The Kosovo crisis in 1999 and the Sierra Leone hostage debacle in 2000 have reignited a recurring debate in international policy circles over humanitarian intervention. This debate focuses on the legal, political, and operational conundrums of coercive actions for humanitarian purposes, and will only intensify in the future. Indeed, internal conflicts are difficult to ignore in a globalizing world.

The legal obstacles to humanitarian intervention were highlighted by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) threats to intervene without United Nations Security Council authorization in the conflict between the Yugoslav government and the secessionist Kosovar Albanians. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1998, China and Russia strongly opposed a possible NATO intervention and threatened to veto any attempt to secure UN authorization for such action. In March 1999, as violence within Kosovo increased, the United States and its NATO allies nonetheless went ahead and, without consulting the UN Security Council or General Assembly, launched a 78-day air war against Belgrade. Consequently, unlike in the early 1990s, the debate at the end of the decade focused not on the question of whether humanitarian considerations could be characterized as “threats to international peace and security” and thus justify intervention in states’ domestic affairs, but rather whether such interventions needed the authorization of the UN Security Council.

The March 1999 intervention in Kosovo and Serbia also highlights today’s policy dilemmas. Clearly, communal strife is difficult to ignore in an increasingly interdependent and globalized world; images of gross human rights abuses will frequently create pressures on outside powers to intervene. Yet, allowing for the use of force in humanitarian emergencies without UN Security Council authorization could easily lead to erosion of the general rule on the prohibition of the use of force and efforts to restrict its use in relations between states. It could also contribute to a weakening of the United Nations.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is acutely aware of this dilemma and the dangers associated with it. In September 1999 he took this debate to the UN General Assembly and urged states to develop criteria to permit humanitarian interventions in the absence of a consensus in the Security Council. Annan asked Algeria, China, and India—countries that vehemently opposed the United States–NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and spoke against humanitarian intervention in the 1999 General Assembly debate—what they would have done if, in the case of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, a coalition of states had been prepared to act in defense of the Tutsi population, but did not receive prompt Security Council authorization. “Should such a coalition have stood aside,” he asked, “and allowed...
the horror to unfold?” Similarly, those who heralded the Kosovo operation were asked what type of precedent the action had set. To what extent had that intervention undermined the prohibition on the use of force and the system created after World War II to deal with such security threats?

The political and operational conundrums of international interventions in internal conflicts for humanitarian purposes again sprang up in Sierra Leone in May 2000 and were illustrated by the international response—or rather the lack thereof—to the taking hostage of 500 UN soldiers by rebel forces. Members of the Security Council immediately voiced their concern about the situation. United States Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke called the situation in Sierra Leone “unacceptable to the United Nations” and said that it “should be unacceptable to all [UN] member states.” “We can’t turn away from crises like these,” he stressed. Similarly, United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated that the hostage-taking was “unacceptable” and that it “needed to be reversed.” Despite these strong rhetorical reactions, little was done.

Britain sent a 10,000-strong Rapid Reaction Force to Bosnia, which paraded in front of Western TV cameras, Western countries bought commercial rates, the UN Secretariat declined this offer. However, because the United States rate for the transport of troops greatly exceeded regular commercial rates, the UN Secretariat declared this offer.

Sierra Leone showed that the political and operational lessons from failed UN missions in Rwanda, Bosnia, and earlier in Somalia had not been learned. The same mistakes continued to be made. For example, the UN had learned in Bosnia and Rwanda that lightly armed peacekeepers should not be sent into a violent or potentially violent situation. Yet, the UN Security Council did exactly that in Sierra Leone in 1999, and set out to do the same in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire) in 2000. Similarly, the early 1990s had shown the importance of matching mission mandates with sufficient resources.

Yet, the Zambian peacekeepers in Sierra Leone were not equipped to carry out a mandate to enforce the peace. This mismatch was reminiscent of the agonizing UN missions of the early 1990s, and it pointed to the domestic and international political constraints inherent in humanitarian interventions. The challenge is mobilizing sufficient domestic and international political support to see these missions through.

