations has been essential. Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, along with numerous UN-led peacekeeping missions, represent a string of military interventions with rather modest success. The political and military outcomes of those operations are less than auspicious relative to the goals that were pursued when they began and the resources that were used in pursuing them, to say nothing of the lamentable large-scale human sacrifice. This poor track record might be attributed to the fact that the full complexity of those conflicts was obviously insufficiently analysed and understood and that there is no agreed-upon civil-military mode of intervention¹ that addresses that complexity and prevents interventions themselves from becoming part of the problem.

The complexity and intensity of many 21st century conflicts is exemplified by the multifarious war in and around Syria. Various political and military dimensions overlap and influence one another in chains of action that cannot be calculated. So there is simultaneously a civil and a transnational (proxy) war underway in Syria in which both regional (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey) as well as global powers (United States and Russia) are intervening at least indirectly with arms supplies and logistical support for the warring parties. The global actors' calculations are also influenced by an additional factor, namely the long-term conflict over Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, the conflict is part of a religious and sectarian war within Islam involving Islamic groups with very different orientations, including terrorist organisations. Altogether, the Syrian conflict reflects a closely interwoven bundle of interests and motivations in the already chronically unstable Middle East region, a place marked for decades by the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and a centre of gravity for Western energy supply security.

1. In this paper, interventions always mean political interventions, which may be carried out by civil and/or military means. In this sense, military interventions are always political, which is to say that they must be politically determined and accountable.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian crisis that has been ongoing since early 2014 has shown the world that a new split in Europe once again seems possible. Long outdated conceptions of collective self-defence within the framework of the NATO alliance are suddenly up for debate again and are presenting Europe with challenges in which immediate threats to European states and society are once more apparent. Collective defence in Europe is again moving more firmly towards the centre of NATO's range of tasks, fortifying a tendency that Eastern European NATO partners have been demanding for years.

In these two fields of security policy action, namely crisis management with respect to transnational civil wars outside of Europe and responses to crises in the context of collective defence, strategic foresight and strategically conceived action is indispensable. Any measures or interventions in such complex crisis situations must be preceded by careful and rational strategic analysis in which achievable goals are set and the risks and consequences of specific steps are considered.

The American security strategy is in transition: stronger orientation towards Asia, military force reductions and greater restraint in military interventions

In the United States, the long and costly military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced war weariness, particularly given that those deployments can hardly be described as successful and that not only the troops who were sent there suffered many casualties, but the civilian populations in the areas of operation as well. Along the way, the American government has also become well aware of the loss of international trust that it has had to endure as a result. President Obama explicitly rejects a role for the United States as the »world's policeman«. Moreover, the geostrategic focal points of American security policy have shifted towards Asia. A comprehensive military engagement involving ground troop deployments on Europe's periphery, for example, has therefore become less likely; only selective military interventions are to be expected. They will primarily only be an option when vital US interests are at stake. The United States' initially hesitant posture towards the Syrian conflict – its late willingness to potentially use limited air strikes to deter the Assad regime from further use of chemical weapons and above all to prevent the



opposition's defeat – underscores that assessment. The financial and debt crises that also persist in the US and that have had drastic effects on the American defence budget will also make military interventions more difficult. The Obama Administration, however, has in no way bid adieu to values and humanitarian considerations in its decision-making with respect to interventions. It may still be willing to at least intervene with limited strikes in cases of severe human rights violations, for example in the event of mass killings or following the use of weapons of mass destruction as in Syria.² In that regard, the mass murders in Rwanda and Srebrenica in the 1990s, in which the United States and the international community did not intervene, remain a political trauma that still has an effect. In his speech at West Point on May 28, 2014, President Obama again expressed his overall preference for a cautious approach when dealing with international cases and conflicts.

Whether the current crisis in Eastern Europe in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea will reverse, if only partially, the shift in the focal point of American security policy, is an open question, but one of great significance to the alliance.

Lessons learnt and the strategic approach to new risks

The interventions of the past ten to twenty years must be reappraised without reservation, including the level of political strategy. This has largely been neglected to date because governments generally find it difficult to acknowledge their own errors and omissions.

