



2014

# The Determining Factors of U.S. Humanitarian Interventions: A Case Study of Kosovo and Syria

Elijah J. Anderson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses>

 Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Eastern European Studies Commons](#), [Military and Veterans Studies Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Policy History, Theory, and Methods Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Anderson, Elijah J., "The Determining Factors of U.S. Humanitarian Interventions: A Case Study of Kosovo and Syria" (2014).  
*University Honors Program Theses*. 52.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/52>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

# THE DETERMINING FACTORS OF U.S. HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS

AN HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY ELIJAH ANDERSON

UNDER THE MENTORSHIP OF DR. WIEGAND

In 1999, the U.S. and NATO went to war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under the guise of a humanitarian intervention. American citizens outraged by images of Kosovar refugees fleeing their homeland helped prompt this military action that eventually freed Kosovo from the grips of Yugoslavia. In 2011 Americans began to be exposed to images of Syrian war victims and refugees fleeing violence and persecution in Syria. The U.S., however, has remained militarily uninvolved in this conflict despite the mass scale of atrocities being committed by the Syrian government. Through this thesis I attempt to explain why the U.S. response in these two case studies was entirely different. In my analysis I ultimately determine that domestic politics, more so than any other factor, determines U.S. foreign policy in humanitarian crises.

**Thesis Mentor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dr. Krista Wiegand**

**Honors Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dr. Steve Engel**

April 2014  
Department of Political Science  
University Honors Program  
Georgia Southern University

### ***Acknowledgements***

This thesis would have been absolutely impossible were it not for the tireless dedication of the faculty members and administration of the University Honors Program. In particular, I must thank Dr. Wiegand. Dr. Wiegand has not only served as my thesis advisor, but has fulfilled the role of mentor, professor and friend throughout my college career. I owe much of my success to her guidance and for that I will be forever grateful. Were it not for the two study abroad trips I attended under her guidance I would have never have discovered my interest in the Balkan region of Europe and even more specifically the country of Kosovo. Likewise, Dr. Engel and Dr. Desiderio of the Honors Program have been a great help to me in my time at Georgia Southern. Dr. Desiderio's guidance in my freshman year and Dr. Engel's service as thesis advisor during my junior year helped guide me in the right direction on the path to success. Once again I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Wiegand, Dr. Engel and Dr. Desiderio. Thank you.

### ***Introduction***

Damascus, Syria. An ancient city nestled in arguably the most critical region in the world now resembles a war torn capital of a country deeply embroiled in a fierce three year long civil war. The ongoing humanitarian crisis has displaced and claimed the lives of thousands as well as led to the rise of powerful Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist cells within Syrian borders. In March of 2011, President Bashar Al-Assad, the authoritarian leader of Syria, initiated a violent

crackdown on the Syrian people in response to the rebel opposition that came to prominence at the height of the Arab Spring. Following the tide of democratic movements springing up all over the Middle East, government opposition in Syria originally sought democratic reform. The brutal crackdown of the protests by the Assad regime coupled with sectarian tensions already existing within Syria led to the conflict the world remains fixated on to this day. While other countries in the region have returned to a state of somewhat normalcy, Assad continues his ruthless and inhumane last ditch effort to regain and assert sole authoritarian power. As of February 2014 it is estimated that nearly 2.5 million Syrians will have been displaced, with millions of that number opting to flee to refugee camps in the neighboring States of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Consequently, the sheer magnitude of the Syrian exodus has further exacerbated fears of destabilizing the region as the influx of refugees is overwhelming the resources, patience, and political climate of its neighbors. Evidencing the growing burden throughout the region King Abdullah II of Jordan recently expressed anxiety over the growing refugee problem in a November 2013 speech to Jordanian parliament.

” Jordan hosts around 600,000 Syrian refugees- an issue that depletes our already limited resources and puts enormous pressure on our infrastructure...If the international community does not move quickly to help us shoulder the burdens of the Syrian crisis...Jordan is able to take measures to protect the interests of our people and country.”<sup>1</sup>

While King Abdullah’s subtle hint at taking military action was probably more bolstering to pacify the growing demands of his populace than anything else, his impassionate speech highlights the growing tensions the Syrian conflict is causing. As for the death count, estimates from the United Nations(UN) have reached higher than 100,000 on both sides of the conflict,

---

<sup>1</sup> King Abdullah II, speech to Jordanian Parliament. Nov. 3, 2013.

with an estimated 40,000 of that number being civilian casualties. As of January 2014, the UN reported that it would no longer keep tabs on Syrian casualties due to the overwhelming challenges of keeping an updated and accurate tally. Rupert Colville of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) stated to NBC News that “gathering casualty figures in Syria has always been an exceptionally difficult exercise...With the situation growing ever more complex and dangerous, and without access to the country to conduct fact-finding on the ground, it has become increasingly difficult for us to source and analyze the casualty figures in order to update them.”<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, this cessation of UN record keeping coincided with the Assad regime handing over the first batch of chemical weapons to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OCPW). Thus, we may never know the true loss of life this war will result in. Despite this monumental humanitarian disaster, Assad has been able to maintain authority of Syria largely due to the lack of action from the international community. In fact, it took nearly three years for the international community to get involved at all.

Until recently, the United States had remained largely uninvolved with the ongoing war in Syria. This is despite intervening militarily in a similar situation in Libya in 2011 as well as a litany of other comparable cases in the past. As an observer of this conflict since its origins in March of 2011, I have had the opportunity to witness the U.S. role change from entirely uninvolved and apathetic to extremely passionate and on the brink of utilizing a military strike in late 2013. Take for example President Barack Obama’s remarks in March of 2012 at a news conference with UK Prime Minister David Cameron when asked about a possible U.S. intervention; “When we see what’s happening on television, you know, our natural instinct is to

---

<sup>2</sup> Henry Austin and Daniel Arkin, “UN stops counting Syrian dead as first chemical weapons removed from the country,” *NBC News*, Jan. 7, 2014. [http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2014/01/07/22216651-un-stops-counting-syrian-dead-as-first-chemical-weapons-removed-from-the-country?lite](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2014/01/07/22216651-un-stops-counting-syrian-dead-as-first-chemical-weapons-removed-from-the-country?lite).

act [but] the best thing we can do right now is to make sure that the international community continues to unify around the fact that what the Syrian regime is doing is unacceptable.”<sup>3</sup>

President Obama’s stance on intervention at this point in time in early 2012 is that it isn’t going to happen. His remarks are condemnatory of Bashir Al-Assad, but also passive in that any form of U.S. military action is out of the question. Fast forward a year and a half later in September of 2013 and the tune President Obama sings is of an entirely different note.

“When dictators commit atrocities, they depend upon the world to look the other way until those horrifying pictures fade from memory. But these things happened. The facts cannot be denied... This is not a world we should accept. This is what's at stake. And that is why, after careful deliberation, I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime's ability to use them and to make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use. That's my judgment as commander in chief.”<sup>4</sup>

In just a year’s time our Commander and Chief transform from a passive observer to, pardon the expression, “chomping at the bits” to get involved and yet, the U.S. did not militarily intervene. This begs the question, what determines when the U.S. is willing to intervene, especially in the face of humanitarian crises? Why did the U.S. intervene in Kosovo and Libya, but not in Syria? To answer these questions, I will compare and analyze the different factors of international relations that seek to explain such decisions, including: the theory of realism, moral humanitarian responsibilities, and domestic factors. In doing so, I will examine a case where the United States did choose to intervene, Kosovo, and compare and contrast that situation with the ongoing civil war in Syria. From my critical analysis of the issues and circumstances

---

<sup>3</sup> President Obama as quoted in The Washington Post March 14 2012 David Nakamura “On Syria, Obama defends his decision not to intervene.”

<sup>4</sup> President Obama in speech to the American people 9/10/2013

surrounding both of these crises, I will seek to answer what factor ultimately determines U.S. foreign policy decisions to intervene.

Examining cases such as Kosovo and Syria and identifying the factors that explain why or why not the United States will intervene is a critical and valuable research pursuit for a number of reasons. Primarily, decisions made by policymakers in Washington D.C. concerning military intervention directly affect the lives of thousands domestically and worldwide. This is true whether it be the sons and daughters of America's armed forces or the children of an unstable foreign country at war who risk their lives simply by waking up and facing a new day. The rising death toll in Syria and the thousands upon thousands of traumatized refugees stands alone as a testament to the disastrous results of an inactive world community.

Likewise, as the current hegemonic state and beholder of the world's largest military, the United States of America possess the capabilities and power to put an end to such violence against innocent victims, that is, if they so choose to. Therefore, examining the reasons and circumstances in which the U.S. decides to use this force is an undeniably worthy pursuit. It forces us to confront challenging and ethical questions. Are Syrian men, women and children less deserving than the Libyan, Iraqi, or Kosovar people for whom the U.S actively intervened in years past? The answer to this question is no. So what then determines such decisions? Previous research identifies that there are noticeable discrepancies between the cases where the U.S. has chosen to intervene and when it has decided not to. It is those differences that I hope to discover through the duration of my research and in doing so produce a model that will be capable of, or at least be likely to predict future cases of potential humanitarian interventions based on the factors that affect the decisions the most. Existing research on this matter can be found within several strains of thought that all claim to answer this question. Those theories include realism,

moral humanitarian responsibilities or the responsibility to protect, and the role of domestic factors. My reasoning behind utilizing these theories to explain the use of humanitarian intervention is twofold. As for the field of International Relations, the aforementioned schools of thought are the most intensely studied and promoted theories seeking to explain why military intervention occurs. Subsequently, I find it necessary to investigate all theories in order to gain a complete understanding of all possible explanations for humanitarian intervention. Among the theories that seek to explain the phenomenon of U.S. humanitarian interventions, realism is undoubtedly the premier school of thought as evidence by the mass amount of literature available promoting this theory. For decades scholars have grappled to understand the true causes of U.S. military intervention in cases of humanitarian crises and now, we shall examine that challenge as well.

## **Realism**

As stated earlier, one of the most popular and well-researched answers to this question has been through the scope of realism. Realism emerged primarily during the Cold War and was applauded for its ability to provide simple, yet powerful explanations for why conflict occurs. Academics like Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and countless others have long advocated the theory of realism as an answer to why international conflict occurs. Realism, as explained by Morgenthau, emphasizes that “politics, like society in general is governed by objective laws in human nature.”<sup>5</sup> These objective laws of human nature Morgenthau refers to include the notion that humans will act *rationally* in order to increase their chances of survival. According to realists, to act rationally is to act in one’s own interest. Just as humans act in their own self-

---

<sup>5</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, Revised, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1978, pp 4-15.

interest to survive, States will do the same. But what does a State actor pursuing self-interest look like? Well, the realist answer would be a State's interest is the attainment and use of power. Morgenthau elaborates that "power may comprise anything that establishes the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another."<sup>6</sup> Thus, power can not only take the form of military might and force, but also can simply be the ability to impose one's will on another with a simple threat or coercive diplomacy. And according to another realist, E.H. Carr, "international politics are always power politics; it is impossible to eliminate power from [the international system]."<sup>7</sup> Carr further elaborates that the "abstract principles commonly invoked in international politics...[are] not principles at all, but the unconscious reflections of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time."<sup>8</sup> In other words, despite what a State may claim as the rationale for their actions in the international system, whether it is humanitarian justifications or a desire to maintain peace, Carr maintains that these "excuses" are nothing more than rhetoric. This is because in the "international order the role of power is greater and that of morality less."<sup>9</sup> In essence, States engaging in international politics do not concern themselves with the morality of an issue, but rather how policy decisions impact the balance of power.