Meeting this challenge requires international actors to answer three questions. First, under what conditions should international actors intervene in internal conflicts? (This “whether to intervene” question has both legal and political components.) The second question is: When international action is required, which international actors should take the lead and who should participate in these operations? (This is the “who should intervene” question.) And the third question is: What are the best ways of carrying out international interventions in internal conflicts? (This is the “how to intervene” question.) Answering these questions requires an examination of recent practice. This in turn will help identify policy challenges for the future.

Obstacles to Intervention

At the heart of the humanitarian intervention debate lies the question of whether force can be used lawfully in situations other than those foreseen by the UN charter. This debate features different legal schools of thought and is defined by the practice and the declaratory policies of states, which often are not in line with each other.

Under Chapter VII of the UN charter, the Security Council can impose coercive measures and disregard the general principle of nonintervention in states’ domestic affairs if it determines that a particular problem poses a “threat to international peace and security.” In the 1990s, the Security Council showed great creativity in defining such threats. It increasingly deemed internal conflicts and gross violations of human rights to be legitimate reasons for international action. By the end of the 1990s, the idea that states should not be
allowed to hide behind the shield of sovereignty when gross violations of human rights occur on their territory had firmly taken root. Still, many states remain hesitant to accept a right of humanitarian intervention outside the UN framework. They believe that the current system, under which the Security Council determines whether a situation merits the imposition of economic sanctions or military intervention, is the best guarantee that economic embargoes and military interventions will not be launched for self-serving political reasons.

Most legal scholars and governments argue that the UN charter contains a general prohibition on the use of force. This prohibition is embodied in Article 2(4): “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”

Scholars and governments generally maintain that the charter allows for only two exceptions to this rule. One is in response to an armed attack (Article 51). The other is when the use of force is authorized by the Security Council to maintain or restore international peace and security (Article 42).

That said, some legal scholars maintain that Article 2(4) does not contain a general and comprehensive prohibition on the use of force. They argue that it merely regulates the conditions under which force is prohibited, but allows exceptions beyond the two mentioned in the charter (Articles 51 and 42). They defend the notion that the charter permits the use of force in other circumstances. State practice, despite declaratory policies to the contrary, seems to concur with this view. Over the years, governments and legal scholars have argued that force can be lawfully used to protect and rescue nationals abroad; free people from colonial domination; fight terrorism; or protect people from gross violations of human rights.

The idea that force can be used to protect a country’s nationals abroad (or even nationals of another country) whose lives are in immediate danger or who are in a hostage situation has not formally been accepted as an exception to Article 2(4). Yet a growing number of states have, if not openly condoned, at least not actively opposed such actions.

Interventions to free people from colonial domination received widespread political support in the UN General Assembly in the 1960s and 1970s, but legal scholars disagreed over the legality of the use of force in such cases. While many scholars considered this issue irrelevant with the end of decolonization, the larger questions of self-determination and the liberation of oppressed people remained on the agenda. Indeed, throughout the cold war, socialist states backed military interventions in support of liberation movements and to preserve so-called Marxist gains within the Soviet bloc. The United States defended military interventions to counter communism and to further democracy during this period. Such ideologically based justifications for the use of force were repudiated by the International Court of Justice in its 1986 decision on the Nicaragua case, and they were abandoned with the end of the cold war. The self-determination debate nonetheless resurfaced in the 1990s with the breakups of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and with the increased focus on ethnic conflicts. Groups in Bosnia, Chechnya, East Timor, Sri Lanka, and Kosovo all claimed a right to self-determination and justified their use of force and requests for outside help on these grounds. Most legal scholars assert that no right of outside military intervention exists in these types of situations, and the UN Security Council has almost always called on outside powers to show restraint and has imposed arms embargoes. State practice is nonetheless often at odds with legal rules and Security Council injunctions.

