

The persistence of intervention: changing circumstances, forms and perspectives.

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Some three decades ago Hedley Bull remarked that 'intervention is a very central and a very old subject in the study of international relations, and there is a sense in which there is nothing new that can be said about it'.¹ In the next breath, however, he emphasised the need to constantly reassess the subject in relation to changing circumstances, new forms, and fresh perspectives. This contribution shows how the rise of non-western states presents changes in all three of these areas and make a strong case for the persistence of intervention as an instrument of foreign policy. In and of itself the persistence of intervention might not be surprising; it is however in the changing forms, rationales and justifications that one finds greater novelty and significance. For often overlooked is that the study of intervention is not only about the practice itself but as much about the nature and rules of the system within which it takes place. Specifically, the particular sets of authority relations that establish the boundaries which 'intervention' transgresses.² Whilst these are typically thought of in terms of 'sovereignty', the question emerges of how the rise of states whose experience of the modern world order has often been problematic will shape the practice of intervention and how we conceptualise it.

Notable in this latter respect is how the broad conceptualisation of intervention employed by a number of contributors disrupts well-known legal definitions of the term, developed after the term entered diplomatic usage between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Therewith, intervention tended to refer to a discrete instance of dictatorial (or coercive) interference in the domestic political affairs of a third party, particularly through the use of military force.³ The notions of 'coercion' and 'consent' at the heart of conventional usage are problematized through drawing out the importance of differences in structural power for the latitude of choice enjoyed by actors, most notably in matters of development and aid (Turner, Forough). Further, the notion of intervention as a 'discrete event' is challenged by, for example, Charbonneau's analysis of counter-

insurgency in which intervention is but one of several instruments comprising a standing modality of governance and control over the colonial and post-colonial state.⁴ Until a better term emerges, 'intervention' is being increasingly stretched in order to accommodate the shift from *political* to *nominal* sovereignty where key decisions affecting what happens within certain states are undertaken by a range of international and transnational actors.

Especially in a period in which the disastrous effects of military intervention have been widely exposed, reinforcing scepticism in some quarters regarding the political utility of the use of force,⁵ the question of where intervention sits in relations to the wider panoply of policy instruments and modes of influence becomes increasingly important. At one end of a spectrum David Williams has made the point that 'most cases of military intervention certainly in the post-Cold War era have been in those countries where development agencies have not had a substantial presence'.⁶ At the other, the most damaging western interventions have been those where a military operation has been undertaken without a substantial reconstruction or development programme such as in Iraq or Libya; but even where such programmes have been evident as in Afghanistan they are no guarantors of intervention success.

These questions of the political utility of force and the appropriate and effective relationship between military and non-military instruments of policy exercises non-western as much as western states. Ziadah's account of the UAE and Saudi Arabian model suggests a focused, financial engagement closely connected to donor interest might prove successful, for the intervener at least, yet earlier western experience suggests that this may in turn provoke a nationalist response. Heathershaw and Owen's analysis of authoritarian conflict management in Eurasia highlights the subversive mimicry of liberal-state building practices coupled with extensive efforts to manipulate the *political process* through efforts to control and manage elections and civil society for the purposes of reproducing and legitimating regional sub-systems of patronal power and the predominance of the regional Powers. Forough highlights the model of 'security through

development' espoused by the Chinese government, yet a consequence of the pro-active cultivation of asymmetric economic and financial interdependence through the New Silk Road is that recipients of Chinese investment may increasingly align with Beijing's perspective on a range of matters, some of which as shown below may not be benign. These techniques of enmeshing intervention with a range of political, economic, financial, and discursive instruments of leverage comprises what can be quite subtle complexes of actual or potential coercive interference. The extent to which they are responses to or 'lessons learned' from western techniques of intervention would be interesting to explore further, but they merit recognition as serving the specific challenges and opportunities faced by non-western states and mark fresh responses to the challenge of intervening *effectively*.

A historical sociological perspective raises the further question of whether the divergent experiences of modernity between western and non-western states might generate distinctive epistemes of intervention beyond those associated with realism or liberalism. By 'modernity'⁷ I refer to the following bundle of factors which are often contrasted with 'traditional' forms of social relations and which have profoundly shaped the development of the international system. Namely, the notion that political authority is ideally dispersed through a system of territorially defined sovereign states; the development of a world economy and the rise of industrial capitalism; the authority of instrumental human rationality in place of God; and the presumption by Europeans that one can apply universal political values and standards to the species at large and which found expression in the grand narratives of 'progress', 'civilisation', 'liberalism' and 'communism'; these in turn underpinning ideologies of imperialism in relations with the non-western world.

Hence the industrial revolution and search for expanded markets stimulated the west to intervene in order to 'open up' the world economy;⁸ the struggle for national self-determination was a major issue generating intervention and counter-intervention;⁹ finance capitalism and the development of infrastructural projects and the extraction industries led to punitive and regulatory interventions when faced with local political instability and default;¹⁰ and the ideological turn in nationalist

struggles as they became embroiled within the East-West politics of the Cold War prompted decades of external intervention.¹¹ In the post-Cold War period the conflict between radical Islamism and western states, in particular the United States, United Kingdom and France has been the most prominent fault line in the international system.

