

To what extent are humanitarian interventions really 'humanitarian'? assess by discussing a specific case of human intervention and its media coverage.

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In cases where humanitarian intervention has been applied, the humanitarian motives of the world leaders is often questioned, which leads to this question of 'to what extent are humanitarian interventions really humanitarian?' In this essay I will specifically be assessing the extent to which the Libyan intervention in 2011 was humanitarian; I will also be considering the influence the media had during this period.

Firstly, it is important to define humanitarian interventions in this context. Interventions usually occur during a crisis or conflict, Caplan (1964, as cited in Brailsford, 2007, p.2) initially defined a crisis as 'occurring when individuals are confronted with problems that cannot be solved'. Similarly, Roberts (2000, as cited in Roberts, A.R. 2005) defines a crisis as "a period of psychological disequilibrium, experienced as a result of a hazardous event or situation that constitutes a significant problem that cannot be remedied by using familiar coping strategies". Furthermore, the intervention itself was defined by Roberts (2005) as 'a coercive action by one or more states involving the use of armed force in another state...purpose of preventing suffering...'. Similarly, Wheeler (2000, as cited in Ekaterina Balabanova, 2015) believes a humanitarian intervention is 'fundamentally about helping people who live in a foreign country, or 'saving strangers'. There is a widespread debate surrounding humanitarian intervention as it is presented as an illegal action under article 2(4) of the UN charter as it prohibits the 'use of threat or use of force in international relations' (www.un.org, n.d.). Although, there are exceptions for interventions, it can be argued that it is necessary and appropriate when preventing suffering and according to Chesterman (2011) this 'desire to do something, anything, is understandable'. One exception for humanitarian intervention comes under article 51 of the UN charter, 'inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs', essentially self-defence is permitted by the UN charter. Another exception is when the action has been 'authorised by the security council' (Chesterman, 2001). In relation to Libya, the UN authorised military intervention as a means to 'protect civilians' (Kuperman, 2013, p.1).

Humanitarian intervention came to prominence in the post-cold war era as attitudes surrounding the need to protect human rights was changing. During this period, the United Nations were 'less inclined to permit concern for human rights to end at a state's territorial borders' (Abiew, 1998), so intervention from other countries was encouraged here. Teson (1996) also supports this idea that humanitarian intervention has been popularised since the cold war ended, "the doctrine of humanitarian intervention has experienced a dramatic revival with the end of the Cold war". World leaders also began to use their voice to declare their support for intervening, for example, after Kosovo (1999), the Clinton doctrine was established. The Clinton doctrine can be summarised as President Clinton's beliefs and wants for his time in presidency. Firstly, he encouraged humanitarian interventions as he was eager to 'promote democracy abroad' and he also wanted 'democratic enlargement' (Brinkley, 1997). In contrast, although this doctrine appears to be humanitarian through its aims to help other countries, many scholars have criticised the Clinton doctrine for having no

intentions of being humanitarian and instead coming from a place of self and national interest, 'from the very outset of his presidency it was obvious that, in addition to traditional national security concerns, U.S. economic interests would attain high priority in Clinton's foreign policy' (Brinkley, 1997). Abiew's (1998) research 'Assessing humanitarian intervention in the post-cold war period' offers a lot of insight into the ethics surrounding humanitarian interventions during this time. For example, Roberts (1993, as cited in Abiew, 1998) observed this idea of 'humanitarian war' and concluded that this is the epitome of an 'oxymoron' because 'how can something as complex as war ever be justified as humanitarian?'. This take on humanitarian interventions proves that perhaps to a certain extent, they can never truly be humanitarian as it is impossible to make a war humanitarian by intervening. Abiew (1998) also cites Hoffman (1995) in his work as Hoffman argues that military intervention can only be justified when 'domestic unrest threatens regional or international security and massive abuses of human rights occur, as long as it is permitted by a higher body'. This stance is also reasonable as every individual is deserving of basic human rights, as stated in the human rights act so when war is 'abusing' one's rights then humanitarian intervention can be justified according to this theory.