Claims regarding the legality of coercive action to combat terrorism, other than in hostage situations, are similarly shaky but have gained some ground. The cruise missile strikes by the United States in August 1998 that destroyed a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan and training facilities in Afghanistan believed to be associated with Osama bin Laden—accused of directing terrorist attacks in 1998 on United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—were criticized throughout the world. Yet, UN Security Council resolutions on terrorism in the 1990s testify to greater international concern with terrorism; they acknowledge that terrorism can endanger “the lives and well-being of individuals world-wide as well as the peace and security of all states.” Moreover, in 1992 the Security Council imposed eco-
nomic sanctions for the first time on a state—Libya—because of its alleged support of international terrorists (the sanctions were lifted in April 1999 after Libya agreed to allow the trial in the Netherlands under Scottish law of the two Libyans accused of bombing an American airliner, killing 270 people, in 1988). In 1996 it imposed economic sanctions on Sudan, and in 1999 it did the same on Afghanistan.\(^4\)

The United States has also increasingly resorted to the unilateral adoption of economic sanctions (in 1999, seven countries believed to be supporting international terrorism—Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria—were the subject of unilateral United States sanctions, as were 202 terrorist organizations and 59 individuals).

The most divisive issue—which is also the one that received the most attention in the 1990s—is military intervention to protect people from gross violations of human rights. The 1999 UN General Assembly debate showed that most states clearly reject a unilateral right to intervene for humanitarian purposes. China, Russia, and most developing states claim that such a right would allow meddling in their internal affairs. They fear abuse from the United States, in particular, and they strongly condemned NATO's unauthorized intervention in Kosovo.

Armed intervention for humanitarian purposes developed a bad reputation in the nineteenth century, when military interventions by European powers were frequently justified on humanitarian grounds. Since the adoption of the UN charter, states have generally avoided referring to humanitarian purposes when justifying their military interventions, relying instead on broad interpretations of self-defense and claims of providing "assistance" to "legitimate" governments.

The end of the cold war resuscitated the question of military intervention for humanitarian purposes, a concept that has steadily received more supporters. Indeed, compared to the early 1990s, the idea that the UN Security Council can order interventions for humanitarian purposes was commonly accepted by 1999. The Security Council did so, for example, in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda. Similarly, it endorsed peace-implementation missions in Kosovo (after the NATO intervention), Indonesia's East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Congo with a Chapter VII—enforcement—mandate. Unauthorized interventions, however, pose problems for most states. Genocide and gross violations of human rights are universally considered morally unacceptable acts. Many analysts and governments agree that, in such cases, economic sanctions and the threat of criminal prosecution are weak deterrents and even weaker instruments of compellence. Yet few have accepted the idea that, in those cases, military intervention must become a duty. The absence of a legal framework for carrying out interventions contributes to the unease states experience when considering such actions. Still, the current system, whereby the UN Security Council determines whether a situation merits military intervention by certifying such a situation as a "threat to international peace and security," is an insufficient warranty that the council will intervene when the next atrocity occurs.

\textbf{IS A LEGAL FRAMEWORK POSSIBLE?}

Developing a legal framework, which would regulate unilateral interventions for humanitarian purposes, would not ensure action. Such a framework, nonetheless, is a necessary condition to help deter and stop future humanitarian disasters. Those who fear that the formulation of a new legal framework for humanitarian intervention would lead to abuse—particularly Western abuse—should be reassured by Western behavior regarding Chechnya, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Congo. In Chechnya, Russia was permitted to act with impunity. In East Timor, Australia intervened only after having received the consent of the Indonesian government. In Sierra Leone, the Western reaction to the taking hostage of 500 UN peacekeepers in May 2000 consisted of evacuating their nationals from the country. And in Congo, three months after the UN Security Council had authorized the deployment of more than 5,000 troops in February 2000, only a fraction of these troops had actually been committed. None were from the United States.

Several analysts and scholars have put forward proposals that would regulate state practice and make humanitarian intervention legal under specific circumstances. Two different approaches have been developed. The first builds on the framework established in the UN charter. Proponents of this school advocate new interpretations of certain charter articles. The second builds on law outside the UN charter and draws on the inherent rights of states.

\(^4\) Sanctions on Sudan were imposed because of Sudan's refusal to extradite three individuals accused of an assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The sanctions, which went into effect May 10, 1996, consisted of restrictions on the travel of Sudanese diplomatic personnel. Sanctions on Afghanistan were imposed because of the ruling Taliban's refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden and his associates for trial. The sanctions went into effect November 15, 1999, freezing financial assets and requiring UN members to boycott Taliban-owned aircraft.
Advocates of this school argue that states have a unilateral right to humanitarian intervention.

