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General Comments on External Intervention in Countries in Crisis

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Theories and Realities of Intervention: a Variety of Configurations

The history of recent interventions (September 2001 being a convenient starting point from a Western perspective) led by some States in other countries shows that each situation has called for a very different approach.

The range of positions adopted by states involved during this period is remarkable, and confirms that there seems to be no fixed configuration of intervening states or opposing states. There was unanimity in 2001 in Afghanistan, deep divisions between the Western allies in 2003 in Iraq, abstention from the emerging powers (including Brazil) and Germany at the Security Council in 2011 over Libya, and an isolated French intervention in 2013 in Mali with logistical support from a few allies.

There is similar variety when it comes to theories. The 2012 version of the Brazilian National Defence White Paper is mainly devoted to the strategic context of the 21st century. It advocates a co-operative multipolarity: bringing together co-operation and defence capabilities and spelling out positions regarding the system of international relations. Seen from Brasilia, the only legitimate interventions are peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the United Nations, and set within strict limits of impartiality and non-substitution of the parties in conflict. The most recent strategic reviews and European white papers recommend a state acting alone should

only intervene under an explicit UN mandate, and only in the case of an emergency. They consider it preferable to act within a coalition, and insist that military action should be only one element used to neutralize a crisis situation and lay the foundations for political compromise. The African crises were the topic discussed during 62% of time dedicated to debate at the UN Security Council in 2012, and from a French perspective there is a need to involve African regional peacekeeping forces as well as mediation by regional institutions. In 2013 in the Middle East, it is easier to proclaim the goal of a political solution than to actually obtain one when the conflicting parties believe, as they do in Syria, that all discussions belong to the battlefield. In such circumstances a realistic approach has to prevail, which in practice means taking the most cautious path.

Opinions differ regarding the principle of “responsibility to protect” (UN, 2005). Brazilian diplomats put forward the concept of responsibility while protecting. However, consensus remains on the concept of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. This idea was formulated in the 18th century by Alexandre Gusmão, under the legal term *uti possidetis*. The notion was also adopted by the African Union (Cairo Declaration of 1964) and is a basic concept for the majority of European states (namely with regard to the dangers of partition or reshaping of the Middle East into new “emirates”). In my opinion, the real divide is between states which use their diplomacy and defence policy in the frame of their international responsibilities, and states which do not: those remaining in the majority.

Yet, history and geography cannot be ignored in this context. Half of the serious crises that started in the world in 2013 are located between three and six hours flight from Brussels. Remaining indifferent is possible. But this stance is neither reasonable, nor sustainable in the long term in Europe. Indeed, one has to take into account the proximity, the historic and human relationships between people from both sides of the Mediterranean Sea and of the Sahara desert, which is no longer a border.

The dangers and assessment of risks for the crises discussed in this paper (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Mali,...) show, on the contrary, the importance of the connections established between the different locations. The countries which intervened in those operations have learned lessons, and this may explain their cautious policies in 2013 in Syria and the widespread decision to retreat from Afghanistan in 2014.

It is also important to assess the risks of interventions in relation to their political results in the current context. This assessment takes into account the role of national and regional stakeholders that are often forgotten in the general debate on legitimacy and sovereignty. The key stakeholders are those who have perennial interests (such as Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan, Syria in Lebanon, and Algeria in the Sahara-Sahel zone). The importance of regional powers is often underestimated, probably as a consequence of Western narcissism.

Imperatives for Intervention: a Critical Analysis

The imperatives to act include the external stakeholders' motivations and arguments, in particular when they are invoking the United Nations Charter (or NATO's Article 5 on Allies solidarity), collective moral principles (responsibility to protect from 2005), strategic goals (against enemies that identify some states and their citizens as targets), or, in more rare cases, economic interests (energy, communication routes).

In the case of Afghanistan, which has been through a series of external interventions since 1978, the events of 9/11 led the allies of the United States to demonstrate solidarity after the attack, invoking article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and based on the unanimously adopted UN resolution 1386. The United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, with the objective of eliminating the bases of Al-Qaida Central, defeating the Taliban regime and the "rebuilding" of a state which was deemed to have "failed" according to the Bonn Agreement.

With regards to Iraq, it was proven quite early that the Republican administration's arguments were both false (to destroy rumoured weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein could not admit didn't exist because of tensions with Iran) and excessive (to reshape the Middle East). France and Germany refused to take part in a military raid (considered "disastrous" by Senator Obama), and NATO's new European allies ("the New Europe") were not able to cope with the demands of their new protector of last resort. Paris and Berlin were later on proven right to oppose the operation, but they paid a high price for their decision ("Punish France, ignore Germany and forgive Russia", as expressed by Condoleeza Rice). The France-bashing lasted for several years with serious economic consequences and reputational damage. Berlin was forced to accept deep intelligence co-operation, as was discovered in 2013. Moscow was marginalised.