Thus, we know that international politics is inherently competitive because as Morgenthau asserted, politics mirrors human nature and human nature is inherently competitive. Likewise, we have determined that because of this characteristic realists assume "states are egotistic actors

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Palgrave. 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

that pursue self-help.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the theory of realism basically asserts that in the realm of international politics, including humanitarian intervention, States will make decisions and act only if it benefits their self-interest. But why is this so? Why is this phenomena allowed to persist? In short, it’s because the international system in which governments and societies interact is anarchic. Kenneth Waltz elaborates on this notion by explaining that, “with [so] many sovereign states with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire- conflict, sometimes leading to war, is bound to occur.”<sup>11</sup> There is no central government or international authority that determines what each independent and sovereign state should do. The closest body we have to an institution like that is the UN, but ultimately the system remains anarchic because the UN lacks the authority to infringe upon state sovereignty, as explicitly outlined and stated in the UN’s founding Charter. Waltz offers the notion that indeed the only way to prevent conflict from erupting is to rid the international system of its anarchic character; “the remedy for war among states is to be found only in such a form of federal government as shall untie nations by bonds similar to those which already unite their individual members, and place the one no less than the other under the authority of the law”.<sup>12</sup> While Waltz’s call for a “new world order” may be reminiscent of George Orwell’s *1984*, he makes a valid point. As independent actors, States have but one responsibility and that is to their own self-interests. As noted political commentator Charles Krauthammer puts it; “the “international community” is a fiction. It is not a community; it is a cacophony--of straining ambitions, disparate values and contending power”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when it comes to a state determining whether or not to intervene in a humanitarian crisis, they will first

---

<sup>10</sup> Stephen G. Brooks, “Dueling Realisms,” *International Organization* 51 (1997): 446.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “International Conflict and International Anarchy,”

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Waltz, same cite as 11?

<sup>13</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World,”

consider whether or not such an action benefits their own interests. Realists assert that this is simply a natural symptom of the anarchic character of the international system.

This theory runs counter to opponents who argue that humanitarian intervention is enacted based on a moral concern for the protection of innocent victims. Instead, advocates of realism paint a harsher and pessimistic view of the international system. Take for example former Stanford academic and Secretary of State during George W. Bush's administration, Condoleezza Rice. Rice, interestingly enough, had the honor of studying under Josef Korbel, the father of former Secretary of State under President Clinton, Madeline Albright, at the University of Denver. Korbel, a staunch advocate of Morgenthau's theory of realism, mentored Rice in her undergraduate career at Denver and instilled within Rice the fundamental principles of realism. Before Condoleezza Rice rose to power in George W. Bush's cabinet she penned an article in *Foreign Affairs* that aptly displayed her own realist views of America's international role;

“American foreign policy in a Republican administration should refocus the United States on the national interest and the pursuit of key priorities. These tasks are to ensure that America's military can deter war, project power, and fight in its defense if deterrence fails;...[and] to deal decisively with the threat of rogue regimes and hostile powers which is increasingly taking the forms of the potential for terrorism and the development of weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>14</sup>

Rice goes on to claim that humanitarian actions, while honorable, should not be the prime directive of any presidential administration. According to Rice, “there is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect. America's pursuit of the national interest will create conditions that promote freedom, markets, and peace. Its pursuit of national interests after World War II led to a more prosperous and

---

<sup>14</sup> Rice, Condoleezza, “Promoting the national interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2000): 45-62.

democratic world. This can happen again.”<sup>15</sup> According to realists, like Rice, the pursuit of U.S. national interests is the premier objective. In other words, the U.S. should not pursue humanitarian action unless it explicitly advances our interests. Rice, however, explains that in doing so we will not forego our responsibility to humanity. Being as we are the world’s hegemony, the pursuit of our interests will result in good for everyone around the world! One could see how Rice’s views would easily go hand and hand with George W. Bush’s justification for war in Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of democracy and freedom.

.Now that the theory of realism is sufficiently explained we can seek to answer how this applies to our present question of what circumstances prompt American humanitarian intervention, specifically in the cases of Kosovo and Syria? A consultation with the literature provides some surprising answers. Primarily, advocates of this school of thought, including Stephen M. Walt, assert that “U.S. foreign policy is generally consistent with realist principles, insofar as its actions are still designed to preserve U.S. predominance and to shape a postwar order that advances American interests.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, decisions to intervene are based entirely on the structure of the system and whether or not intervention will ultimately benefit the United States in their pursuit of maintaining a unipolar world. That is, a world where they remain the sole superpower. According to realists, it is the United States’ ambition to remain the sole hegemonic power that determines when and where the U.S. will deploy military force.

Thus, realist scholars assert that humanitarian intervention is likely in cases where a crisis endangers the current structure of the system of which they benefit and unlikely when a crisis

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (1998):37.

poses no danger of disrupting the status quo. For a brief example, let us look at the cases of Libya in 2011 and Rwanda in 1994.

Libya produces roughly 2 percent of the world's oil supply, a relatively small amount considering the output of other states like Saudi Arabia, but important to the overall oil supply nonetheless. Libya's oil production is especially important to European countries who take advantage of Libya's geographical proximity when importing oil. Thus, stability in the country of Libya is a priority for the U.S. and its European allies and as evidenced by the NATO led intervention there in 2011 will go to extraordinary measures to protect the status quo. Rwanda, on the other hand is a land-locked central African country with little to no value to the U.S. The fact that the U.S. intervened in Libya and did not in Rwanda, despite the absolutely horrifying occurrences there, is no surprise to realists. In their eyes, the underlying motive for the Libyan intervention was to prevent a shock in the oil supply which would have driven prices even higher than they already are. Thus, the Libyan intervention was an effort to maintain the status quo, not some heroic effort to salvage the Libyan rebels from the whims of a tyrannical dictator. Ultimately, in the eyes of realists, it boils down to power; the maintenance of power, and the pursuit of further power. But, how does this theory hold up to our case study of Kosovo and more importantly in the case of Syria? As we will see it performs an adequate job in explaining military explanations and we will investigate those arguments now.

### *Kosovo*

In the early spring of 1998 an eerie sense of Déjà Vu emerged. As bombs began to erupt over the skies of Belgrade there was no doubt that the West was once again at war with Yugoslavia. The Kosovo War would mark the second time the West, under the guise and organization of

NATO, would militarily confront Yugoslavia's highly nationalistic leader Slobodan Milosevic in the volatile Balkans of Europe. Just three years earlier, the Clinton administration authorized U.S. commitment to a bombing campaign in Bosnia when violence in the disintegrating republic threatened to jeopardize continental Europe's security as a whole. Violence would inevitably erupt again as Milosevic's campaign for a "Greater Serbia" set its eyes on a new theatre of war; the disputed southern province of Kosovo. From 1989 to 1999, thousands were murdered and even more displaced as ethnic conflict and war embroiled the territory. After a decade of complacency, NATO would finally intervene and bring an end to Milosevic's campaign of terror, but why and under what conditions?

Once an autonomous region of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was stripped of its self-governance and annexed by Serbia under the rule of Slobodan Milosevic. This contested area has historically been inhabited by a Christian-Serb minority and a Muslim-Albanian majority. Following the removal of the autonomous status enjoyed under the rule of the "benevolent dictator" Josip Tito; the province would erupt in ethnic conflict. The division of interests stemmed from the majority Albanian population's desire for self-determination and Serbian reluctance to relinquish control of what was perceived as culturally, religiously, and historically significant land since the year 1389. As violence escalated, the images of thousands of victimized Albanians fleeing Kosovo flooded the news cycles of many Western nations. The constant flow of desperate and traumatized victims escalated fears that a humanitarian crisis was imminent and raised concerns that such a crisis could destabilize the entire Balkan region. As a result, NATO prepared to square off with Milosevic one last time.

For all purposes Serbia undoubtedly found itself on the losing side of the preceding wars in Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia. It goes without saying that the 1990's were a less than admirable

time to be a Serb! As the centerpiece and undeniably most powerful country of Yugoslavia, the loss of 3 republics decimated Serbian prestige and power. Despite this considerable setback and the continual disintegration of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic remained in power facing a hostile and entirely dissatisfied populace. To avail these concerns, Milosevic “soon refocused his attention on the plight of the Serb minority in Kosovo as a means of consolidating his influence”.<sup>17</sup> The situation in Kosovo had taken a turn for the worse when Milosevic stripped the province of its autonomy and placed the region under what was essentially martial law in 1989. This action entailed the dismissal of Albanian teachers from schools, the banning of property and ownership rights for Albanians, “the imposition of police rule, and the encouragement of a form of apartheid in which the Albanian majority had no power”.<sup>18</sup> Up until this point, Albanians and Serbs had lived in relative harmony in Kosovo. Under Tito, the province had enjoyed self-governance and even representation at the federal level. As secessionist movements sprang up and gained traction in the dissenting republics of Croatia and Slovenia, Kosovar-Albanians set their eyes on similar goals of independence. Enter the Kosovo Liberation Army(KLA), an internationally recognized terrorist organization, whose sole purpose, some argue, was to “provoke Serb retaliation, which helped to feed a cycle of violence...so that international intervention would [eventually] be unavoidable”.<sup>19</sup> Such violence included the harassment and attack of Serb civilians, domestic terrorism, and the orchestration of an illegal firearm and drug trade. These actions infuriated Serbian nationalists and emblazoned demands for Milosevic to do everything possible to protect the Serb minority in Kosovo. After all, Kosovo was the sovereign territory of Serbia and had been for thousands of years.

---

<sup>17</sup> Peter Huchthausen, *America's Splendid Little Wars: a short history of U.S. military engagements:1975-2000* (London: Viking, 2003), 211

<sup>18</sup> Huchthausen, *America's Splendid Little Wars*, 212.

<sup>19</sup> David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 171-205.

To Milosevic and a majority of other Serbs, an independent Kosovo was unimaginable. Serb claims to the land date back to the year 1389 with the Battle of Kosovo. There, in the “Field of Blackbirds, near [the] present-day capital of Prishtina...Serb forces attempted to fend off invading Turks, with ethnic Albanians probably fighting on both sides in the battle”.<sup>20</sup> The causes of Serbia’s involvement in this war are then clear. It was perceived as a matter of national identity. Serbs had fought, bled, and died for this land. Thus, the idea of Kosovo was engrained in the national identity of Serbia. Further increasing these nationalistic sentiments was the violence instigated by the KLA, especially the violence that affected innocent civilians. The harassment of local Serbs and the escalation of ethnic tensions granted Milosevic the political support to fiendishly pursue his own desires for a “Greater Serbia”. The resulting growth in Serbian nationalism prompted the brutal expulsion and forced evacuation of thousands of ethnic Albanians from the territory. To carry out this deed Milosevic utilized “Serb paramilitary security squads [who] went from village to village separating Albanian families, selectively murdering some village leaders and abusing others, and forcing all to flee for their lives”.<sup>21</sup> The extreme and often brutal measures employed by these notorious Serb henchmen and the resulting mass exodus of Albanians into neighboring countries finally forced European and American governments into action. For NATO, intervention was vital to their own perceived self-protection for several reasons. One such reason was that allowing the situation in Kosovo to deteriorate any further would have risked destabilizing the entire region. A danger NATO could not dare allow persist.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Hutchhausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars*, 215.