Among the analysts who advocate a new look at the charter, those who suggest an extended reading of Chapter VIII, which deals with regional arrangements, are the most convincing. They propose to broaden the mandate of regional organizations and give them the right, under certain conditions, to authorize the use of force. Like the 1950 “Uniting for Peace” resolution, which gives the UN General Assembly the right to recommend military action if the council is paralyzed, most of these proposals maintain the central role of the UN Security Council and allow for the activation of other loci of authority only if the council is incapable of acting.

Winrich Kühne, a German analyst at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Ebenhausen, Germany, has proposed investing regional organizations with the authority to use force under three conditions: first, when the UN Security Council is unwilling to act or is incapable of acting; second, when the Security Council has not explicitly denied the existence of a humanitarian crisis; and third, when the regional institution in question can act within the confines of a predetermined institutional structure that could authorize such action. Kühne proposes that the Security Council adopt a declaration that would invite regional organizations to develop such mechanisms and that would interpret Article 53 of the charter as giving regional organizations a right of humanitarian intervention when the council is unable or unwilling to act. Bypassing the question of whether NATO is a regional organization under the terms of Chapter VIII, under Kühne’s proposal NATO’s action in Kosovo would have been lawful.

Kühne’s and similar proposals have three problems, however. First, regional organizations are not always the best intervenors in internal conflicts. Members of regional organizations are neighbors, who are the international actors most likely to have ulterior political motives for intervention. Indeed, neighbors often meddle in unhelpful ways in such conflicts (Liberia’s support for the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone is but a more recent example). Second, these proposals merely shift the problem from the global to the regional level. Indeed, the decisions of these regional authorities would be based on political considerations and not on agreed-on principles—that is, law. That such decisions would be made collectively would not make them more lawful: “more” means greater might, but not necessarily greater right. Finally, the Kühne proposal would give the great powers a key role in deciding on interventions. Great powers could block smaller powers from intervening by adopting declarations in the Security Council that would nullify the existence of a humanitarian crisis. But an attempt to block intervention by, for example, NATO would probably not succeed in the council. Indeed, France, Britain, or the United States most likely would veto it. In practice, this would mean that only interventions by regional and subregional organizations in Africa or Asia would be subjected to international scrutiny, since most of the regional and subregional organizations in those continents do not count permanent members of the UN Security Council as their regular members. Although Kühne’s proposal was designed to redress insufficient enthusiasm for intervention, its possible abuse might make it unattractive to many developing countries.

Other analysts have argued that states have an inherent right to use force (the United States and Britain defended this right during the Kosovo crisis). This right, they say, is restricted by the UN charter, but not prohibited by it. Many experts have outlined conditions under which military intervention would be lawful, drawing on just-war theories of the nineteenth century that established criteria by which war could be considered just and legitimate. These criteria include: right authority (which actor has the authority to decide on war?); just cause (is the cause legitimate?); right intention (what are the motives behind the launching of the war?); last resort (have other actions been considered?); open declaration (did war start with a declaration?); proportionality (is the act of war proportionate to the harm inflicted?); and reasonable hope (is there a reasonable chance for a successful outcome?).

Serge Sur, a professor of international law at the University of Paris, suggests that humanitarian intervention should be considered lawful under the following conditions. First, states would publicly declare in which cases they would reserve the right to intervene. For example, they could stipulate in a unilateral or collective declaration that they would intervene in cases covered by the statutes of the
international criminal tribunals set up for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, or those of the International Criminal Court. This right of intervention would be discretionary. States would not be obliged to intervene; neither could third parties hold them responsible for not intervening. Second, states would outline in advance how they would intervene, specifying the military means they would consider employing. In view of the controversy over the use of air power in Kosovo and a military doctrine that allows for no deaths on the side of the interventor, states would outline when they would deploy ground troops. Moreover, states should ensure that the military intervention would not itself become a violation of humanitarian law (several NGOs have argued that certain aspects of NATO’s bombing campaign were in violation of humanitarian law, in particular the choice of certain targets and the use of cluster bombs). States also would outline entry and exit strategies. Third, states would articulate how they would coordinate and harmonize their military interventions with efforts for national and international criminal prosecution of those responsible for the humanitarian crisis in question. Such prosecution is foreseen in the Geneva Conventions and is an integral part of international humanitarian law.