The UN as well as NATO and the EU need a constructive security policy »error culture«: Errors and omissions must be jointly and openly discussed with a view to possible future engagements. Learning from past experience, however, is not enough to successfully handle crises and conflicts. Every new crisis generates surprising situations and requires an extremely high degree of flexibility in strategy development. Actively evolving security risks highlight this fact. The global threats that are cited again and again, such as the proliferation of weapons

2. »I have made it clear that even when America's core interests are not directly threatened, we stand ready to do our part to prevent mass atrocities and protect basic human rights.« <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>

of mass destruction and modern conventional weapons, regional wars, cyber attacks, climate change, criminal actions by large non-state actors, resource and food scarcity as well as blockades of important maritime trade routes only reflect trends in isolated fields. Listing these trends has become a commonplace, but that is not enough for a deeper understanding of future crises and conflicts. Concrete risk scenarios only arise from a specific combination of trends and conflict drivers. Above all, scenario technology, through which the possible interplay of various trends and their escalation are hypothetically played out, can support comprehension of ways and means to address future crises and conflicts as well as responses to them. It is particularly important to identify potential tipping points in the course of a crisis – moments in which incidents may take a violent turn and spin out of control.

But above all – and with respect to possible future crisis interventions – the new parameters require:

- Strategic early detection and preventive engagement;
- A long-term orientation towards political strategy and prioritisation of scarce forces and resources on the crises and conflicts presenting the greatest danger to Europe and the international community;
- A solid legal basis, legitimacy, and public acceptance, particularly where military interventions are concerned;
- A fundamental change of strategy from the current strategic ambition of direct civil-military intervention in crisis and conflict states towards a fundamentally defensive strategy of flexible containment.

Strategic early warning and preventive engagement must be strengthened

All timely action is preceded by early detection. Early warning signals must be detected in the right time and assessed for their potential dynamics. In multilateral fora and security organisations, strategic early warning is linked to the challenge of uniting often-distinct national risk assessments. National strategic analyses and threat perceptions are formed by the respective national interests, goals, internal political processes and security cultures. There are no objective »true« risk assessments;



they are always co-determined by particular fundamental perspectives and perception filters. In multilateral security policy, this can produce controversies regarding the handling of an emerging crisis, even among allies. Intensive, open, and respectful consultation in awareness and recognition of different perceptions and security cultures is indispensable for reaching a common assessment. That particularly applies to agreement on the need for action and joint decisions in favour of intervention.

Preventive engagement is a task for international political diplomacy, which nations must provide with efficient instruments. These include economic and financial policy instruments first and military options last, when they can contribute to managing a crisis.

Preventive engagement is also only effective if the commitment of force is significant and involves all of the relevant political areas. The preventive use of military means requires a particularly high investment in a civil-political framework of action.

Strategy formation requires clear and concrete political objectives

Political and military strategy formation is certainly becoming increasingly difficult in a security environment that is complex and difficult to calculate. This applies to creating a comprehensive political crisis strategy as well as to the partial military strategy that must be embedded within it. This does not mean that these can be passed over but that strategy development requires the highest degree of flexibility and adaptability.

The interventions of the past two decades show how difficult it is to appreciate and understand all of the essential elements of a conflict situation and to undertake an intervention in such a way that the intended goals are reached and, in any event, unintended consequences are avoided to the greatest extent possible. It is important for all participants to agree on a joint strategy to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals. In NATO, the EU, and the UN, however, a tendency has developed to set very broad, abstract goals, to plan for the short term, and to utilise an approach that admits trial and error as well as the pursuit of multiple strategies at the same time. It is a process of all but poking around in a fog of uncertainty until the next fork in the road requires another decision. But this

approach of stumbling forward and/or sideways, which prevailed for years during the conflict in Afghanistan, is no way out of the strategic dilemma: Improvised strategy is no strategy at all. Incremental actions or proceeding by trial and error usually indicate short-term thinking and the absence of a targeted strategy – and involve the danger of mission creep: In general, acting without a strategy oriented towards clear goals ultimately leads to constrained action and entanglements that easily deviate from the original intentions.

The political and strategic goals of a possible intervention therefore must be clearly defined. They have to be concrete and comprehensible and have a sufficient likelihood of viability. Goals articulated as, for example, »self-supporting political stability« are not good enough and must be fleshed out to the extent that intermediate goals can be identified and reviewed. The real motives, particularly the common interests of the active partners, must be expressed in the articulation and justification of those goals. This is a matter of stating a convincing rationale for a possible intervention for the sake of national parliaments as well as for the public and media. That requires a particularly high degree of political leadership.

The primacy of political leadership over military leadership must be maintained at every stage. With respect to military leadership, this means that political bodies must establish unambiguous political objectives including necessary caveats before military options are developed. Politics must not be confined to assigning military authorities to develop courses of action without specifying clear, nuanced objectives and constraints. Political leadership must never delegate the application of its leadership responsibilities to military leadership; military leadership must never attempt to actively shape political decision-making processes beyond its consultative function. Military deployment is still the continuation of political action with the involvement of military means (Clausewitz).