First and foremost, the geographic location of Kosovo in continental Europe mandated some form of action. To continue letting the situation escalate would have risked allowing the entire Balkan region to descend into chaos. Surrounding countries harboring the refugees coincidentally had sizable Albanian populations. Poor refugee camp conditions and increasing Albanian nationalism possessed the potential of further exacerbating ethnic tensions region wide. Truthfully, Kosovo alone lacked any strategic benefit to the alliance. Particularly for the United States, who instead went to war “less to correct Serb misbehavior there than to preclude adverse consequences elsewhere”.<sup>22</sup> A conflict in Greece or Turkey, for example, would have undoubtedly undermined the alliance on a much larger scale. Moreover, the fact remained that at the door steps of Western Europe the “Serb effort to evict all Albanians from Kosovo became the largest resettlement of a European population since World War II”.<sup>23</sup> Such characteristics rendered the situation simply unavoidable and left many asking “if NATO was unable to control things in their own backyard, what good was the alliance in the first place”?

Secondly, there was a widespread fear that without the intervention and involvement of western nations there “lurked the possibility...of an Iran backed revolutionary state in Kosovo that could become the Cuba of Europe”.<sup>24</sup> Were this fear to be realized it would undoubtedly run counter to NATO’s grand strategy of preserving Western influence and dominance in the region. Consider for a moment the drastic effect another large-scale land war would have had on continental Europe economically and humanitarially. Doing so allows one to rationalize NATO’s involvement based on realist principles: To preserve and assert the dominance of the alliance, dispose of an authoritarian ruler who was perceived to have caused nothing but

---

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Bacevich and Eliot Cohen, *War Over Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 48.

<sup>23</sup> Huchthausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars*, 214

<sup>24</sup> Huchthausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars*, 215

problems, and also prevent the rise of antagonizing actors in the region. It was for these reasons, undeniably rooted in self-interest, the European states of NATO agreed to initiate a bombing campaign in March of 1999. Thus, intervention in Kosovo involved less of a desire to protect minority rights and more so entailed an act rooted in self-interest. Nowhere more evident is this phenomenon than in the case of the United States.

For the United States, observers have historically noted that “foreign policy is generally consistent with realist principles, insofar as its actions are still designed to preserve U.S. predominance and to shape a postwar order that advances American interests”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, for the United States, the Kosovo War was an assertion of America’s hegemonic position, a reaffirmation of U.S. resolve, and a testament to their renewed commitment to the world.<sup>26</sup> Such was necessary after a decade that housed the humiliating foreign policy setbacks of Somalia and Rwanda. Consequently, the Clinton administration was eager to successfully display U.S. capabilities and strength. Intervention in Kosovo ultimately enabled the U.S. to enhance their reputation, protect their allies, assert their hegemonic position, and demonstrate their resolve when following through with threats. Despite how it was portrayed by the Clinton administration and the world media at large, the United States was driven by realist principles and clearly invested in Kosovo for their own sake far more than any pressing humanitarian concern for Albanians. Incidentally, the cloak of humanitarian intervention is an excellent way in which to legitimize the use of force for a state’s own desires. One does not have to look far to verify these claims.

---

<sup>25</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (1998): 37.

<sup>26</sup> David Hastings Dunn, “Innovation and precedent in the Kosovo War: the impact of Operation Allied Force on US Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs* 85 (2009): 535.

Initially, it was well known that the U.S and NATO were content with Serbia maintaining control of Kosovo in exchange for a peace agreement and comprehensive settlement of the conflict. Such was the premier objective of the Rambouillet Conference held in France in February and March of 1999;

“The western mediators who directed the conference sought to end Serb repression in Kosovo, to re-establish Kosovo’s regional autonomy (though still as a province of Serbia), and to establish an armed international peacekeeping force to oversee implementation. An independent Kosovo was not contemplated at this point”.<sup>27</sup>

The failure of the negotiators to reach an agreement is what ultimately resulted in the subsequent bombing campaign, Operation Allied Force, less than a month later. At first glance and based on the pre-existing reputation of Serbia, one would find it easy to jump to conclusions and think that this unraveling was due to Serbia’s selfish and unapologetic aims. Contrary to popular thought, this was not the case. In fact, Serbia was reportedly willing to accept the demands put forth by conference mediators and even open to allowing either UN or OSCE(Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) peacekeeping forces in Kosovo to supervise the implementation of the peace settlement.<sup>28</sup> Milosevic was clearly on the verge of capitulation by agreeing to what was already perceived to be great strides in a comprehensive peace settlement. So, what caused the breakdown of negotiations? This failure can be explained through the scope of realism and traced back to the United States’ pursuit of self-interest. Particularly the advancement of the U.S. hegemonic status as the undisputed world superpower and the U.S. desire to exhibit its resolve worldwide by following through on its threats and displaying military capabilities.

---

<sup>27</sup> David Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 171-205.

<sup>28</sup> David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 171-205.

Late in the negotiation process the western mediators came to the table presenting a new proposal they wished to add to the agreement. The so-called “military-annex” portion of the proposed settlement called for the deployment of, not UN or OSCE, but NATO peacekeeping forces in the province that “would have free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, NATO access would not be restricted solely to Kosovo, but rather extend throughout the entire state of Yugoslavia. In other words, it would have granted NATO access at an unprecedented and highly intrusive level. As soon as this proposal was brought to the table negotiations broke down. The Serb delegation, who felt they had already conceded a great deal, lost all faith in the negotiation process and withdrew from the conference all together. Now, this prompts a very important question. If the United States and other NATO members were truly concerned for humanitarian reasons, why did they choose to present demands that they knew would never be accepted by Milosevic and further prolong the violence? After all, he had already expressed willingness to cooperate; why test his resolve any further? There are some who argue that this can be explained by the Clinton administration’s desire to legitimize NATO’s existence in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union thereby demonstrating realism once again. After all, the USSR was the reason for NATO’s existence in the first place. With their main foe out of the picture many believed the alliance was no longer relevant or necessary. Reestablishing a purpose for an alliance absolutely critical to the United States’ grand strategy can then be said to have played a major role in determining U.S. involvement. Ergo, the Kosovo War “played a key role in affirming NATO’s importance for the post-Cold War period, and [provided] it with a new function”<sup>30</sup>. It was through the limbs and structure of NATO that the U.S was able to once again assert its

---

<sup>29</sup> David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 171-205.

<sup>30</sup> David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 171-205.

hegemonic status and exhibit its resolve worldwide. In some ways the Kosovo War can be viewed at a massive act of costly signaling. The mobilization of NATO forces allowed the world to see what The United States and their allies were capable of. In the end, despite some considerable bumps in the road, they were able to topple a regime and set the stage for a free and independent Kosovo completely through an air campaign with absolutely zero ground troops involved. Thus, NATO was able to bring an end to a humanitarian crisis and satisfy their self-interests at the same time.

Overall, Realism is fairly efficient in explaining the foreign policy of the United States, particularly concerning the War in Kosovo, but as Walt points out it “does not explain everything and a wise leader would also keep insights from the rival paradigms in mind”.<sup>31</sup> After all, there are glaring holes in this theory when it is exclusively applied to the current situation in Syria.

### *Syria*

If the preservation of the United States hegemonic status and the upkeep of our preferred world order was truly the only thing guiding U.S. humanitarian intervention, why have we not already intervened in Syria? From the realist point of view there are several reasons why intervention in Syria would have aligned with U.S interests. For one, instability in the Middle East undoubtedly runs counter to United States foreign policy objectives. The dangers that instability, particularly revolution, present are monumental threats to the entire region and more importantly the U.S allies Israel and Turkey. Syria borders Israel along the fiercely contested Golan Heights and has engaged in full out war with the nation multiple times. Needless to say the two countries are not friends and diplomatic ties have never been successfully established.

---

<sup>31</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (1998):43.

Thus, it is easy to understand why Israel was quick to panic when it was reported in November of 2012 by several news outlets including the *Jerusalem Post* that a total of three Syrian tanks had entered the cease-fire zone in the Golan Heights.<sup>32</sup> While these tanks were confirmed by the United Nations Disengagement Force, who monitors the Golan Heights buffer zone, to be in no way an act of aggression towards Israel, but an attempt by the Syrian forces to weed out rebels seeking refuge in this area, it still evidences the security threat that Israel faces every day that this civil war drags on. However, it is not Bashar Al-Assad's army that troubles Israel and the men and women comprising the Israeli Defense Force the most. The real threat to Israel is the potential it has to be launching pad for terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, to confiscate weapons and initiate attacks.

In late January 2014 U.S. Intelligence Chief James Clapper reported to the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee that "Syria has become a huge magnet for extremists" from over 50 countries. In fact, according to the annual report, 26,000 out of a total opposition force estimated to range from 75,000 to 100,000 rebel fighters are expected to be "extremists." As illustrated in the most recent information gathered by the U.S. intelligence community, the ongoing civil war in Syria has the potential to breed and provide succor to radical groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with agendas far more malicious than overturning an autocratic government. ISIS is a Sunni terrorist/resistance organization backed by Al-Qaeda who is capitalizing on the current state of unrest in Syria and more importantly, the disorganization of the Syrian rebels. The unrest in Syria, unabated by international intervention, has allowed ISIS and other terrorist cells to gain traction, lasting power and popularity within Syria. This undoubtedly poses threats not just for the rest of the region, but for the United States as well.

---

<sup>32</sup> Lappin, Yakkov, "Three Syrian Tanks enter Golan Heights buffer zone," *The Jerusalem Post* Nov. 3 2012

ISIS is also the terrorist cell responsible for the recent surge of violence in neighboring Iraq, the highest levels since the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, and has successfully seized the city of Fallujah and maintains a strong presence in several other cities throughout western Iraq. The disarray caused by the civil war in Syria has allowed radical groups like ISIS to gain power in the wake of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. As this conflict continues ISIS and other groups with radical agendas are likely to gain more and more power. The most alarming scenario of all is the very real danger of a radical group like ISIS defeating the Assad regime and taking control of Syrian military resources. This would elevate ISIS from a group of 2,500 to 3,000 ragtag guerilla soldiers to a mechanized army with significant fire power.

The parallels of Kosovo and Syria when it comes to terrorist groups gaining power are quite interesting. In Kosovo, some suggest that intervention was enacted out of a fear that the KLA led uprising could turn into a radical Islamic revolution potentially risking terrorist attacks across the entire European continent. Interestingly enough the KLA, despite possessing “a record of viciousness and racism that differed little from that of Milosevic’s forces”, received U.S. aid and support.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the U.S. and other NATO members clearly recognized the KLA as a terrorist organization until the intervention began because of the KLA’s brutal attacks on Serbian civilians intended to provoke an aggressive response from Serbian military forces. The KLA’s label of terrorists, however, quickly faded from view when NATO intervened on their behalf and placed them in power in Kosovo at the end of the war. In Kosovo, the U.S. and NATO calculated it best to support the “terrorists” or the “freedom fighters”. The U.S., throughout 2012, struggled with the same dilemma, facing questions of whether to assist the rebel groups rallying against Assad, yet deemed terrorists by many. In Syria the same threat exists, we know it exists and the

---

<sup>33</sup> David Gibbs, “Was Kosovo the Good War?,”

possibility of serious terrorist threats coming to power is far more plausible than was ever the case with the KLA in Kosovo. If realism truly does guide intervention, why was U.S. foreign policy to the Syrian crisis so delayed and nonchalant up until August of 2013, over two years after the Syrian Civil War had begun? I have shown that the U.S. clearly has a vested interest in containing the situation in Syria and preventing further escalation of humanitarian conflict. Realism states that states act in their self-interest, yet the U.S. inaction in regards to Syria discredits this theory as a complete possible explanation for U.S. foreign policy. Thus, we must turn to other competing theories and investigate whether they explain why the U.S. intervened in Kosovo, but failed to do so in Syria.