Every approach that would allow for humanitarian intervention contains possibilities for abuse, and none provides a guarantee to future victims of genocide or gross violations of human rights. Yet forcing states to define the parameters under which they would consider military intervention for humanitarian purposes might introduce a measure of predictability into the process and could have a deterrent effect on future violators of basic human rights. It would also constitute a start at undercutting arguments about double standards, as well as serving as a hedge against accusations that interventions are solely self-serving.

By emphasizing that a just doctrine of humanitarian intervention is not about legal authority alone, but also about ensuring that interventions have strong political support and sufficient military resources, Sur provides a framework for addressing two additional problems that have plagued coercive actions in the 1990s: political commitment problems and resource problems.

**Managing the Politics of Humanitarian Interventions**

The 1990s saw the UN Security Council increasingly intervene to stop internal conflicts, imposing economic sanctions or authorizing the use of force to stop gross violations of human rights and civil strife that it considered “threats to international peace and security.” Since 1989, the Security Council has imposed economic sanctions 15 times—compared to only twice between 1945 and 1988. In 10 of these 15 cases, sanctions were imposed to contain or stop internal conflicts. The use of force other than for self-defense was authorized in 11 cases since 1989, as opposed to 3 times between 1945 and 1988. Ten of these cases concerned internal conflicts. Despite this increase in coercive action, the results have been limited, and in some cases coercive actions have been outright failures (for example, in Bosnia and Somalia).

While some of these failures can be ascribed to faulty operational procedures and inappropriate coercive strategies, most arose because of insufficient political commitment by the intervening powers. Their commitment was restrained by both domestic and international political factors.

Public opinion in Western-style democracies often is moved by media images of humanitarian atrocities, leading citizens to pressure their governments to intervene. At the same time, politicians are hesitant to commit troops to such missions because of the potential for casualties. Indeed, interventions in internal conflict situations are almost always tricky propositions, even if “formally” invited by the warring parties and after the signing of a peace agreement. The military, particularly the United States military, will only support a military intervention if widespread domestic support for such action exists.

Politicians and military commanders believe that domestic support is dependent on keeping combat
casualties to a minimum. The conventional wisdom is that the riskier an operation, the weaker the domestic support for it. This explains why American policymakers were wary of intervening in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti. It also explains why policymakers generally propose gradual and incremental policies when dealing with humanitarian atrocities. Because they are subject to conflicting domestic political pressures, they often push for half-measures and think in terms of best-case scenarios: wishful thinking is the order of the day when it comes to humanitarian interventions.

However, the cautious attitude of politicians, particularly American politicians, seems questionable. A series of public opinion polls conducted at the University of Maryland as well as a series of studies by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies in North Carolina show that the American public will support military interventions that are morally and politically compelling. For example, in a 1999 poll, people were asked to identify the highest number of American military deaths that would be acceptable to stabilize a democratic government in Congo; a figure of almost 7,000 casualties was given. Similarly, the public was willing to tolerate almost 30,000 deaths to prevent Iraq from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.7

Moreover, a 1999 research project by the Program on International Policy Studies of the University of Maryland shows a huge disconnect between policy elites and the public. For example, policy elites consistently think that the American public wants to disengage from the world and has a negative view of the UN, including UN peacekeeping efforts. Poll data, however, show that Americans have a very positive image of the UN and would like to see the organization strengthened, including its military component. Strong majorities (71 percent to 77 percent) believe that the United States and the UN should intervene militarily when gross violations of human rights occur, and they favor the United States contributing troops to such operations.

Constraints on humanitarian interventions are not only of a domestic political nature; international political obstacles are also important. Intervention decisions should be made by the UN Security Council. Whether the council takes action with respect to a specific problem depends on the extent to which the problem threatens regional peace and security, and the extent to which the interests of the council members are engaged, particularly the five permanent members.

Unfortunately, the international political consensus that seemed to emerge at the beginning of the 1990s is crumbling. The new globalized world order of the late 1990s appeared to many states to be an unequal order, favoring one country—the United States—far more than others. As Algerian President Abd alaziz Bouteflika and many other delegates pointed out at the 1999 UN General Assembly debate, the uneven manner in which states developed economically and the ever-widening gap between rich countries and debt-ridden third world countries have not made the establishment of a universally accepted new world order any easier.