A profound situational analysis is the key to formulating reachable goals

Political goals must be determined based on a profound and comprehensive situational analysis that delves into the complexity of the interconnections to the greatest extent possible and links them to particular interests. No



successful political or military solutions can be generated without an accurate diagnosis. The greatest political and military errors are usually made at the start, which is to say already in the planning stage. The crux of a crisis or of a conflict of interests in the usually highly complex manifestations of conflicts as described here – along with the full breadth of (seldom neutral) expert opinions, assessments, and media commentary – must be recognised. This includes a careful analysis of the actors involved, which must produce information about what potential opponents want, what their perception of reality is, what ideologies and emotions drive their behaviour (such as hatred or willingness to die) – in short, what psychological models determine their behaviour and countermeasures. That is the only way to ensure that the nature of a conflict is sufficiently understood and that qualified decisions are made. In this regard, ways in which the interconnectedness of analytical capacities within the community of states, primarily within the EU and NATO, can be expanded and strengthened through competent scientific expertise should also be reviewed.

Civil wars are almost always transnational wars

It should always be remembered that nearly all so-called domestic conflicts or civil wars are in reality transnational wars. Regional and global powers have overt or covert influence, for example, by supplying weapons and logistical support (i.e., proxy wars). The actual power structures and driving political interests of the parties to a conflict and the influential external powers must be recognised, named in planning documents, and taken into consideration. In national and international political debates prior to an intervention, the various actors' real motives and mutually entangled humanitarian and geostrategic rationales and layers of argumentation must always be recognised in their full mutability and addressed in multilateral negotiations.

Opposing action possibilities should be better anticipated in planning and application and taken into consideration in strategy formation

A strategic orientation also requires that the actions and reactions of the parties to a conflict are anticipated as well as possible before and during an engagement and

that the consequences of an actor's own actions or even of an actor's failure be continually assessed. Relevant »devil's advocate« questions should be asked openly and answered during the planning stage. For example, what effects will a military intervention have on the various actors in the region in which a conflict takes place and how can the risk of inadvertent escalation be contained? Forming *red* teams that investigate adversarial actions and are integrated into political strategy planning can be useful for this. Careful evaluation of opponents' options and their feedback into one's own planning is the key to successful operations, whether civilian or military.

Available forces and resources must correspond to strategic goals

The UN, NATO, the EU or ad hoc coalitions should only commit to military deployments when the political will and the capacity to control escalation – and simultaneously to control de-escalation – have been assured. Capacities, forces, means, and resources must correspond to the articulated strategic goals. The extent of forces and resources is still important and cannot be replaced by another smart technology-supported approach. Usually only the principle of *overwhelming* force is effective in civil as well as military interventions. This should also apply to tactical action planning, including troop strength and weaponry, in order to be able to produce clear local superiority at any time, for instance against locally strong insurgent groups.

Most countries, however, are confronted with limitations on deployable materials and forces as well as the available financial resources for troop deployment. Even in NATO countries, troop capability development faces increasing financial constraints – a political decision that military planners have to live and work with. The multilateral committees of NATO and the EU should openly and honestly analyse what forces they can or cannot offer, given respective national structural particularities. Hollow ambitions for deployment and intervention possibilities must be avoided. The same applies to particularly important civil capabilities, for example with police, the judiciary and development assistance. Resource limitations create a need to concentrate on rather few but necessary interventions, which need to be well justified.



Previous peacebuilding concepts must be thoroughly reviewed

Peacebuilding in the wake of armed conflicts should remain among the top priorities in the civil-military field in the future.

The poor peacebuilding record to date, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq has revealed the possibilities and the limitations for consolidating peace despite the employment of substantial personnel and resources and must be reviewed thoroughly. If the political and social elites in the country of operation lack the emphatic will and capacity for good governance and the rule of law, a resolute fight against corruption, the establishment of a fair economic order, and unification of the state, then peacebuilding cannot be sustainable.

From the start, strategic orientation also requires civil and military operation planning to be interlocked. Despite extensive effort, the needed culture of collaboration has only reached a rudimentary level. The aim should be to integrate all civil and military processes in order to achieve synergies in operation. This is the unity of purpose and effort under the functional primacy of civil political authorities. It requires a credible, comprehensive political intervention concept with built-in civil measures and a military operations plan – and not the other way around.