In Libya, Paris and London took the initiative on their own, arguing that they were implementing the new principle of "responsibility to protect". It was clear that the Khadafi regime would massacre the rebels in Benghazi and Cyrenaica, as declared by the Libyan government. It was seen that the Europeans, who had previously suffered massacres in Bosnia, were not ready to morally accept another mass killing, this time perpetrated in Libya. Still, it is also clear that the interpretation of resolution 1973 led to the introduction of a regime change objective, in a civil war context. Germany, Brazil, China, India and Russia all abstained from the Security Council vote. It's worth noting that the Arab League supported France and Britain's move, and forces from Qatar and United Arab Emirates led military and support operations.

Finally in Mali, the January 2013 military intervention initiative lay entirely with France. The operation was intended to counter the advance of armed jihadist groups towards the capital Bamako initiated by AQIM, MUJWA and Ansar Dine. The jihadists were responding to the firm and detailed UN Security Council resolution 2085 (dated 20/12/2012) that intended among other things to deploy the AFISMA with the support of regional and international forces. The French-initiated military action was

requested by the interim Malian president. The operation's objective was to stop, drive back and finally destroy AQIM's central base in the Saharan mountain region - an area that the previous government admitted it had lost control of. It should be remembered that France doesn't have economic interests in Mali, unlike China or Algeria. Mali is the African country that receives the largest amount of French aid. However, France has an extensive expertise in Mali (the rescue of hostages) and there is a large Malian population living in France. This community has approved the intervention as "a life-line".

In the case of Syria, the aforementioned stakeholders' positions have evolved, with the exception of Russia who has decided to support the regime and obtain an unlikely negotiated solution. After originally being quite proactive, London and Paris have progressively judged that it was not appropriate to intervene in a civil war between Syrian Muslims, nor was it wise to risk supplying equipment that could be used by internationalist jihadist groups. Europeans are trying to give political support to a credible political opposition, respectable and representative, without considering either a no-fly zone or direct military action. The Libyan and especially Iraqi precedents call for a cautious approach. The European position does not favour a regional redefinition, they aim to contribute to a balancing of the current power struggle. The intervention of the Iraqi and Iranian-Shia regimes on one side, Sunni-Saudi and Qatari on the other gives a concerning regional dimension to the Syrian civil war.

These examples show the different configurations in external interventions according to the different crises. Of course, it is important to take into account the role played by leading figures during the decision process, in democratic countries in particular, and the desire of some to distance themselves from their predecessor. It can also be observed that the initial objectives tend to divert over time, except in the case of Mali where the original goal of territorial integrity has been reached. The fact that this operation was not led by a coalition has made it simpler to keep the objectives in sight.

Dangers and Results of External Interventions, Considered as Assessment Criteria

The concept of a "Crescent of Crisis" was highlighted in several defence and national security white papers published in Europe at the end of the last decade. The "crescent" refers to an area extending from Sahara to Pakistan, where jihadist groups with international objectives could try to spread and co-ordinate their actions. Al Qaida has indeed franchised affiliates acting more or less autonomously, the more proactive organisations being AQAP, AQIM, the Iraqi branch of Al Qaida, and the Al-Nusra Front that fights Kurds, Alawis and Christians in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, the surviving AQIM katibas that were driven out of Mali are trying to settle in Southwest Libya, out of reach from Tripoli's control. Weapons stolen from Libyan arsenals have been found in Mali. Shabab groups in Somalia have received financial support from AQIM. All crises have a regional dimension and regions in neighbouring countries become sanctuaries for rival groups.

The consolidation of this type of critical regional situation, including a shifting of the centre of the crises, is probably the main hazard for regional stability.

Another danger is political failure of the intervention. What happens when foreign forces leave the scene of an intervention?

Let us look back on the Afghan case. 12 years later, the main stakeholders are in a process of military retreat; elections are planned for 2014; meetings have started in Qatar between the United States and Taliban representatives, in Tokyo, London and then Paris, but there no negotiations have started. Al Qaida Central is weakened but its affiliates in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Maghreb continue to be active.

It is probable that if the United States (and their allies) had focused lastingly on their principle objective of destroying Al Qaida Central, the political and economic results could have been more positive. Today experts, at least in Europe, are wondering if the operation has been a “useless war”. And unless there is radical political change in the civilian and military authorities of Pakistan, no-one predicts stability for Afghanistan after 2014. Pakistan has permanent national interest in Afghanistan unlike the countries who took part in the intervention. China continues to advance its influence in the region with copper mines and infrastructure projects via Tajikistan.