Moreover, many states resented Washington's imperial attitude and its willingness to push multilateral organizations aside when they could not agree on a course of action that the United States favored. As a result, organizing collective responses to peace and security threats was becoming increasingly difficult by the end of the 1990s.

International interventions need strong leaders who can coordinate and give focus to the intervention. The UN Secretariat, because of its chronic lack of resources, is often unable to provide this type of leadership. The difficulties of the mission in Sierra Leone and the two other missions undertaken in the wake of NATO's Kosovo intervention—in East Timor and Congo—exemplify the type of problems the UN runs into when it does not have the support of any of the major powers. Unfortunately, the major powers—the United States especially—are often reluctant to engage in humanitarian interventions.

The development of economic sanctions and military strategies should not be seen as independent undertakings.

7The poll showed some remarkable discrepancies among the military elite, the civilian elite, and the mass public. Faced with the same question on Congo, the military elite gave 284 and the civilian elite 484 as the number of acceptable deaths. For Iraq, the figures were: military elite, 6,016; civilian elite, 19,045. Finally, respondents were asked how many American deaths would be acceptable to defend Taiwan against invasion by China. The military responded 17,425; the civilian elite 17,554; and the mass public 20,172. See Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, “How Many Deaths Are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer,” Washington Post, November 7, 1999, p. B3.
WHO SHOULD INTERVENE?

According to the UN charter, military interventions are to be carried out by armed forces put at the disposal of the Security Council and commanded by the UN Military Staff Committee. Because of the cold war, such an international army was never established. And although the cold war is now over, it seems unlikely that the UN will be endowed with its own army in the near future.

Proposals in the early 1990s calling for the establishment of a UN volunteer military force or the creation of UN peace enforcement units were extremely controversial. In 1993 the UN introduced a standby program that called on member states to earmark some of their forces for UN operations. The limits of this program soon became apparent. Indeed, during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the UN secretary general was unable to deploy 5,000 soldiers—despite the pledge of 19 governments to keep 31,000 troops available on a standby basis. By 1995, the idea of standby forces had deteriorated to a standby system under which states made conditional pledges to contribute troops to future UN peacekeeping operations. As of May 2000, 88 states had pledged a total of some 147,900 troops. Yet, few of these states had volunteered troops for the missions in Sierra Leone and Congo.

In sum, as former high-ranking UN official Brian Urquhart put it in a September 17, 1999 Boston Globe column, the idea of a UN force is “further than ever from becoming a reality.” Troops are put at the disposal of the UN on an ad hoc basis. Most peacekeeping operations—that is, operations where local parties have agreed to the deployment of international forces—are under UN command. Military interventions, including UN enforcement operations, are generally under national command or that of a regional organization because of the operational risk associated with such interventions; a lead state often drives and controls the operation. In Europe, it is NATO, and within NATO it is the United States; in western Africa, it is the Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and within ECOMOG it is Nigeria; in East Timor, it is Australia.

Whether a country will intervene or lead a “coalition of the willing” is a function of the international environment (including the legal environment) and national interests (including national military capabilities and domestic political considerations). For large-scale operations, the United States has to take the lead, if only because it alone possesses the capabilities to carry out such operations. Moreover, the involvement—even the limited involvement—of the United States will signal to troublemakers that the effort is serious.

Unfortunately, the United States has a mixed track record in this area. In many cases, the United States failed to take meaningful action: Rwanda, Congo, and East Timor are notable examples. The United States took the lead in Bosnia in 1995 after agonizing for three years about whether and how to get involved in the conflict. In Somalia it took the lead for four months, but then distanced itself from the operation and eventually pulled out altogether. In Haiti, the United States decided and acted only in 1994, three years after Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president, was deposed in a military coup. Similarly, in 1998 and 1999 the United States hesitated about intervening in Kosovo.