This remains a challenge because the various actors usually encounter opposing cultures and approaches. This is due to the fact that civil reconstruction or development cooperation and military protection often follow very different logics. They can sometimes appear to be incompatible, particularly when peacebuilding has to occur in parallel to the fighting of armed insurgent groups. That makes it more difficult to communicate among each other and share orientation towards a common goal beyond the mere coexistence of several structures. The civil-military nexus should be reviewed and moulded more constructively in theory and practice. This requires a fruitful, reciprocal understanding and acceptance of each other's differences as well as the development of practical rules and principles and real collaborative processes. Military leadership at all levels and the leading personnel in civil organisations need to recognise that they are sharing a common responsibility in the field, only then can paths towards a common goal be developed.

Interlocked, homogeneous civil-military planning is not guaranteed. It requires effective process control on both the national and multilateral levels. This will only be accomplished when the highest authorities in national capitals and in international headquarters agree on common standards for taking action. Moreover, involving relevant non-governmental organisations in analysis and planning of action early on is useful.

The responsible actors on the political and military levels should consider their collaboration as necessary to share a common responsibility with a clear definition of their respective roles.

A solid legal basis and strong legitimacy are indispensable for military intervention

A solid legal basis and strong legitimacy for military interventions are preconditions for successful military interventions. They are decisive for both international support as well as for the consent of the countries dispatching civil and military personnel.

According to Article 51 of the UN Charter, only the UN Security Council can legitimise the use of military force in cases other than individual or collective self-defence. Other than that, under certain conditions a request for military support by a state or its legal government can also create sufficient legality under international law. In such cases, however, that legal basis should be reinforced whenever possible by a UN Security Council resolution in order to ensure the consent of the international community. Political practice to date shows that this procedure cannot always apply, as even the mass killings in Rwanda in 1994 and in Srebrenica in 1995 did not lead to the adoption of a resolution of the Security Council allowing appropriate action; instead it was paralysed by the opposing national interests of its permanent members.³ In such exceptional cases in which intervention is ethically necessary, it may be necessary to replace legality with strong legitimacy. The precondition for this is that the Security Council's inaction can be characterised – and

3. In Rwanda, there was certainly evidence that the responsible authorities at UN Headquarters (above all the Secretariat and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) led by Kofi Annan) did not take the UNAMIR mission's insights seriously enough when they should have considered them and sent them officially on to the Security Council. It should be assumed, however, that multiple Security Council member states had information about the actual situation on the ground and the impending genocide through their own national intelligence.



this with convincing and comprehensible arguments – as being illegitimate. While such inaction would always be formally legal given that there is nothing in the UN Charter that forces the Security Council to act, it can nevertheless be characterised as illegitimate if intervention is urgently necessary in cases of severe human rights violations according to common opinion. Such a course of action, however, must be restricted to rare, exceptional cases and must not be institutionalised as »humanitarian intervention«: The Security Council's monopoly on the authorisation of peace-enforcement measures as specified in the UN Charter is an exceedingly precious good for the international order and should not be undermined by repeated use of exceptions.

A possible change of strategy from direct military intervention to a strategy of flexible containment

In cases where offensive military interventions are considered to be counterproductive for any number of reasons, the question of future alternative intervention strategies other than mere inaction may be raised. In individual cases and after careful consideration, restraint may be a much better solution, particularly when the possible consequences of intervention appear to be incalculable.

On the other hand, specific containment interventions by the international community do suggest obvious alternatives. Containment in the context of international crisis management and collective defence, such as during the Cold War, can be regarded as different manifestations of containment. Elements of containment strategies other than collective defence have been applied to international security policy for years, for example to Iran and in the Syrian conflict.

The question of whether or to what extent NATO should utilise containment strategies against Russia in light of the Ukrainian crisis would require a separate, thorough analysis and falls outside the scope of this article.

Overall, a new containment strategy to check civil wars and transnational armed conflicts would require deeper investigation and can only be broadly outlined here: Containment in this instance does not mean cynically avoiding conflict situations and their humanitarian consequences

but rather is directed at having a moderating effect on the parties to a conflict and steering that conflict toward nonviolent paths, deflecting the effects of conflict away from Europe, and protecting endangered civilian populations from the possibility of excessive violence.