These macro-trends in intervention over time do not of course capture all instances of intervention but they do highlight historical changes in the key systemic rationales for intervention. Whether, and if so how, non-western actors will employ intervention in relation to the ongoing development of modernity will depend upon a number of factors. Here we might include the historical experience of modernity by non-western states in which imperialism, under-development, cultural dislocation, externally imposed borders as well as in some cases a problematic relationship with the sovereign state itself plays out in various ways. Another is the demand pull of intervention: that Great Powers are required to provide and be seen to provide order in the face of instability or crisis in a region. In this regard, intervention thrives where the terms of the modern world order are contested, cracked, or crumbling. If non-western states are to avoid the pitfalls of intervention they will need to further develop innovative ways to address these issues, as discussed above. The extent to which the international system itself has evolved to obviate or supersede the need for intervention is also important. Care, however, is needed on this point for whilst normative factors as well as more sophisticated technical and administrative factors at the global level rendered military intervention obsolete when faced with, for example, sovereign default, globalisation continues to create winners and losers which can inflame political instability and trigger interventions or external support for local coups.

The negative resonance of modernity for many non-western actors is evident in the rhetorical appeal to earlier periods of real or imagined glory, even if these sit alongside a willingness to make full use of modern technologies. The Islamist appeal to the 'caliphate'; China's 'new silk road' project; and Turkey's 'neo-ottoman' conception of regional interests create a powerful imagery of

the structural heterogeneity and historical plurality of modernity, sometimes referred to as the 'contemporaneity of the untemporaneous'.¹² Intervention has elsewhere been characterised as marking the contestation of power and authority between bounded sovereign territorial domains and transnational social forces (in the realms of economic and financial interests, ethnic or religious ties, and ideological projects beyond the state).¹³ The political imagery of the non-western actors identified above suggests alternative conceptions of authority to that which characterises the sovereign state order, and with different sets of authority claims come different notions of a particular inside/outside to be transgressed. The lack of congruence between sovereign borders and ethnic or religious groups in the post-colonial world in particular stands to become an increasingly significant rationale for intervention.¹⁴ This, of course, is not entirely new, for western Powers often intervened on behalf of Christian minorities elsewhere. But the cases of both China and Turkey highlight the significance of this issue, albeit in diametrically opposed ways. As Hoffmann shows, the geo-spatiality of Turkey's 'neo-Ottoman' interventionism is shaped by ethnic pan-Turanic and religious considerations. It is through these that its geo-economic and geo-strategic considerations are conceived rather than – or alongside – material notions of *raison d'état*. Indeed, this notion of a strong Turkish state acting on behalf of fellow muslims is also evident in Cetinoglu's analysis of its refugee policy in which the 'thick' bonds of religion contrast with the thin universal *soi disant* cosmopolitanism of European humanitarianism.

China's emergence as a powerful geo-economic actor benefits from a convergence of values amongst national elites upon the importance of economic growth and cooperation such that it has no pressure to forcibly open up new market or investment space as in earlier periods. Indeed, from a narrow conceptualisation of intervention what is significant here is that it is the intervention dog that has not barked. Arrighi postulated the possibility of a Chinese led market order superseding the post-1945 western order and Forough's analysis of China's appeal to 'security through development' supports this. It possibly also indicates a deeper epistemic shift from the 'chequer-board' model of geopolitics wherein 'if your neighbour is your "natural enemy" the power on the

side of your neighbour is your natural ally'¹⁵ towards a geo-economic logic of contractual partnership and inter-reliance. The extent to which this can, in and of itself, be regarded as 'interventionary' remains for now an open question, for the 'coercive' or 'transgressive' aspects conventionally associated with intervention do not appear to be obviously evident. But as noted above it does establish the conditions for greater influence which have already become securitised through, for example, enlisting foreign security services in such new silk road partners as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to extend the surveillance of Xinjiang's Uighur diaspora beyond its borders (Feng, 2018).¹⁶

To conclude, intervention is but one modality of coercive interference in a third state, and one that's failings and adverse consequences and repercussions have in recent years been widely exposed.

Macro-trends in the rationales for intervention are evident in its role at the vanguard of the coercive development of modernity in which western states have routinely intervened throughout the non-western world. This legacy has contributed towards the development of a distinctive set of political structures (in terms of the colonial and post-colonial state), issues and challenges for non-western states, alongside a cultural awareness of alternative models of political order and authority to those advanced by western or liberal actors. It is against this background that one can better recognise the distinctive and innovative ways in which non-western actors have already developed particular complexes of coercive interference, of which intervention comprises but one element. Indeed, to understand the mechanics of intervention is to understand the wider complex of which it is part. Beyond this the extent to which the intervention – and non-intervention – practice of non-western states will reflect their problematic experience of modernity will remain to be seen. Yet given the close relationship between the development of the modern world and macro-trends in intervention, it would be odd indeed to think that we were at the end of history.

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¹ Bull, 'Preface', iv.

² Reus-Smit, 'The Concept of Intervention'.

³ See for example Oppenheim, *International Law*, 430; Tilemma, 'Foreign Overt Military Intervention', 180-1.

⁴ See also Hameiri, *Regulating Statehood*; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*; Turner, 'Securing and Stabilising'.

⁵ Smith, *The Utility of Force*; Angstrom, 'Exploring the Utility of Armed Force'.

⁶ Williams, 'Development, Intervention and International Order', 1216.

⁷ See Jung, 'The Political Sociology of World Society'.

⁸ Gallagher and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade'.

⁹ Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention'; Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*.

¹⁰ Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention*.

¹¹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

¹² Jung, 'The Political Sociology of World Society', 456.

¹³ See Lawson et al., 'Intervention and the Ordering of the Modern World'.

¹⁴ See *International Affairs*, special issue on 'Contentious Borders'.

¹⁵ Wight, *Power Politics*, 158.

¹⁶ Feng, Emily, 'China Extends Uighur Crackdown Beyond its Borders', *Financial Times*, 26 August 2018.