Other countries also have taken leadership roles, but these interventions have succeeded only if they have been supported by a regional or global power. Italy, because of its interests in the region and because it was directly affected by the crisis in Albania in 1997, took the lead for Operation Albania. It managed to secure UN Security Council authorization and together with eight other European countries reestablished security in Albania. In 1999, Australia took the lead in East Timor. Given the great powers’ lukewarm support of intervention, the success of the Australian mission depended in its early stages on Indonesian cooperation; indeed, Australia intervened only after it had secured approval from the Indonesian government.

The multinational force authorized by the UN Security Council in November 1996 to prevent the starvation of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees in Zaire and to create humanitarian corridors to lead them back into Rwanda failed; Washington and Paris were unwilling to lead or provide support for this operation. Canada, which had been given primary responsibility for the mission, was unable to carry out the operation on its own. Similarly, the UN force in Sierra Leone failed miserably to uphold its authority when attacked in May 2000. Only after Britain introduced some 800 well-trained troops did tension begin to subside.

Given the reluctance of many Western powers to engage peacekeepers in distant lands and Western fears of combat casualties, some experts have advocated hiring private military corporations for these missions. In the 1990s, private military forces were increasingly used to give logistical support, dispense military advice, provide security services (protection of property and personnel), and participate in
A clear distinction must be made between hiring the services of security firms for limited and well-defined tasks and hiring them in a peacekeeping capacity, where they would be responsible for the maintenance of public law and order. The United Nations might wish to do the former; it should not be allowed to do the latter. Questions of war and peace and life and death should not be governed by profit motives; doing so would be contrary to everything the UN stands for.

**HOW TO INTERVENE**

Much has been written about how to intervene. States generally have two main coercive instruments available when considering intervention: the use of force and economic sanctions. (International criminal prosecution, a third available instrument, is not covered here.) Six conditions must be fulfilled for the effective use of such coercive instruments.

First, outside powers need to have a clear idea of the political objectives they hope to achieve. They should try to pursue one objective at a time; multiple objectives muddy the waters. The imposition of sanctions or the use of military force should also not be aimed at punishing troublemakers. Rather, these instruments should be used to change behavior or to bring those responsible to justice.

Second, outside powers need to correctly assess the economic, political, and military characteristics of the target, which will often be nonstate actors. Our knowledge of how coercive actions affect targets—particularly nonstate targets—is limited, a deficiency that hinders the development of a coherent and effective strategy. The imposition of economic sanctions on some targets is ineffective and can even be counterproductive. For example, imposing economic sanctions on parties in poor states (Burundi) or failed states (Somalia) is at best futile. Similarly, the effectiveness of the use of force depends on the characteristics of the target. Aiming the use of force at the “conflict” instead of at the belligerent parties, as was done in the early 1990s in Bosnia and Somalia, led to dramatic policy failures.

Third, one country or international organization has to take the lead in interventions. Leadership gives direction to interventions and is key to building strong coalitions. Moreover, in the absence of a leader, multilateral sanctions regimes will quickly be crippled because of interpretation problems;
multiple as well as conflicting purposes may be proposed for military interventions, which frequently leads to failure. In theory, international leadership should come from the UN Security Council; in practice, it comes from individual states. A leader must chart an effective course of action and articulate its position to others. Whether it can do so is a function of its political strength and its military capabilities. Being a leader does not mean bullying others. True leaders know how to translate national interests into regional and international interests and how to persuade other states to get on board.

Fourth, leaders need to build strong international coalitions for proposed coercive undertakings. Obtaining international support for these interventions is a function of national interests and the threat posed to regional and international security and human life. The more countries see an internal conflict as a threat to their own security and to higher values, the easier it will be to construct a coalition to support international intervention. The participation of many states is necessary for the effectiveness of multilateral sanctions regimes. It may also be attractive when it comes to the use of military force; indeed, it may help ensure that sufficient numbers of troops are available for coercive actions. Moreover, multiple involvement may help bring down costs. The United Nations has an important role to play in building and organizing international support for coercive actions, and it can provide legitimacy for them.

Fifth, outside powers need to ensure that enough resources are available for their interventions. Resources may be needed to implement and enforce sanctions regimes, and they may also be needed to compensate some states for losses associated with the implementation of sanctions. Similarly, military interventions must be endowed with sufficient resources. This is not to say that to be successful, such operations must have overwhelming military capabilities, but they need enough firepower and the right mix of forces—air power and ground troops—to get the job done.