One such rival paradigm that seeks to dispute realism is that U.S. humanitarian intervention is determined by moral reasons or some sense of ethical responsibility to use their hegemon status to protect the rights of humans worldwide.

### **Moral Humanitarian Responsibilities**

Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun define humanitarian intervention as a “coercive action against a state to protect people within its borders from suffering grave harm.”<sup>34</sup> Another definition comes to us from Bruce Jentleson who argues that humanitarian intervention is the “provision of emergency relief through military and other means to people suffering from famine or other gross and widespread humanitarian disasters.”<sup>35</sup> There are some scholars such as Nicholas Wheeler, Alex Bellamy, and Paul Williams who argue that U.S. humanitarian

---

<sup>34</sup> Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, full cite since it's the first time mentioned

<sup>35</sup> Bruce W. Jentleson and Rebecca L. Britton, “Still Pretty Prudent: Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (August 1998), 395-417.

intervention is guided and determined by an increasing international sense of collective moral responsibility. In other words, humanitarian intervention is based on an emerging tradition of using the capabilities of the U.S. and other international states to protect vulnerable populations from state-sponsored conflict, genocide, and mass violence. Adherents to this belief assert that the desire to protect populations in harm will prevail even if it means compromising the territorial integrity and sovereignty of another state and subsequently breaking international law in the process. An excellent illustration of this principle is the “Clinton Doctrine” which emerged following the humanitarian intervention that occurred in Kosovo back in 1999. NATO’s successful Operation Allied Force led President Clinton to state the following in what would come to be known as the Clinton Doctrine:

“I think there’s an important principle here that I hope will be now upheld in the future...And that is that while there may well be a great deal of ethnic and religious conflict in the world- some of it might break out into wars- that whether within or beyond the borders of a country, if the world community has the power to stop it, we ought to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing.”<sup>36</sup>

Here we see President Clinton clearly acknowledging the belief that given a circumstance that warrants intervention, such as the ethnic genocide in Kosovo, countries that have the ability to act should very well do so. To do otherwise in many peoples opinion would be an intolerable injustice. Therefore, According to this school of thought, our question concerning what factors determine U.S. humanitarian intervention are answered by the international community’s “responsibility to protect”.

Evans and Sahnoun define “Responsibility to protect”(RtoP) as an international collective “duty to react to situations in which there is a compelling need for human protection [because]

---

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Unlearning the lessons of Kosovo,” *Foreign Policy* 116 (1999) 128.

preventive measures have failed to resolve or contain such a situation [and] the state in question is unable or unwilling to step in”.<sup>37</sup> This belief arose due to the internationally perceived failures of the UN in ending the humanitarian crises of the 1990’s in the countries of Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. Most of the challenges and roadblocks that prevent the UN from achieving much success in ending humanitarian crises stem from the all-powerful Security Council veto. This power, as granted by Chapter V of the UN Charter, allows any of the five permanent members (P5) of the Security Council (France, United States, Russia, China, and the UK) to veto and table any resolution concerning matters of international peace and security. Recently this practice was seen in regards to the ongoing civil war in Syria, the focus of this study, when China and Russia used their veto power to table a Resolution calling for sanctions and condemnation of the Syrian government. Unfortunately, as with many of the humanitarian crises of the past and current century, the State or government related to the ensuing crisis has often been an ally of one or more of the P5 States.

Being as the Security Council remains to be the only international body legally endowed to deal with matters of international peace and security, many resolutions confronting situations of humanitarian are found intrusive to the principle of State sovereignty and are thereby vetoed by one or more of the P5 States. This was the fate of the aforementioned resolution that failed to pass in July of 2012 condemning the Syrian government and proposing new sanctions.

Proponents of the “Responsibility to Protect” movement are critical of what they see as a very limited and biased approach to humanitarian interventions. After all, the fates of untold millions lie in the hands of the P5 States and the lives of innocent individuals should not be subjected to politics of international alliances. As Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun put it, “few things have done more harm to [the international community’s] shared ideal that people are all equal in

---

<sup>37</sup> Evans and Sahnoun, “The Responsibility to Protect,” *Foreign Affairs* 81 (2002): 99-110.

worth than the inability of the community to prevent [such] horrors”.<sup>38</sup> Thus, despite its questionable reality, the emergence of a proactive unilateral or multilateral humanitarian intervention on the basis of moral responsibility has become a popular notion in the years following the success of NATO’s victory in the Kosovo War.

### *Kosovo*

The Kosovo War in particular is of great importance to the development and propagation of the RtoP doctrine. As iterated by Nicholas Wheeler, The Kosovo War was groundbreaking and “controversial because it was the first time since the founding of the UN that a group of States, acting without explicit Security Council authority, defended a breach of the sovereignty rule primarily on humanitarian grounds”.<sup>39</sup> Arguably, Operation Allied Force was an illegal operation under international law and yet, the international community still managed to intervene despite Russian and Chinese opposition in the UN Security Council. Advocates of the RtoP assert that as with Operation Allied Force the moral obligation to intervene trumped any issues of the legality of their actions. In their opinion, “even the strongest supporters of state sovereignty will admit today that no state holds unlimited power to do what it wants to its own people” even if such action takes place behind internationally recognized and respected borders.<sup>40</sup> This stems from the belief that once a government begins to massively abuse the human rights of their subjects they forfeit their rights to be treated as sovereign and the legal protection that come with those rights.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Humanitarian Intervention after Kosovo: emergent norm, moral duty or the coming anarchy?” *International Affairs* 77 (2001): 113-128.

<sup>40</sup> Evans and Sahnoun, “The Responsibility to Protect”

According to Nicholas J. Wheeler; “NATO justified the use of force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the grounds that it was necessary to avert an impending humanitarian catastrophe”<sup>41</sup>. Those who claim that moral responsibility to intervene is the driving factor behind U.S. humanitarian intervention further point to the fact that the NATO operation that ended the ethnic genocide in Kosovo was in violation of NATO’s very own Charter! Essentially, Article 5 of the NATO Charter asserts that an attack on any member of NATO is to be considered an attack on all and that an adequate multilateral response is required. Yet, Yugoslavia had failed to attack any of the NATO member states. This, however, did not matter in the end.

The wave of euphoria induced by the success of Operation Allied Force led the United Nations in recent years to define the responsibility to protect as “the emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect...in the event of genocide and other large-scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of international humanitarian law”<sup>42</sup>. This view, however, runs counter to the founding principles of the United Nations as outlined in its Charter. Chapter VII of the UN Charter affirms the equality and sovereignty of all States.

I find it necessary to note that technically the conflicts in Kosovo and Syria are different in the way in which they are classified and this is an important distinction to make for the ramifications that such distinctions can have. The distinction is that “when the state murders some of the general population, the term is democide; when it murders minorities, the term is genocide.”<sup>43</sup> The killing of Albanians in Kosovo was classified as ethnic genocide. The Albanians were specifically targeted by Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic who utilized

---

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Humanitarian intervention after Kosovo: emergent norm, moral duty, or coming anarchy,” 113.

<sup>42</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, “The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (2008): 50.

<sup>43</sup> Gerald W. Scully, “Democide and genocide as rent-seeking activities” *Public Choice* 93 (1997) 77-97.

Serbian forces to focus attacks on Kosovar-Albanians. Thus, there was a clear and present RtoP Albanians in Kosovo further advancing the argument that the Kosovo War was based on a desire to protect the humanitarian needs of a people unfairly singled out for genocide. Then again arguably the most clear case of genocide since the Holocaust occurred in Rwanda in 1994 and yet Western powers refused to call the atrocities occurring in Rwanda a genocide. I note this to highlight the subjective use of the term “genocide”. If there ever was an irrefutable case of genocide occurring it was undoubtedly the slaughter of over 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. This leads me to a main pillar of my theory. Humanitarian reasons have only a marginal effect on the actual presidential decision regarding humanitarian intervention. I argue that the United States claims genocide occurs only when we wish to intervene, but go out of our way to avoid labeling a conflict “genocide” when we have no wish to partake in its resolution. Syria, however, has not been regarded as genocide by the mass media or the U.S. government, but rather as a civil war. The revolting Syrians are, in most cases, not being targeted because of their ethnicity, but rather because they are rebelling against their government. Thus, the estimated 100,000 plus killed already has not been classified as genocide, but rather democide, or the act of murder of any person or people by a government. What does this all mean? Does this distinction blur the lines of moral humanitarian responsibility? Could the fact that the Syrian conflict is not classified as genocide, which is considered to be the worse of the two despite their equal evil, be the reason why the United States has yet to intervene?

There are considerable holes in this explanation of U.S. military intervention. The most apparent flaw lies in the fact that if a true moral responsibility exists to intervene when a humanitarian crisis exists, why has the situation in Syria been allowed to persist? President Obama defended his decision to intervene in Libya in 2011 by stating, “Some nations may be

able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States is different. And as President, I refuse to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.”<sup>44</sup>

Advocates of this school may argue that the structure of the international system won't allow for intervention in Syria. After all, all legal efforts through the United Nations have been vetoed by Syrian allies and Security Council members Russia and China, thus slowing the process down significantly. This claim, however, does not stand up to further scrutiny. For all purposes, the NATO intervention in Kosovo was a violation of Serbia's state sovereignty, but that did nothing to halt the attack. For if military intervention was truly determined by an unwavering moral responsibility to stand up for the defenseless, the United States would have found a way to do so, just as they did in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya. Humanitarian concerns were cited as the premier objectives of intervention in those three circumstances and whether it was through NATO or unilateral action the United States found ways to bypass the United Nations and achieve the objectives that aligned with their desires with little to no legal repercussions. So, I find this explanation inadequate and the very idea of the RtoP nothing more than an academic exploration of unjustified idealism. Evidence found in these cases makes it easy for me to discredit this theory outright as a complete explanation for U.S. intervention. If there truly was a RtoP the United States and international community would have already intervened in Syria, but yet the violence rages on. By no means am I asserting that moral and ethical reasons play no role in U.S. foreign policy, but I do believe that if anything they play only a minimal role. Instead, military intervention is much better understood through the other schools of thought: realism and the domestic factors of the United States. Furthermore, the most glaring objection to this theory is the observed fact that these purported “humanitarian interventions” do more harm than good.

---

<sup>44</sup> President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya,” *Office of the Press Secretary* March 28, 2011.