In the case of Iraq, those who reaped the benefits of the American intervention are the Kurds who have gained a quasi-independence and are now able to bypass Baghdad when they negotiate oil contracts, the Shia who are now the majority in government, the Iranian regime which has had its revenge for the Saddam Hussein period, and finally the Chinese oil companies which have won the main exploration contracts and are buying half of the oil produced in Iraq (in 2020, 80% of Iraqi oil will be exported to Asia, mainly to China according to the International Energy Agency). Those who were defeated include the Sunni minority in the central provinces and the Ba’ath Party members who have not admitted the loss of power, the Saudis and the Gulf countries. This situation led to an unprecedented levels of violence in the Iraq in 2013. This failure of America’s administration of Iraq explains the will of the new leadership to find ways to engage in a dialogue with the Iranian regime of President Rouhani.

In Libya, the government in Tripoli has not yet succeeded in imposing its authority on the regional groups and tribes that refused to disarm (about 200 katibas are evading the central power’s control). Several debates are affecting a society divided between a western part which is urbanised and attached to the Maghreb region, and an oriental part which is more sensitive to the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt that is losing influence despite Qatar’s support.

In Mali, as we saw, territorial integrity was restored, a UN force (MINUSMA) has been deployed and the second round of presidential elections was held without dispute. On 12th August, the former Prime Minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was elected with the message of “return its pride to Mali” and change in political practices. As outlined by experts, the main problem in Mali was not located in the north of the country but rather in the south, due to the drift in political governance. France insisted on holding elections as soon as possible. Forces will remain in the country in support of the MINUSMA

from 1st July, under the command of a Rwandan general and including 6300 African soldiers, and under a solid mandate (Resolution 2100 from 25 April 2013 which places the mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and was adopted unanimously). This external intervention justified by the regime's inability to provide security gave a jolt to the African Union and other countries. It led to a commitment to reinforce the capacity of the African regional military to intervene to bring states in conflict to the negotiating table (North/South Agreement negotiated in Burkina Faso before the elections in July). As in other places in Africa, the "security, democracy and development" triangle needs to be implemented. The Malian army is being rebuilt and is trained by the European EUTM mission. The last side of the virtuous triangle is economic development. On 15 May 2013, 80 countries met in Brussels and promised 3.2 billion euros in aid to Mali over a two year period (France committed to 280 million euro). This aid amounts to a third of the Sahelian State's gross domestic product.

Here again, we can see a large range of results obtained after external interventions. There is also a need to insist on the importance of involving regional stakeholders in the process of finding sustainable diplomatic and political solutions.

Early November 2013, it seems that the UN is still facing difficulties to deploy all the troops and the international money for assistance is not yet available.

The Serval military operation is still going on to cope with a new campaign of asymmetric actions by jihadist groups which are using a grey area in Southern Libya. In that situation, the French and Chadian forces will act as rapid reaction unit to support MINUSMA. They will remain on the ground with a regional range of intervention.

As for the political relations between Tuareg fractions and central government, which is key to stabilizing the large Northern half of this vast country, a new agreement is required.

Conclusion: the Role of Major Diplomacies

The crises and their following interventions discussed in this paper have several characteristics to consider.

First, those crises are located between three and six hours flight from Europe. Half of the serious crises in the world are located in this radius. It is therefore rather difficult to justify an indifferent position due to the proximity of the conflicts and the fact that European interests and citizens are explicitly being threatened in several crises.

The Crescent of Crises concept is limited, as it describes a territorial connection in crises that should be avoided. The most difficult situation is in the Middle East, where the track record of Western interventions needs a rather rigorous appraisal. So does the direct intervention of Russia in Syria, alongside Iran and Hezbollah. Moscow grabbed the opportunity to get involved and take a detrimental role (like in the good old days) in its anti-Sunni approach.

Critical transitions in the Arab World are game-changers and explain the United States wait-and-see attitude (preferable to the neo conservatives' transformational activism) and the Chinese gamble which is winning the economic stakes.

The powers that be and their great diplomacies must give up on trying to shape the world, and should instead commit to guiding transitions and supporting states as their crises wind down. They ought to conform with United Nations mandates. But there is more to it. As the African continent situation demonstrates, there is awareness that the African Union member states have to get more involved in the resolution of crises. France, Germany, United Kingdom, Brazil, United States...have to encourage and support those member states in this direction.

Besides, "external" stakeholders do not only include Western countries. In my opinion, there is a need to expand the notion of intervention to players who have permanent interests in the concerned states (Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan, but also Russia, China and Uzbekistan; Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in Iraq; Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries in Syria; Egypt, Algeria and Qatar in Libya; Saudi Arabia and Oman in Yemen; Saudi Arabia and Algeria in Mali). These states have the power to continue to stir up instability or alternatively they could encourage compromise.

On that topic, it is worth noting that other states have themselves led external interventions: Uganda and Burundi in Somalia (AMISOM), as well as Ethiopia that has important forces at the Sudan-South Sudan border, and South Africa in Central African Republic. It is no longer true to say that external intervention is a Western monopoly. And that is good news.