Sixth, outside powers need to adopt appropriate strategies. Intervention strategies are the subject of significant debate within the scholarly and policy-making communities. Two main schools of thought exist on the imposition of sanctions and the use of force. The first believes that coercive instruments are most effective when imposed immediately and comprehensively. The second believes that coercive instruments can—and often should—be imposed gradually. Both schools of thought are right some of the time: some cases warrant swift and comprehensive coercive actions; others call for gradual approaches.

The use of economic sanctions and military force should be proportionate to the desired goal. Limited goals do not warrant the imposition of extreme sanctions or the massive use of force. If goals are more ambitious, stronger coercive actions are generally required. If the threat to international peace and security or human life is significant and immediate, strong sanctions and military operations might be needed. Less urgent situations call for more incremental approaches.

The political, economic, and military characteristics of the target should also guide selection of a strategy. For example, authoritarian regimes are less vulnerable to economic sanctions than are democratic regimes; when dealing with an authoritarian regime, it may be advisable to forgo economic sanctions and threaten the use of force immediately. Similarly, small guerrilla groups are generally immune to economic sanctions. Many sanctions regimes stay in place for a long time and often start producing adverse social and humanitarian effects. Such effects, though, rarely lead to the overthrow of politicians or a change in the behavior of the political elites. On the contrary, empirical evidence in the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and Iraq tends to confirm that prolonged sanctions strengthen—rather than weaken—the political regimes in place. The existence and level of development of a political opposition in the target country are important in this respect. If the opposition is weak, the imposition of comprehensive sanctions may ruin their chances to develop into a real opposition. This happened in the former Yugoslavia, for example.9 The economic and military characteristics of the target should also guide coercive strategies. Weak economies, for example, should be targeted with gradual and partial sanctions. Robust economies, as well as centrally planned economies, should be hit swiftly and comprehensively; because of their ability to shift resources, they are better able to withstand sanctions.

Similarly, the limited use of force may be sufficient in traditional wars. Indeed, traditional military orga-

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9 Recent claims that sanctions brought Milosevic down are wrong. First, the comprehensive sanction regime imposed on Yugoslavia in 1992 was lifted in 1995 with the Dayton peace agreement. In 1998, in response to mounting violence in Kosovo, the UN Security Council imposed an embargo—but no other international economic sanctions were imposed by the council. Second, the unilateral United States and European Union sanctions imposed in 1998 were of a limited nature.
nizations may be more vulnerable to the coercive uses of force than are guerrilla or insurgent fighters. Much has been written about the force of air power, particularly after Kosovo. Air power remains an extremely problematic tool in internal conflict situations and in situations where gross violations of human rights are taking place. It is often forgotten that the NATO airstrikes in Bosnia—especially those before the 1995 summer offensive—showed the limited utility of air power in these types of situations; it demonstrated that airstrikes cannot substitute for ground forces. The use of air power in the Balkans in 1999 also raises important questions about NATO’s targeting policy and its use of cluster bombs.

Coercive strategies should also be flexible. The economic, military, and political characteristics of a target can change over time. The coercer’s objectives and means may also change. A strategy that was sound early in a conflict may not be effective later.

Finally, all good strategies should contain exit strategies. But exit strategies should not be confused with exit schedules. Exits must be based on local political and strategic conditions—not arbitrary and rigid timetables. They should also encompass a postintervention strategy designed to tackle long-term economic and political problems. Outside powers considering intervention should realize that interventions entail more than the imposition of economic sanctions or the use of military force. They should be prepared to make long-term—even open-ended—commitments.

The development of economic sanctions and military strategies should not be seen as independent undertakings. Economic sanctions strategies should include determinations about when to escalate and threaten the use of military force. The imposition of economic sanctions and the use of military force should therefore be seen as two points on a coercive continuum and two complementary policy options.

To sum up, the effective use of economic sanctions and military force depends on having a clear purpose; correctly assessing the target, leadership, coalition support; providing sufficient resources to ensure effective implementation; and having an appropriate strategy, including an exit and postintervention strategy. These conditions may seem commonsensical, but many post–cold war interventions have failed to meet these basic standards. And they consequently failed to have the desired effects.