David Gibbs observes as much in both cases of the Kosovo intervention and the Iraq War of 2003:

The most disturbing aspect of the Kosovo case is that a purported humanitarian intervention served mainly to increase the scale of atrocities. In this respect, the Kosovo War has much in common with the 2003 Iraq invasion, which also was sold to the public as a humanitarian effort to “save the Iraqi people from a violent dictator. In retrospect, however, it seems likely that the invasion caused as many or possibly more deaths than the total number killed by Saddam Hussein. The main lesson of the Kosovo and Iraq experiences is that military actions- whether we call them “humanitarian or not- retain the potential to increase human misery. The advocates of humanitarian intervention give too little consideration to this danger.”<sup>45</sup>

Gibbs highlights an interesting point. These “humanitarian” interventions often do not lead to “humanitarian” results. He notes that, in fact, the intervention increased the scale of Serb atrocities as before the bombing a total of Serbs, Albanians, civilians and combatants killed in the conflict was roughly 2,000.<sup>46</sup> The casualties in Kosovo, following the NATO, bombing increased five times over. According to Gibbs, “approximately 10,000 persons were killed by Serb security forces during the NATO campaign...[and] around 90 percent of the Albanian population had been displaced.”<sup>47</sup> Gibbs later goes on to claim that NATO is partly responsible for the vast increase in deaths in the Kosovo War. Instead of creating peace, NATO created destruction that worsened tensions in the region and escalated violence. He argues further that this is anti-humanitarian characteristic of NATO’s intervention is evident in the wave of reprisals and violence the KLA and Albanians committed against Serbians following the conclusion of the Kosovo War. Reportedly, “400 to 700 Serbs were murdered in the first eight months after the NATO victory...[and] nearly a quarter of a million Serbs, Roma and other despised ethnic groups fled Kosovo.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, there is a great deal of evidence that purportedly humanitarian actions are not humanitarian at all. They lead to more death, violence, and empower the side that

---

<sup>45</sup> David Gibbs, “Was Kosovo the Good War?”.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

was intervened on behalf of the “justification” and freedom to execute acts of vengeance.

Therefore, one could not reasonably accept the argument that U.S. humanitarian interventions are carried out for moral purposes.

### **Domestic Politics**

Ultimately, I argue that more so than anything else domestic factors play the largest role in shaping U.S. foreign policy when determining humanitarian intervention. It is these domestic factors that we can examine and highlight differences in order to explain the vastly different responses of U.S. foreign policy when facing a humanitarian crisis. These factors include, but are not limited to: the state of the economy, public opinion of Congress and the President, public aversion to war, election year cycles, the amount of media exposure given to a humanitarian crisis, and the extent to which a conflict can act as a diversion (distraction). By comparing and contrasting these variables in 1999, when the Clinton administration authorized intervention in Kosovo and looking at the same variables in 2012 to 2014 in the case of Syria, one can begin to notice stark differences in the state of domestic affairs. Primarily, one begins to notice the existence of election year politics in 2012 and the struggling state of the economy as two of the most pressing domestic issues. Also of note is a war-weary public, who after having endured two prolonged wars in the Middle East will be extremely hesitant to support further foreign engagement and could potentially punish leaders who promote such unfavorable aims. However, when one takes a look at Kosovo and the surrounding domestic issues of that time, those negative factors are not present. The late 1990's were a period of economic expansion. Both Clinton and Congress enjoyed favorable public opinion polls and there were no other ongoing wars that U.S. ground troops were involved in. I believe that these differences make it clear that

humanitarian intervention will not be likely unless domestic factors are amicable. In the 2012 to 2014 case of Syria, domestic conditions certainly are not.

Domestic factors have long been acknowledged as critical to any decisions concerning U.S. foreign policy, including humanitarian intervention. As Robert Putnam points out: “it is fruitless to debate whether domestic politics really determine international relations...The answer to that question is clearly [yes]. The more interesting questions are “When?” and “How?”<sup>49</sup> Evidence for this is grounded in the belief that no state poses a true threat to the United States in the current unipolar system. Thus, foreign policy decisions will not be influenced by international regimes or international law, but instead by pressure applied by constituents and their representatives desire to survive politically.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Henry Carey asserts that “the frequent U.S. interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo and indirectly in East Timor, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other UN peacekeeping missions, have [all] been guided by equally compelling considerations: U.S. domestic politics.”<sup>51</sup> There are a wide range of domestic factors that are advanced by scholars in this field as possible influencers of foreign policy. With that being said, it is these factors that policymakers must consider before suggesting or implementing any kind of military force. This is because of the critical relation between political success and public opinion. Presidents who enjoy high approval ratings are more likely to advance their political agendas thereby ensuring their successful reelection or strengthening of their political legacy.<sup>52</sup> Examples of these factors include: the state of the economy “the mass media, public

---

<sup>49</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games,” *International Organization* 42 (1988): 427.

<sup>50</sup> Henry F. Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics and the Emerging Humanitarian Intervention Policy: Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo,” *World Affairs* 164 (2010): 80.

<sup>51</sup> Henry F. Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics”, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Michael T. Koch & Patricia Sullivan, “Should I Stay or Should I Go Now? Partisanship, Approval, and the Duration of Major Power Democratic Military Interventions,” *The Journal of Politics* 72 (2010): 616-629.

opinion polls, and election cycles” just to name a few.<sup>53</sup> These elements must be weighed and accounted for when considering any military action, especially humanitarian missions, which are often viewed as unrelated to the immediate national security of the country and secondary to the premier importance of the economic climate. Thus, to commit to a humanitarian mission, the domestic political climate must be friendly to such pursuits. As the primary decision maker in all foreign policy issues, it is the responsibility of the President to weigh and balance domestic concerns with international affairs.

As the Commander and Chief of all United States armed forces, the decision will ultimately come down to the President and his administration. It is the job of the President to determine how and when he will use this power. When facing such a decision the President will first “consider his domestic political standing, his relations with Congress, the public’s attention or inattention to foreign policy matters, the public’s dissatisfaction with the progress of the economy, [and] also whether an election is forthcoming”.<sup>54</sup> As a rational decision maker, the President will not likely make decisions that will decrease his favorability and consequently his chances for reelection and vice versa. Thus, as a result, he will be very sensitive to the public’s “attitudes towards international involvement, as well as domestic considerations such as the state of the economy”.<sup>55</sup> If for example, the economy is in the tank and the public is very wary of military involvement in a foreign civil war, a rational decision maker would likely not choose to pursue overseas intervention due to the potential political costs such an action would have. This is because “war fighting is tremendously costly. Using military force results in the loss of economic resources, material and human lives, and these costs can have political repercussions

---

<sup>53</sup> Henry F. Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics”, 73.

<sup>54</sup> Brian L. Job and Charles W. Ostrom, “The President and the Political Use of Force,” *The American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): 543.

<sup>55</sup> Brian L. Job and Charles W. Ostrom, “The President and the Political Use of Force,” 545.

for national leaders.”<sup>56</sup> By observing the domestic factors during an ongoing crises one can likely predict whether or not a President will choose to intervene. Therefore, an analysis of domestic issues ongoing in the United States at the time of a crisis, such as the Syrian Civil War, will help provide an understanding as to why the U.S. has remained largely uninvolved.

### *A. State of the Economy*

One of the most important factors of the domestic political climate is the condition of the economy. In fact, decades of research has shown that “the public’s attention is often preoccupied with economic prosperity” above anything else.<sup>57</sup> Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the President, while considering foreign policy decisions, must take into account the state of the economy. This includes factors like the unemployment rate, national debt, job creation, income inequality, and average income for the entire country. Higher levels in each of these elements of the economy will grant the President greater levels of prestige, a higher chance of reelection, and the freedom to pursue a chosen political agenda with increased levels of support. In other words, the President can focus on accomplishing other aspects of his mandate, rather than focus solely on improving the economy and creating jobs to ensure his chances of reelection.

### *Kosovo*

The 1990’s, particularly the late 1990’s, have long been acknowledged as the economic glory days. Oftentimes, this glorious decade is compared to the greatest boom our country has ever experienced in the 1950’s following the victory of WWII and the U.S. ascension to world superpower status. During the Great Recession that began in December 2007, many Americans

---

<sup>56</sup> Michael T. Koch & Patricia Sullivan, “Should I Stay or Should I Go Now? Partisanship,” 618.

<sup>57</sup> Charles W. Ostrom & Brian L. Job, “The President and the Political Use of Force,” 548.

found themselves longing for the stability and surplus that characterized the 1990's. And they did so for good reason. There are several reasons accredited for the great economic success of the 1990's. Often economists and historians will note that the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. chief economic rival, led to a plethora of new, previously inaccessible trade opportunities in Eastern Europe and Asia. Additionally, the advent of microchip and the computer revolution spearheaded by American industry in the Silicon Valley contributed to this decade of abundance.

According to NPR, unemployment averaged roughly 5.7% throughout the 1990's. Even more specifically, from 1998 to 1999, the time intervention in Kosovo was being debated the unemployment rate in the U.S. had sunk to its lowest levels since 1969 at 4.5% and 4.2% respectively.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate just how impressive that number is, economists theorize that the natural rate of unemployment for the U.S., hovers somewhere between 5 to 6 percent. The natural rate of unemployment is essentially the idea that even when an economy is operating at its best possible function, when everything is running smoothly, there will be some level of unemployment that will naturally occur because of "market imperfections, stochastic variability in demands and supplies, the costs of gathering information about job vacancies, and labor availabilities, the costs of mobility, and so on."<sup>59</sup> Thus, we can see that all over the course of the 1990's the unemployment rate would indicate based on this information, that the U.S. economy was operating at optimum levels.

Furthermore, when we consider other elements comprising the state of the economy, such as job creation, a similar picture is created. Under President Clinton's watch, the U.S. led the world in the unprecedented information technology boom. According to the U.S. Department of State "Technological developments brought a wide range of sophisticated new electronic

---

<sup>58</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>59</sup> Milton Friedman. "The Role of Monetary Policy," *American Economic Review*, 58 (1968), 1-17.

products. Innovations in telecommunications and computer networking spawned a vast computer hardware and software industry and revolutionized the way many industries operate.”<sup>60</sup> More businesses, entrepreneurs, and individuals had access to computers and Internet capabilities. This in turn increased productivity, expanded business opportunities, reduced costs, and ultimately spurred an increase in profits. These profits led to a stock market surge, sending the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which compared to 1,000 in the late 1970’s to the 11,000 mark in late 1999. More profit meant more jobs and more Americans employed feeding money back into the economy. It was this boom and the excess of profits generated that permitted Clinton and congress to cut taxes on the middle class and post the government’s first budget surplus in 30 years in 1998.

As you can see, at the time of the Kosovo War the economy was not troubling the American voter. In fact, when one examines the U.S. average median household income “Americans were the richest in 1999, when median household income was \$56,080, adjusted for inflation.”<sup>61</sup> Things looked great for the future of the U.S. Following, the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. emerged victorious as the world’s sole military and economic superpower. But why is this important? Why does the state of the economy even matter? Well, the result of all the 1990’s economic boom created wealth and economic viability that pleased the American public. A public who was now willing to assert that hegemonic role and use the U.S. elevated status for what was perceived as good throughout the world. In other words, the lack of economic maladies made Americans more willing to focus more on global issues, thus permitting the forthcoming intervention in Kosovo. Likewise, U.S. economic success proved highly beneficial to President Clinton and he was rewarded with a reelection in 1996 and high public approval throughout a

---

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of State

<sup>61</sup> Steve Hargreaves, “15% of Americans living in poverty,” *CNNmoney.com*. September 17, 2013. <http://money.cnn.com/2013/09/17/news/economy/poverty-income/>

majority of his tenure. These public opinion polls gave Clinton the ability to pursue other interest and policy goals such as the Kosovo war with a great deal of support as we will see next. First, however, we will analyze the state of the economy during the time of the Syrian War.