The 2011 Libyan revolution is an important case to cover when assessing humanitarian interventions genuine intentions as the primary objectives of NATO during this time period seemed to shift significantly- which ultimately created more problems. In 2011, the civilians of Libya confronted their leader 'Qaddafi/Gaddafi' after years of being 'subjected to a litany of bizarre whims and half-baked political and economic experiments, which had plunged the country into a permanent state of chaos' (Pargeter, 2012). The catalyst for this uprising was the 'false arrest that was made of a human rights lawyer' (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Following this initial uprising, Qaddafi responded by 'ordering his troops to kill peaceful protestors' and within days, thousands were killed, resulting in a 'bloodbath' (Kuperman, 2013, p.3). Due to the violent nature of this conflict, the UN had a duty to respond, they authorised a 'no fly zone and all necessary means except occupation troops to protect Libyan's civilians' (Kuperman, 2013, p.3). The security council also voted to 'authorise the use of military action- including against tanks and heavy artillery on the ground- in order to protect civilians' (Pargeter, 2012, p.23). The UN security council received a lot of international support during this period, with Britain and France 'calling on the international community to act by imposing the no-fly zone'. They were further supported by the US government, despite the Obama administration originally making it clear they wanted 'a limited role in the campaign' (Pargeter, 2012, p.23). It is evident from these interventions that the primary objective was concerned with protecting the lives of innocent Libyan civilians as the no-fly zone protected the civilians from aircraft bombings.

Another aspect of the humanitarian intervention displayed in Libya (2011) was the 'responsibility to protect', which NATO claimed as their reason for intervening. This was the first case where this concept was implemented and seen as 'a successful example, if also a controversial one' (Thakur, 2011, p.1). By 1945, 'the right to use force internationally was restricted to self-defence against armed attack or under UN authorisation' (Thakur, 2011, p.1) so humanitarian intervention was deemed illegal outside of this and under the 1948 genocide convention, 'the international community asserted the collective right to stop

states killing large numbers of civilians inside their borders' (Thakur, 2011,p.1). Eventually in 2001, the ICISS published their report that stated that sovereignty's nature 'had changed from state privileges and immunities to the responsibility to protect people from atrocity crimes' (Thakur, 2011,p.4). This introduction of 'R2P' emphasised the importance of protecting innocent individuals in the space of conflict. Finally, at the UN summit in 2005, 150 leaders 'tightened the application of R2P to four atrocity crimes' (Thakur, 2011,p.5) one of these being 'crimes against humanity' which arguably Libya's uprising fell under as there were unlawful killings of innocent protestors and Libyan civilians.

The media play an influential role during times of conflict as they can frame events a certain way and their relationship with humanitarian interventions can often be deemed a complicated one. During these conflicts, news outlets will often publish news with the intent of reaching those in power to influence them to make a change and when this happens it can often be deemed as 'the CNN effect'. Feist (2001, p. 713, as cited in Gilboa, 2005, p.3) wrote that "the CNN effect is a theory that compelling television images, such as images of a humanitarian crisis, cause U.S. policymakers to intervene in a situation when such an intervention might otherwise not be in the U.S. national interest." Similarly, Schorr (1998, as cited in (Gilboa, 2005,p.3) defined the CNN effect as "the way breaking news affects foreign policy decisions". Essentially, the advent of twenty-four seven news and social media forced world leaders to get involved as they had an added pressure from the public; it became impossible to avoid the disturbing images that they were presented with. In the case of Libya, it could be assumed that NATO intervened due to this international pressure and outcry from the public. This was definitely the case during Syria's war, as in 2017, President Donald Trump was vulnerable to the CNN effect. After being bombarded with several disturbing images, Trump made a statement that 'the attack on children had a big impact on him' (Doucet, 2018) and within 36 hours he had ordered an air strike due to these images. Although this did not have great impact overall, it still conveys this idea that social media can impact policy makers decisions and in turn can lead to interventions.

Regarding the relationship between the media and humanitarian intervention, there has been a myriad of research into this area. Al Nahed(2015) conducted a framing analysis of Al Jazeera and the BBC's coverage of the uprising and intervention in Libya. Firstly, framing was adapted by Entman(1993) ; he says that 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. In Al Nahed's (2015) study he found that both channels 'displayed a pro-interventionist agenda that aligned with the foreign policy aims of their respective political contexts' and 'the Humanitarian Intervention Frame was the most common frame found on all channels; it primarily framed the NATO intervention as a humanitarian mission aimed at saving the Libyan population'(p.13). So, the public were presented with this idea that the intervention was humanitarian and necessary in saving the Libyan people. Furthermore, the BBC having these views makes sense as Britain are members of NATO. In contrast, Machin's(2014,p.296) content analysis on the 'visual presentation of the uprising' concluded that the intervention was portrayed as necessary 'due to the evilness of Gaddafi' as opposed to necessary for protecting innocent lives. There