Such a strategy of containing threats must be comprehensive, long-term, and consistently oriented to stability and it must be communicated through enhanced international diplomacy. It must be an integrated strategy that is not merely declaratory or rudimentary but that is at the core of political-operative planning. As an element of early warning, containment must be applied in the integrated policy and economic sectors and above all it must include regional powers with interests in intervention and prevent them from fomenting violent conflict in neighbouring countries. One crucial component would be a consistently restrictive and internationally coordinated weapons-export policy among the leading exporter nations: Supplying weapons to regional powers striving for dominance generally increases at least the mid- to long-term risk of violent domestic and international conflict. Transfers of weapons to regional powers that are themselves intervening in regional conflicts with money, combat training, and weapon supplies should therefore be strictly rejected. In this regard, long-term stability and well-founded confidence in the governments of recipient countries should be firm criteria for authorisation of arms exports.

A fundamental reorientation by the major powers towards a long-term approach to pursuing their geo-strategic interests is vital here. Global as well as regional powers must withhold support from particular conflicting parties and armed groups that they are affiliated with in favour of focusing on longer-term stability and solutions. Early detection is imperative for anticipating cascading negative impacts that in time may turn short-term advantages into the opposite due to support for particular conflicting parties. Examples include American support for Saddam Hussein's regime in the war against Iran and American support for Islamist rebels against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Thinking about long-term stability should take precedence over expectations of short-term political gain. With reference to the UN Security Council, zero-sum thinking in foreign and security policy would also have to be peeled away by balancing the interests of and cooperation among the major powers, particularly the



United States and Russia. This particularly applies to key economic and power-policy regions. Geopolitical and geostrategic calculations are always an implicit part of international relations, even if actors usually refrain from openly saying so. The point is not to flatly reject such calculations but to steer them towards accommodating and nonviolent paths.

What resources and tools would a flexible containment strategy require?

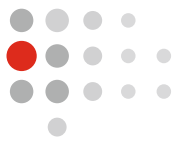
First, nations must be prepared to strengthen international diplomacy by making effective forms of pressure available to it. Steps taken by the UN Security Council in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter and the preparedness of states or security organisations like NATO are indispensable in this regard. Above all, economic and financial policy measures and tools that are established in the UN Charter, such as sanctions, embargoes, and blockades, constitute important forms of pressure. Intelligent sanctions in the fields of finance, energy, and trade as well as targeted measures against responsible elites could be increasingly applied. The effectiveness of sanction regimes is controversial due to their possible unintended side effects and their potential for backlash. The sanctions toolset would have to be carefully tailored to achieve the intended change of behaviour.

Such indirect measures against the parties to a conflict should be accompanied by political and economic stabilisation of the states neighbouring the conflict zone in order to prevent the violence from spreading. This would include, for example, supporting those neighbours as they accommodate refugees from the area of conflict. To the extent possible without intensifying the conflict, this might also involve establishing safe areas and humanitarian corridors that make it easier to protect and accommodate people in the conflict zone and to ease the burden on the neighbouring states.

Economic and humanitarian measures are at the heart of such a containment strategy. If it makes sense to do so, these might be flanked by military activities. In the event of military flanking, it must be strictly embedded or interwoven into the economic and humanitarian deployment concept. In principle, the following tasks are conceivable for multinational military forces:

- Helping to stabilise and develop the capacity of forces in neighbouring states with solid governance, particularly in the areas of leadership, strategy development, arms and military training, and logistics;
- Implementing trade embargoes, particularly embargoes of weapons shipments by sea, land or air, authorised by the UN Security Council;
- Keeping maritime trade routes open in the geographic region around the conflict as well as deterring and combating piracy;
- Humanitarian operations to protect and accommodate civilian victims, particularly displaced persons and refugees under the aegis of the United Nations' »Responsibility to Protect« principle; this may also include selective military deployments of limited duration in war zones as well as preservation of humanitarian corridors;
- Preventing spillover of violent conflicts into the region by stabilizing and, in extreme cases, defensive deployments in border areas of neighbouring states, provided that such deployments are desired by the states concerned;
- Military protection for civil peace building measures in connection with a lasting cessation of armed conflict.

A strategy of flexible containment in no way rules out limited offensive military deployments as a last resort, but it does place them in an altogether defensive framework. In this context, the element of military deterrence should be reconsidered as a strategic instrument. That way, the threat of specific air strikes on central military targets of the conflicting parties may well change the behaviour of governments and ruling elites according to the wishes of the international community. One current example would be the fact that the Russian government and the Assad regime backed down in October 2013 and permitted the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to destroy Syrian chemical weapons under threat of American air strikes. However, the effectiveness of deterrence lives and dies by the credibility of the threat of such actions, which is to say by the willingness to actually carry out the threatened strikes or measures if the intended effect does not occur. This correlation cannot be left out of the decision-making process. Again and also against this background, military deterrence requires strong legitimacy.



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