### *Syria*

Unlike the excess and abundance of the 1990's, the economic plight faced by many Americans since the Great Recession has been a dreary one. From 2009 to 2013, since President Obama has come into office, the unemployment rate has stood at an average of 8.7 percent which is a drastic increase from the 5.7 percent average enjoyed in the 1990's. Furthermore, in 2011, when the Syrian conflict first began, the unemployment rate was at a crippling 8.9 percent. Why is this crippling? First and foremost, the American population is greater than it was in the 1990's and roughly 9 percent of the American populace out of work means less tax revenue flowing into the government, less consumer spending, and the accumulation of vast amounts of state debt in order to finance the social safety net programs, like unemployment insurance, to assist those in need. In other words, less money was coming in to the government because less people had money to spend on goods, businesses had less money to pay their employees and so and so forth. However, because of the social programs put in place following the Great Depression to prevent our country from collapsing in such a drastic fashion once again, government spending continued to go up. To finance this increase the government has had to seek funds from other governments and banks. The result was an accumulation of astronomical debt, the likes of which the U.S. had never seen.

At the beginning of 2011, “the amount of U.S. debt subject to the country’s legal maximum...topped \$14 trillion for the first time.”<sup>62</sup> Since 2011, U.S. debt has only continued to rise. As of March 25, 2014 the amount of U.S. debt stood at roughly \$17.6 trillion, or roughly \$55,210 per U.S. citizen. To put this number in to perspective, the average median household income for U.S. citizens in 2012 was \$51,017. Each American owes more than what the average American makes in an entire years salary. Recalling the same economic indicator in 1999, the median household income was roughly \$56,000, \$5,000 more than what Americans were making in 2012. As you can see, the economic climate of the U.S. in 1999 was far different from the one exhibited from the beginning of the Syrian crisis until its climax in September of 2013. Not only was the average American making more money in 1999, there were more Americans employed and the U.S. national debt was nowhere near the astronomical value it stands at today. In other words, the economic climate in 1999 was friendly to discussions and debates over issues not explicitly concerning the economy. Things were great, it was not the average Americans chief concern. Fast forward twelve years later to 2011 and the beginnings of the Syrian War and the anemic state of the economy, as illustrated above, was the single most important issue to voters across party lines. In a February 2012 Gallup poll “more than 9 in 10 U.S. registered voters [said] the economy [was] extremely important or very important in their vote in” the November 2012 Presidential election.<sup>63</sup> Gallup goes on state that “the economy is usually an important issue in helping voters decide whom to support in U.S. presidential elections. That seems to especially be true in years when an incumbent is seeking re-election; presidents have been easily elected in times of relative prosperity, such as in 1984 and 1996, and presidents have been defeated for a

---

<sup>62</sup> Jeanne Sahadi, “Debt Crosses \$14 trillion mark,” *CNNmoney.com*. January 20, 2011.  
[http://money.cnn.com/2011/01/20/news/economy/debt\\_record\\_high/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2011/01/20/news/economy/debt_record_high/index.htm)

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Economy is Paramount Issue to U.S. Voters,” *Gallup.com*. February 29, 2012.  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/153029/economy-paramount-issue-voters.aspx>

second term in down economies, such as in 1980 and 1992.”<sup>64</sup> 2012 was a year of economic disparity for many. As evidenced above nearly 9 out of 10 Americans found it to be among the most important issues facing the country. This heightened attention granted to the maladies of the economy discourages Americans from wising to become involved in any action that will stress the economy further. Thus, in 2012 the focus of both party’s election bids was not the crisis in Syria. Rather, the political debate that consumed the country was focused on improving the state of the economy, getting Americans back to work and not, under any circumstances, risking the lives of Americans in another conflict in the Middle East.

### **B. *The CNN Effect***

Among the many variables to consider under the auspices of domestic politics and how it relates to determining U.S. humanitarian decisions is a phenomenon that emerged specifically due to the advent and widespread ownership of the television. Television’s critical role in shaping public opinion and thereby influencing domestic political decisions was solidified in the news coverage of one of the most politically divisive conflicts of U.S. history; the Vietnam War. In the hours of reporting, broadcasting and coverage of American military action in Vietnam, the American public was exposed to a side of war they had never experienced. Never in our country’s history has American civilians been so close to the action, able to witness the brutality of war in all its forms from the comfort of their living rooms. Film of injured, dead and dying servicemen appeared on the TV screens of average Americans in cities and towns across the country. As American troops waged war in Vietnam, the battle lines at home were being drawn with equal vigor partly due to this unprecedented exposure. Those who supported the conflict, the mission

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

and our troops were countered by peace seeking, anti-war activists informed by the astute coverage afforded by nightly television news. This divide of hawks seeking to contain communism and doves seeking to promote peace is the direct effect result of broadcast news and unmistakably illustrates the monumental effect it had on American public opinion on the War in Vietnam. Images of entire Vietnamese villagers being forcefully removed from their homes by American soldiers disillusioned many back home, who began to question the credibility of the U.S. in Vietnam. Historians point to the My Lai massacre of 1968, where 300 to 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians were murdered by American troops, as an example of an atrocity broadcast to the public that highly swayed public opinion in opposition to the Vietnam War. Atrocities like My Lai were televised all across the world and only worsened public opinion on the issue.

Of particular importance to this study is how the negative public opinion, shaped and informed by television coverage, impacted the decisions and actions of U.S. foreign policy and presidential decisions. As noted by Charles Ostrom and Brian Job, if U.S military action fails “or the U.S. gets drawn into a much bigger and costlier event, the president stands to see his credibility, his popularity, and the support for his party in Congress undermined.”<sup>65</sup> In 1968, as a result of the failure of the Vietnam War, that is exactly what happened. Due to the overwhelmingly unpopular nature of the War in Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Democratic Party suffered. At the time Johnson fully intended to run for a second term. Instead of an uncontested primary, however, Johnson faced stiff competition from anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy. Although McCarthy did not win the New Hampshire primary, the margin was slim enough to illustrate to President Johnson the damage that the mishandling of the war had caused to his reputation and chances at reelection. Thus, in hopes of possibly avoiding the

---

<sup>65</sup> Ostrom and Job. “The President and the Political Use of Force.” 549.

embarrassment of losing the election, or even more so, the Democratic primary, Johnson ended his bid for reelection. The damage to his party, however, was already done. In November of 1968, Republican candidate Richard Nixon won the White House and ushered in policies aimed at reducing U.S. involvement in Vietnam and ultimately winding the conflict down entirely. The defeat of Democrats in 1968 is a prime example of how public opinion, aided and informed by media, can control domestic politics and ultimately steer foreign policy decisions. Since we have established its origins with the Vietnam War, we may now turn our attention to modern times to investigate how this phenomenon has shaped U.S. foreign policy throughout the 1990's to today.

The phenomenon that led to the ousting of Democrats in 1968 would be amplified by creation of the first 24/7 cable news channel CNN. What began as an arguably risky business venture by media mogul Ted Turner created an entire industry and institution that continues to shape and defines American public opinion to this day. In modern times, CNN hardly stands alone as Fox News and MSNBC all contend for top ratings among the 24/7 news industry. This saturation of exposure to events worldwide, specifically in regard to American military actions, led social scientists to coin the term “the CNN effect” to describe the phenomenon we first witnessed during the Vietnam War.

Advocates of “The CNN effect”, such as Henry F. Carey, claim that “the news media strongly influences public perceptions of contemporary issues and may raise the salience of some issues over others.”<sup>66</sup> Depending on the bias of the news network presenting the issue, news networks have the ability to shape, form and define public opinion on a wide array of matters. This degree of influence over the American public absolutely has a visible effect on viewer’s perceptions and

---

<sup>66</sup> Henry Carey, “U.s. Domestic Politics.”

opinions of matters domestic and abroad. Thus, it is no surprise that social scientists wishing to explain the ebb and flow of public opinion polls scour over data relating the hours of air time dedicated to reporting on a topic in relation to other topics. One, for instance, might generally observe that the traditionally conservative Fox News has spent more hours reporting on various “scandals” of the Obama administration, while the traditionally liberal MSNBC spent a great deal of time reporting on the “Bridgegate” scandal of potential Republican presidential candidate Chris Christie. These biases are critically important because of the impact they can have on that networks viewers. This is because “viewers exposed to repetitive television coverage of a particular problem generally become more convinced of its importance and the need for action.” (Carey). Why is this important? Well, if one examines the hours of air time dedicated to particular conflicts as opposed to others one can begin to develop a theory that this variable, “The CNN effect”, may be correlated to a presidential decision in the positive or negative. I argue, through an analysis of my case studies, that the amount for air time an event or topic is given can directly affect the attention it is given by policymakers in Washington D.C.

### *Kosovo*

To say that the media was influential throughout the orchestration of the Kosovo War is an understatement. Just as in Vietnam, “the battle for public opinion was waged to a large extent through television images of the military conflict.” (7 The Kosovo Conflict) In my own travels to Kosovo I had the pleasure of meeting a Kosovar-Albanian woman who was born in Kosovo, but raised in the state of Arizona. The story of how she became an American is quite remarkable. For the purpose of protecting her privacy, however, she will remain anonymous in this recount. I met this young woman, who was just a few years older than I, on my study abroad trip to Kosovo in

the summer of 2012. She was fulfilling the role of my group's interpreter, guide and traveling companion. During a particularly long bus ride to our next stop of the trip, she had the opportunity to tell us her amazing story.

As a small child our interpreter vaguely remembered being forced from her home in Kosovo by Serbian troops. As her family crossed the border into Albania with thousands of other refugees, she and her family were filmed by one of the countless American television crews reporting in that area. Little did she know, watching thousands of miles away in Arizona, was an American woman who saw this child and instantly felt the need to do something to better the life of this now homeless girl. Following months of attempts to get in touch with the girl and her family, the Arizonan woman finally was able to make contact with officials at the refugee camp where the child and her family now lived. The Arizonan offered to take this entire family in, pay for their journey and relocation to the U.S. and fund their new beginning in Arizona. Years later, the young girl transplanted from a refugee camp in Albania returned to her homeland of Kosovo. This time, however, she made the pilgrimage home as a graduate of Arizona State University and an employee of USAID's mission in Kosovo. This remarkable story is an example of how extensive the media coverage of the violence and atrocities in Kosovo was. My interpreter's story is a first hand account of the CNN effect, a result of the hours upon hours of extensive media coverage dedicated to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. According to Carey, this extensive coverage created "a shock effect" similar to the ones that catalyzed the public to support the other humanitarian interventions of the 1990's in Haiti, Bosnia and Somalia. This shock effect led the public to support intervention in Kosovo and ultimately gave President Clinton the confidence to intercede in Kosovo, without explicit U.N. approval, to wage war on

the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Whereas the “CNN effect” in Kosovo took the form of coverage of thousands of displaced women and children from Kosovo, in Somalia it was starving children, in Haiti it was the so called “boat people” who made the dangerous trek of floating to Florida in makeshift boats in order to escape the atrocities there. The coverage of human suffering whether it be starvation or refugees facilitated the exaggeration, as Carey calls it, that led to the escalation of the events in Kosovo, Haiti, and Somalia as a salient issues deserving immediate U.S. attention.

