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International Conference
Schloss Herrenhausen, Hannover

Consequences of Military Interventions since 1945 Experiences, Lessons and Questions

I. Relevance to society and scholarship

Ever since the Balkan wars of the mid-1990s and especially against the backdrop of international terrorism, the pros and cons of military intervention has become one of the great contentious issues on the political agenda, both nationally and internationally. In Germany, Bundeswehr deployments are often accompanied by emotionally charged debates including lessons of the past that any side might consider to be the right ones. Yet elsewhere, too, arguments keep revolving around the same issues. When may, when must one intervene to stop civil wars, mass murder or persecution motivated by politics, religion or ethnicity? Does it make sense to force regime change through armed intervention? And, especially: What are the long-term effects and how high is the price of military intervention for the states and societies immediately affected? A remark many people are citing these days vividly captures the dilemma: "ISIS cannot be defeated through war – but not without it either." Surveying the present global state of conflict and crisis, it seems evident that we can expect more such controversies – and more frequently – in the future. It appears equally manifest that there are no conclusive answers, only provisional insights of comparably fleeting intellectual value.

Our conference examining "*Consequences of Military Interventions Since 1945: Experiences, Lessons, Questions*" is meant to advance both the public debate and research agenda on the subject for historiography and the social sciences. On-the-ground political and military experience will challenge distinguished scholarship and vice-versa. Current crises will pose their own questions to history; today's challenges will cast new light on past conflicts. Briefly, we must hone arguments and perspectives, for they will be put to the test, again and again.

Between 1945 and 2009 more than 150 civil wars were fought in which an estimated 22 million people died. Third countries intervened in 97 cases – generally indirectly,

by supplying funding, arms and/or expertise to a side, yet frequently also by sending troops. Notably, the major powers – the United States, the USSR/Russia and China – were far from alone in engaging in such activity. So did secondary powers or smaller states including France, Britain, Pakistan, Vietnam, South Africa, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Israel, Tanzania, Somalia and Sudan. We have likewise registered shifts in both conflict configurations and public perceptions since the end of the Cold War. Numbers of unilateral interventions have fallen and multilateral ones greatly risen. These have been mandated primarily by the UN or NATO in response to state tyranny (generally based on the “Responsibility to Protect” principle), to stabilize fragile peace agreements or expel terrorist organizations from their havens. Not least, more differentiated assessments of risks and consequences than in the past have been demanded.

Military interventions since 1945 have also spawned a diverse and voluminous literature spanning many disciplines. Political science has primarily discussed theories of decision-making processes and conflict dynamics or else accumulated vast databases on conflicts and conflict resolution since 1990. Historical research has devoted itself mainly to the Cold War era or, more recently, comparative analysis of colonial wars. Here, too, the focus has been on origins and narratives. The deficits in both emphases and reciprocal perceptions are obvious. Historians have rarely subjected their empirical findings to theoretical approaches from the social sciences, while social scientists generally omit historical context in their studies. Also, both fall short of what is possible and necessary in the discussion of one essential issue: What are the legacies of indirect or direct military intervention? In what ways and at whose expense does the economic, political and societal life of “intervened” states change?

Our conference on “*Consequences of Military Interventions Since 1945: Experiences, Lessons, Questions*” should break new ground in two respects. Firstly it provides a forum for comparing the great “intervention phases” that, as a rule, have been artificially divorced from one another and discussed accordingly: the era of the Cold War and progressions from 1990 to the present day. Secondly, this event will give an impulse to systematize our knowledge on the effects of military intervention in the short-, medium- and longer term, with a view primarily to those most immediately affected. It will discuss not only the experiences of failure but also examples of successful intervention. What conditions must be met to stabilize a country shattered by unrest and violence and make it viable for the future? What



factors bring failure to such attempts? Case examples will doubtlessly be cited repeatedly. Yet the point lies not in comparative observation of individual cases. Instead, comparisons draw on analytically relevant issues and socially significant problem areas.

II. Advancing scholarly and political issues

A nuanced survey of intervention effects must take a view that takes two perspectives into account: the policies, economies and societies of intervening states on the one hand and “intervened” states on the other. Examples of the reciprocal contexts of both these levels can be elaborated within the following thematic fields:

1. Reasons and goals of interventions

We proceed from the hypothesis that the consequences of military intervention stand in immediate relation to the definition of a conflict and previously defined goals – that, as a consequence, it makes a difference whether the driver of policy is “peacekeeping,” “nation-building” or “democratization,” whether “egotistical intervention objectives” (e.g. securing spheres of influence or commodity markets) or “altruistic motives” (for example enforcing human rights or implementing a responsibility to protect) weigh heaviest. Is it primarily a matter of “hard” security concerns (economic and strategic issues) or “soft” ones (credibility, prestige, domestic considerations)? How do threat perceptions figure? To what extent, for instance, does a policy of “democratization” prolong applicable conflicts over power and influence? How relevant are these standards to the outcome? What effects are reflected in what constellations?

2. Preparation of interventions

We proceed from the hypothesis that the political and military preparation of military interventions is inextricably linked to their consequences. What institutions, bodies and individuals take part in the planning and executive process? Who seeks public support, democratic legitimation or legal backing when and in what ways? Under what conditions do states opt for multilateral or unilateral interventions? What plans exist for the time following the pullout; what tangible preparations are made for the “post-intervention period”? Who tends when and why to overestimate their own capacities and misjudge the problems of

an intervention? How good is the “intercultural competence” of the interventionists; how do they regard the “others” and how does this view change over time? How and in what ways are the interests of “intervened” states taken into account? Who are the contacts there, how do bilateral relations develop, what input rights are accorded to whom and who gets to act?

3. Execution of interventions

We proceed from the hypothesis that the effects of interventions depend not only on the interests and plans of participating actors but also – sometimes to a greater extent – on unexpected twists and chance events. When do plans and actual developments come into conflict? What triggers unexpected processes? Who gains when and with what means new definitional powers over events? When and how do external interventions change the nature and evolution of domestic conflicts? Under what conditions do they become independent and active agents? How durable is their agency?

4. Political treatment of interventions' effects

We proceed from the hypothesis that public perception exerts substantial influence on the treatment of intervention's effects. By what criteria do different actors measure the success or failure of a military intervention? Which consequences are raised in the public discourse, and which are marginalized or ignored? Which problems are placed on the political agenda, by whom and in what manner (refugee flows, economic reconstruction, parallel economy, crime, institutional reconstruction)? To what extent do misconceptions and wishful thinking (e.g. following the collapse of repressive regimes) obstruct responses appropriate to the situation? Under what conditions do the standards shift by which success or failure is measured? Who profits from military interventions on what sides of conflicts?

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