was some examples of imagery that depicted children in hospital beds suffering which indeed would be published to engage with the western leaders and audience but out of Machin's(2014) 120 sample, only ten could be found. Parry(2010, as cited in Machin,2014,p.292) expanded on this type of visual presentation and explained that 'images of children in press photos are used to signify the human toll of war' and personalise these issues. Furthermore, there were numerous issues with misinformation during this conflict, for example, on the first day of the uprising many western media organisations 'incorrectly reported that Qaddafi's forces had fired live ammunition at peaceful protesters, citing video posted on the internet', the next day only the BBC admitted to their mistake stating that 'this was footage originally uploaded more than a year ago'(Kuperman, 2013) but other organisations did not do the same, leading to the spread of false news . Finally, when questioning whether this intervention was truly humanitarian, the media exposes the intervention for being an 'oil grab'(Machin, 2014). Arguably, what can be taken from these news articles is that the intention was to gain financially from this intervention, which is ultimately not humanitarian.

The concept of humanitarian interventions really being humanitarian is a long-debated subject as in some cases they can be falsely represented. In the case study of Libya, it initially seemed as though NATO intervened to uphold this 'responsibility to protect' and save innocent people from Gaddafi. However, many scholars have since questioned this stating they had hidden objectives. Kuperman(2013) expands upon this, he believes NATO's primary objective of helping the Libyan people quickly spiralled into 'overthrowing Qaddafi's regime, even at the expense of increasing harm to Libya's civilians'. As a result of this, NATO began intervening rapidly but only siding with those who wanted regime change, 'NATO started bombing forces in Qaddafi's hometown of Sirte, where they represented no threat to civilians because the residents supported the regime' and NATO were continuously 'aiding' the rebels who wished to overturn their leader. This aspect of the intervention ultimately 'extended the war and magnified the harm to civilians, contrary to the intent of the UN authorization'(Kuperman, 2013,p.10). In summary the intervention can rightfully be deemed as not humanitarian in those instances as they did not have the best interest of the civilians and they were not trying to protect their human rights. Furthermore, the primary purpose becoming 'regime change' creates issues with the success of the intervention, for example various leaders spoke of the importance of Gaddafi stepping down which suggests that the 'perceived success of the intervention will be measured primarily by whether his reign ends' (Pattison, 2011) and not on how many people they can protect. Pattison(2011) also raised the ethical issue of 'selectivity', he expresses that 'the intervention in Libya is morally problematic because the NATO-led coalition has failed to act in response to similar situations such as Yemen and Bahrain'. Furthermore, these 'inconsistent moral standards' imply that self-interests led to their intervention(Pattison, 2011,p.6). In addition to this concept of 'selectivity', Ekaterina Balabanova(2015, p.62) highlights how humanitarian interventions can be difficult to navigate as "doing nothing can lead to accusations of moral indifference, just as 'doing something' prompts charges of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state", so even when cases are selected and others aren't, government officials most likely would have received backlash regardless. As mentioned, the intervention was

initially 'praised for gaining recognition of R2P as a legal concept' (Terry, 2015) as it was the first time it was implemented on a large scale. However, responsibility to protect does not 'justify regime change as it only justifies the minimum action necessary to end a crisis situation' (Terry, 2015), NATO going above and beyond clearly fails this. The long-term consequences of this uprising also appear to not be humanitarian as Libya 'became worse after Gaddafi's death' and the UN concluded that 'the human rights situation in Libya was now worse than at any time under Gaddafi's rule' (Terry, 2015). Ultimately, the intervention, while initially preventing many deaths, ended up causing more destruction therefore proving they did not help and were not humanitarian in their approach. In conclusion, many aspects of the intervention were not humanitarian as they caused more harm than good to the innocent civilians of Libya. While it can be argued that NATO initially had good intentions as their intervention was passed by the UN charter, it rapidly declined into chaos, and this resulted in long term issues for the civilians.

Overall, the humanitarian aspects of an intervention vary from case to case. In Libya, it can be argued that although there were initially good intentions to protect innocent Libyan lives, it eventually spiralled into a regime change and NATO were focused on removing Gaddafi from leadership. Nevertheless, NATO did have a just cause to intervene and perhaps if they hadn't the conflict would've happened anyway just on a worse scale; they took preventive measures to a certain extent. Regarding the media, they are imperative in bringing those in power together and are arguably the catalyst for interventions. In the case of Libya, the media played a significant role in educating the public however there was cases of misinformation which proves they can not fully be relied upon.

Bibliography – 411 words

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