The extent of the CNN effect has on shaping public policy is seen in the cases of Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia and Haiti is astounding. While the events in all these countries were resulting in deaths, none of the countries the U.S. militarily intervened in during the 1990’s could compare in casualties to those countries we did not intervene in, despite losses that dwarf the number of casualties in Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, and Haiti. Carey notes that in none of the cases in which the U.S. intervened “was there killing comparable with that which took place in Rwanda, Tajikistan, Sierra Leone, or the Sudan.”<sup>67</sup> And yet these countries received no military intervention from the U.S. For instance, U.N. estimates purport that at least 800,000 Rwandans perished in the genocide that took place in that country in 1994. In Kosovo, however, the killings of Kosovar-Albanian remained relatively low until the NATO humanitarian intervention, at which point the violence and death tolls skyrocketed. What we see in these cases is the selective use of U.S. military capabilities in humanitarian crises. It is unmistakable that the amount of air time received by Kosovo, and not by Rwanda or Tajikistan or Sudan, is directly responsible for impacting American public opinion in support of NATO intervention in Kosovo. Of particular importance to our two case studies, Kosovo and Syria, is a stark difference in the way the two

---

<sup>67</sup> Henry Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics,”

conflicts were addressed by the media. Whereas coverage of Kosovo and NATO's intervention rarely touched on the legality issues of infringing upon Yugoslavia's sovereignty without UN approval, the legality of U.S. intervention in Syria was a topic of much discussion. The point remains, however, that the way in which the media approaches a crises, even in its classification of a crisis, impacts public opinion. Public opinion, in the end, will prompt or discourage the use of U.S. military force.

### *Syria*

Starting in 2011, foreign press was banned from entering or reporting in Syria. Despite the violence that was raging within its borders, media sources at home had very little access to Syria. This absence of initial press coverage contributed to a general lack of knowledge or concern by the American people, who were instead captivated by the NATO intervention gearing up to take place in Libya that sent oil prices skyrocketing. Likewise, as time persisted, several other major news events captivated the public and held its attention. The further development of the Arab Spring throughout the region, particularly the developments in Egypt continued to concern and intrigue observers. Furthermore, North Korea threatening to use nuclear weapons against the U.S. and Iran's continued attempts to obtain nuclear weapons generated the most public concern in the realm of foreign policy. In a February 2012 a Gallup poll found that "58 percent of the public believed that preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is important even if it means taking military action." Beyond Iran, the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya and the subsequent handling of those attacks by the Obama administration generated a media firestorm that has still not been extinguished. Likewise, the continued debate over the implementation and application of the Affordable Care Act dominated the domestic

political front. In 2012, a string of mass shootings also captured a great deal of headlines and catalyzed a gun control debate that fiercely consumed the American public and divided many along partisan lines. All of these issues combined with the presidential election of 2012 made Syria a very low priority in the eyes of the American public. Exacerbating tensions even more domestically were the revelations of the NSA spying program leaked by former NSA analyst Edward Snowden. Needless to say, the domestic front during this time was unstable, upset by a string of scandals, tragedies and yearning to return the focus of the U.S. back home rather than abroad. With all of the additional stories generating interest in the months following the Syrian war breaking out, the U.S. media failed to allot even remotely comparable time as they gave to the conflict in Kosovo. This lack of media attention, coupled by the many domestic political issues of the time, undoubtedly contributed to a general lack of concern for the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian War from the American public who expressed little interest in seeing U.S. military capabilities used to stop the crisis from spreading.

### ***Presidential and Congressional Approval Ratings & Election Schedules***

Now that we have identified two major components that form public opinion we may actually begin to examine how these two factors, The CNN effect and the state of the economy, translate into presidential and congressional approval ratings. I argue that no other factor contributes more to U.S. military intervention in humanitarian crisis than the public opinion of Presidents and Congressmen in Washington D.C. It is these numbers that do and will continue to shape U.S. humanitarian intervention policies. Ultimately, this is because for both the President and Congressional representatives, approval ratings are the best indicator as to how an election will turn out. Since we all recognize that the first job of any politician is to secure reelection, the

importance of these numbers is understood. Likewise, in relation to our study it is critical to understand that the “higher a president’s current approval rating, the greater will be his propensity to use force. Presidents with relatively low levels of popular support, and in turn congressional support, will tend to become immobilized” when making risky foreign policy maneuvers.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, high approval ratings facilitate the ability of a President and his party to pursue their policy agenda with the support of the public at their back.<sup>69</sup> For example, President Obama and the Democratic controlled House of Representatives and Senate used the wave of popular opinion that brought them into power to pass the Affordable Care Act, Obama’s signature policy achievement. This success is largely due to the leverage high approval ratings provide the President when working with Congress. If, for instance, a congressman, caucus, or entire party is reluctant to work with a President who possesses a majority of public support and high approval ratings nationwide, they risk compromising their own popularity and their reelection chances. This ability is critically related to other things important to politicians, especially presidents, such as their legacy or place in history which is largely determined by their ability to navigate the gridlock of Washington D.C. and produce legislation true to the mandate of their campaign promises.

### *Kosovo*

President Clinton was notoriously concerned with approval ratings throughout his political career. In fact, Clinton’s former advisor George Stephanopoulos remarked that, “Clinton relied on polls to an absurd extent at times, even to decide where to take a vacation or what clothes to

---

<sup>68</sup> Ostrom and Job. “The President and the Political Use of Force.” 549

<sup>69</sup> Koch and Sullivan, “Should I Stay or Should I Go Now”.

wear.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Clinton “did not just take polls on major public policy issues; they were even counseled on vacation spots. In the summer of 1995...all the President really wanted to do was to play golf on Martha’s Vineyard, but [was] sent hiking in the Rockies instead. Golf [was seen] as a Republican sport.”<sup>71</sup> This meticulous reliance on opinion polls to guide the actions of his presidency seemed to pay off. According to Gallup, who have been keeping track of presidential approval ratings since Harry Truman’s Presidency, Clinton remains to have the 2nd highest average approval rating of any two-term President. Over his eight years in the White House, Clinton averaged an approval rating of 55.1 %. Only Dwight D. Eisenhower leads him in that regard with an average approval rating of 65%. Interestingly enough, when we look at 2nd term averages alone, President Clinton clearly leads the pack. In his second term, Clinton averaged an approval rating of 60.6% narrowly topping Eisenhower who averaged 60.5% approval in his second term. Overall, Clinton was a popular President who tended to possess a majority of American support throughout the duration of his term. The data above clearly shows this is even truer in the late 1990’s of his second term. One can surmise that the budget surpluses, general economic security, and blossoming IT industry all led to this impressive display of American public support that would facilitate the NATO intervention of Kosovo in 1999.

When we specifically consult the time period in which debates over intervention in Kosovo were being considered, 1998 to early 1999, President Clinton’s approval ratings were the highest of his entire presidency. In 1998 alone President Clinton averaged an approval rating of 63.8%, with the highest approval ratings of his entire presidency occurring in December of 1998 at 73%. Despite the ongoing Monica Lewinsky scandal President Clinton’s popularity was not impacted. In fact, if anything, he became more popular. Gallup polls show that his average

---

<sup>70</sup> Henry Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

approval rating in 1998 (63.8%) was 12.5% greater than the average first five years of his presidency (51.3%). It was during 1998, riding the waves of public goodwill to President Clinton, that the first murmurings of military action in Kosovo began. Based on the data, we can clearly see that President Clinton was supported and approved of by most Americans giving him the flexibility to pursue policy goals and agendas that he saw fit. One more thing to consider is President Clinton's status as a "lame duck" President during the time of the Kosovo War. President Clinton won reelection in 1996 and did not have to worry answering to the American public in the voting booths in 2000. This ability to act without electoral consequences should not go unobserved as the way the electoral schedule fell in 2012 the U.S. response to Syria was drastically affected. It is true that he was, in fact, nearing the end of his presidency and simultaneously facing a political scandal that, while not decreasing his popularity, did nothing to alleviate his parody inducing reputation as a womanizer. It is important to consider that facing the end of his Presidency, Clinton was more concerned than ever about his legacy. It can be argued that a president, such as Clinton, "worried about his place in history may use the last years of his tenure to enhance public support or to select the electoral stage for his heir apparent by initiating popular foreign policies."<sup>72</sup> Later, we will see that partly due to the CNN effects heightening the salience of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo to American viewers, the Kosovo War was indeed a popular foreign policy.

Now, that we have established that President Clinton was in the most popular years of his presidency during the events surrounding the Kosovo War, let us take an equally important look at congressional approval ratings at this time. Despite split government being the status quo for a majority of President Clinton's time in office, bipartisanship was not a novelty of the 1990's as it

---

<sup>72</sup> T. Knecht and M.S. Weatherford, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Stages of Presidential Decision Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006): 708.

is today. If we ignore the impeachment of President Clinton and that minor snafu, one can appreciate the impressive functionality of Washington D.C. during this time. Under the tutelage of President Clinton and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, gridlock was overcome and democracy worked. According to Dean Garfield it was during this time that

Democrats and Republicans joined efforts and agreed on a variety of legislative and regulatory changes that provided the framework for today's world of 1,000-channel cable systems, smartphones, an infinitely diverse Internet, stronger global technology standards and increased trade of core products and services. The value of bipartisan efforts was demonstrated in a decade that saw the lowest unemployment in 30 years, the creation of more than 22 million jobs in less than eight years and, remarkably, the longest economic expansion in America's history.<sup>73</sup>

Welfare reform, the NAFTA agreements and the budget surpluses of the late 1990's are all examples the bipartisanship that characterized this era, regardless of political differences. One cannot help but become enamored by the nostalgia of it all. I argue that President-Congress relations also play a monumental role in U.S. foreign policy decisions to intervene in humanitarian crises and in the 1990's relations were superb. Like Clinton, Congress enjoyed substantially high approval ratings during this time averaging the support of 47% of Americans in 1998. While nowhere near the levels of President Clinton's approval ratings during this time, 47% approval for Congress is nothing to frown upon. In fact, it is quite respectable considering the dismal ratings of Congress today. Additionally, if one considers the approval ratings of Congress one year earlier in 1997 it is significantly lower than 1998 at 35.6%. When nearly half of the country supports Congress and more than half of the country supports the President there is less gridlock, opposition and brinksmanship that often paralyzes our system today. Because of this general favorability, our government was more free to pursue solutions to ethnic conflict in

---

<sup>73</sup> Dean Garfield, "Replicating the Bipartisan Economic Successes of the 1990s," *huffingtonpost.com*. March 20, 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dean-garfield/replicating-the-bipartisa\\_b\\_842338.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dean-garfield/replicating-the-bipartisa_b_842338.html).

Kosovo, but only because a near majority of Americans supported intervention in Kosovo in the first place.

### *Syria*

Unlike President Clinton, the time in which the Syrian crisis was unraveling was not the most popular point of President Obama's presidency and this undoubtedly contributed to some of his actions regarding Syria during this time. In fact, in 2011 and 2013 President Obama experienced some of the lowest numbers of his entire presidency. In October of 2011, seven months after the war in Syria began; President Obama was hit with his lowest approval rating of his entire presidency at an anemic 38%.<sup>74</sup> Throughout 2012, a great deal of President Obama's time was spent campaigning and rallying the base of voters who put him in the White House in the first place, but that did little than put his numbers a little above 50%. The 2012 presidential and congressional elections should be noted as a great influence in regards towards U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in this time. Unlike President Clinton, President Obama depended on American voters to reelect him for a second term during the time the Syrian war and refugee crisis was really escalating. Because of the elections President Obama and Congress were very weary of making any unpopular decisions that might jeopardize their chances of political success. In fact, President Obama's inaction towards Syria was used as cannon fodder by Republican competitors who criticized his inaction as a sign of weakness. Republican candidate Mitt Romney took an active stance on the issue to distance himself from President Obama by expressing his interest in both military strikes against the Syrian military as well as arming the rebel forces in that country. However, as election results would show, Mitt Romney's stance on the issue in Syria as well as other policy issues was not well received as he failed to win the

---

<sup>74</sup> Gallup

election. Thus, in January of 2013, nearly two years after the Syrian conflict began; the U.S. remained largely inactive towards the issue and President Obama's approval rating stood at 52%. This would be the highest numbers President Obama would have in 2013 following his successful reelection bid. More importantly to our topic of discussion however, are President Obama's approval ratings during the month of September. After more than two years of delaying an U.S. response to Syria, President Obama deferred to Congress to make a decision regarding the U.S. response to the use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians. In an address to the American people, President Obama stated that he was in favor of issuing military strikes against specific Syrian military targets, but clarified further that he would not do so without the explicit consent of Congress: "While I believe I have the authority to carry out this military action without specific congressional authorization, I know that the country will be stronger if we take this course and our actions will be even more effective."<sup>75</sup> According to a Gallup poll taken from August 26<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>, the day president Obama made this speech, President Obama's approval rating stood at 44% with a 48% disapproval rating.<sup>76</sup> Compared to President Clinton at the time of the Kosovo War's initiation, President Obama's approval rating was nearly 20 points less at the time of wishing to initiate military strikes than President Clinton's. This less than majority approval likely led to Obama's decision to defer to Congress. In this way, Obama deferred the consequences of making a possibly unpopular decision to Congress, thereby sparing him from potential political backlash of acting without congressional approval to wage an unpopular military act. Congress, as we will see, was in no place to make unpopular decisions either.

---

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Talev and Terry Atlas, "Obama Seeks Congressional Approval for Syria Strike," *bloomberg.com*. September 1, 2013. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-31/un-team-quits-syria-after-kerry-sets-stage-for-u-s-action.html>

<sup>76</sup> Gallup

In this day and age of hyper partisanship, gridlock and government shutdown Congressional approval ratings have sunk to abysmal ratings. American support for Congress has sunk so low, in fact, that in October 2013 Senator John McCain even remarked that Congress “can’t get lower in the polls. We’re down to blood relatives and paid staffers now.”<sup>77</sup> McCain’s observation would seem just about right to the American public as the average approval rating for Congress in 2013 was 14%, dropping from an average approval rating of 15% in 2012.<sup>78</sup> In the 29-year history of Gallup asking Americans how they feel about Congress, 2012 and 2013, possessed the lowest approval ratings of all time. What does this all mean? Well, for one it means that Congress will be reluctant to enact decisions that would risk making their popularity levels sink any lower. Thus, when faced with a decision, Obama’s call for Congress to make the call in regards to authorizing a military strike for example, Congress will be reluctant to do so unless such a decision would increase their popularity. However, as we will soon see, military strikes in Syria were not popular at all.

### ***U.S. Public Opinion of the Conflict***

According to a survey taken by Pew Research Center in March of 1999, 47% of Americans agreed that the U.S. has responsibility to do something about “ethnic fighting in Kosovo” with 46% of Americans disagreeing and 7% remaining neutral. In regard to the conflict in Syria, however, the numbers are quite different. In March of 2012, nearly a year after the war in Syria had begun, the Pew Research Center asked the question; “Does the U.S. have a responsibility to do something about fighting in Syria?” This time, however, the American public

---

<sup>77</sup> Robert Costa, “Divided and Uneasy,” *nationalreview.com*. October 14, 2013.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/361123/divided-and-uneasy-robert-costa>

<sup>78</sup> Frank Newport, “Congressional Approval Sinks to Record Low,” *Gallup. Com*, November 12, 2013.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/165809/congressional-approval-sinks-record-low.aspx>.

clearly expressed aversion towards getting involved. Only 25% of Americans answered that, indeed, the U.S. needed to do something about the situation in Syria. An overwhelming majority, 64% of Americans in fact, felt that the U.S should not become involved.<sup>79</sup> Now, if we go to September 2013, following the crossing of President Obama's red line and wishes to initiate military strikes on Syrian military targets we are met with a similar aversion. This, of course, is after President Obama delegated the decision to Congress and said he would not issue an executive order to initiate the attacks himself.

According to a Gallup poll taken in September of 2013 the percentage of Americans in favor of intervention in Syria had increased slightly. When asked if they were in favor of the U.S. intervening in Syria to reduce Syria's ability to use chemical weapons, only 36% of Americans were in favor. 51% were against such action, while 13% remained undecided or had no opinion on the matter. According to Gallup, at the time this poll was taken "Americans' support for the United States' taking military action against the Syrian government for its suspected use of chemical weapons is on track to be among the lowest for any intervention Gallup has asked about in the last 20 years."<sup>80</sup> It is no wonder then, that intervention was not pursued as a legitimate response to the issue as well as the humanitarian region that threatens to destabilize the region. President Obama lacked sufficient support, Congress definitely lack sufficient support, doubts over the economy still prevailed, Syria was perceived by the American public as to costly as an action to be taken following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and ultimately, American support for Syrian intervention was simply not existent in relation to the War in Kosovo. One explanation for the significant difference in support for these two cases is that traditionally, "helping to defend against external aggression was popular; intervention in

---

<sup>79</sup> Pew Research Center

<sup>80</sup> Gallup

civil wars [is] not.”<sup>81</sup> The media during the time of the Kosovo War intentionally or subconsciously portrayed the Serbians as external aggressors mercilessly killing and uprooting defenseless Kosovars. Throughout the 1990’s Slobodan Milosevic was even nicknamed “The Butcher of the Balkans” further enforcing the notion of Serbia as the bully. Regardless of the fact that Kosovo was within the sovereign territory of Yugoslavia at the time and considered a civil war by many and certainly by the Serbians to be one, the American public ignored this fact and supported the violation of international law through NATO’s bombing campaign. In terms of the Syrian conflict, however, the conflict was always portrayed as a civil war, which as stated above, has never been the wish of Americans to become actively engaged in since the devastation that was Vietnam.

The Vietnam War cost 58,000 Americans their lives. Since then the U.S. public has been reluctant to intervene in situations that could lead to a heavy loss of lives, preferring instead to support interventions that are comprised of only air strikes, such as in Kosovo. Despite President Obama’s claims to only employ air strikes in Syria on select military targets, the American public would not budge. The explanation for this discrepancy in situations can possibly be explained by the difference in the state of economies at the time or perhaps, the public becoming completely disillusioned by the thought of more war in the Middle East. The truth, however, remains that public opinion, influenced by the state of the economy and the CNN effect, was entirely amicable to intervention in Kosovo, but against intervention in Syria. The high levels of popularity enjoyed by President Clinton in Congress in 1999 facilitated their willingness to risk political backlash in the potential failure of the Kosovo mission. The relative unpopularity of both President Obama and Congress at the time of the Syrian war, however, prohibited military

---

<sup>81</sup> Richard C. Eichenberg, “Victory Has Many Friends: U.S. Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force, 1981-2005,” *International Security* 30 (2005): 140-177.

action as both the President and Congress were unwilling to make unnecessary decisions that would decrease their popularity more, especially in the middle of an election year. President Clinton's inability to run for a second term allowed him to worry not so much about his chances at reelection as his political legacy. President Obama, however, spent a majority of his first term building his resume up for the 2012 elections in hopes of securing a second term as President. Likewise, the timing of the election schedule and the fact that the Syrian War began in the year right before President Obama's reelection campaign forestalled the execution any preemptive strikes in 2011 or early 2012 that may have been effective in preventing the escalation of the conflict and refugee crisis. Thus, it is quite evident that the domestic climate faced by Presidents and Congressmen determines whether or not the use of military force is employed in humanitarian crises.

### *Conclusions*

The first inkling of my thesis came to me as I stood at the foot of a war memorial in the village of Prekaz, Kosovo. It was a striking experience. As rain drizzled down upon this hallowed ground, I drifted between three rows of graves, some of which contained children as young as four. Across from the plot of graves guarded by Kosovar military personnel stood a barn, or what used to be a barn. Now, I witnessed a building which that was nothing more than a bullet riddled tomb. For it was here, in this barn, where over sixty men, women and children sat huddled together in fear during the last moments of their lives. As Yugoslavian/Serbian troops

surrounded the barn the grenades and bullets began to explode in a deafening display of violence. There were no survivors in this village. All were lost.

This was no random attack. Yugoslavian troops were acting under orders to find and destroy KLA operatives reportedly seeking refuge in this tiny, typical town. Why? Prekaz was the hometown of Adem Jashari, the leader of the KLA and the man responsible for orchestrating countless terrorist attacks against Serbian authorities and civilians throughout the 1990's. Attacks that even the governments in the U.S. recognized as blatant acts of terrorism. It was here that I became dumbfounded for the first time. In my time in Albania and Kosovo we, as Americans, were treated with a certain degree of reverence. Thankfulness for the countless Albanian lives the U.S. government helped spare with the NATO intervention of 1999. I, of course, reveled in this pomp and circumstance. I definitely preferred the adoration of Albanians compared to the scorn of Egyptians that I faced on my first study abroad trip. Thus, I was to an extent a victim of Stockholm syndrome. Not once was I presented with the Yugoslavian argument or viewpoint. Not once was I presented with the argument that, "Hey, in all actuality Kosovo legitimately belonged to Yugoslavia in the eyes of international law. Likewise, the acts of the KLA, justifiable or not, were nothing more than acts of terrorism." That never happened when I was in Kosovo or Albania.

It occurred to me later through a discussion with my mentor Dr. Wiegand that perhaps there was a reason why, when discussing the Kosovo War you do not think about the inherent illegality of NATO's intervention, but rather you remember the faces of Albanian mothers holding crying babies as they flee Kosovo and bombs erupt behind them. What bothered me most of all was the overnight change in policy in regards to Kosovo. One night the U.S. regards the KLA as terrorists, the next they are freedom fighters waging a justifiable war against a

tyrannical butcher of a dictator. This complex simply baffled me. Thus, I sought answers. This inquiry into what actually controls U.S. humanitarian interventions led me away from my quixotic preconceived notions that the U.S. intervenes to save people in dire need. That there were no ulterior motives behind the U.S. acting valiantly, such unparalleled selflessness was critical to the composition of our nation. I discovered I was wrong.

My fears were reinforced as when I returned from Kosovo in the summer of 2012 and the U.S. still had yet to do much more than comment of the situation in Syria. I read and watched countless news reports detailing the atrocities being committed by the Syrian government and I began to see similarities between Kosovo and the Syrian conflict. In both situations we see a dictator perceived as tyrannical and abusing his power through attacks against his own people juxtaposed against a group of ragtag “freedom fighters” with possible terrorist connections. Despite these similarities, however, the U.S. never committed to military action as they did in Kosovo. I finally decided I would pursue the answer to this mystery in my thesis. The answer I found is that several factors and elements encompassing domestic politics determine any and every foreign policy decision made by the U.S., especially in the case of humanitarian interventions.

We can infer based on the case studies of Kosovo and Syria that lacking a majority of the public’s approval to get involved with a conflict as well as their support for the policymakers who make those decisions, no military action will be taken. It is for these reasons that we witness an entirely different response by the U.S. in Kosovo than we do in Syria, despite the vast ramifications of inaction in Syria. In conclusion, it’s all about the numbers. Numbers which relay economic indicators, numbers that tell us how many hours of media coverage an event garners, numbers which informs policymakers of their approval ratings, and numbers which relay to those

policymakers what actions are popular and what actions are not. In regards to the Kosovo War, those numbers were favorable. For Syria, however, they were not.