



BOĞAZİÇİMUN ADVANCED

2025
the Legacy

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

STUDY GUIDE

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#BridgingTheGap

Table of Contents

Letters

I. Introduction to the Committee: The United Nations Security Council

A. Overview

B. Importance in Contemporary Geopolitics

C. Objectives and Expectations for Delegates

II. Agenda Item: Emergency Session on the Right to Intervene / Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

A. Conceptual Context

1. The Westphalian Principle and the Evolution of Sovereignty
2. Types of Intervention
3. The Right to Intervene vs. the Responsibility to Protect
4. The Responsibility to Protect: Background and Structure

B. Institutional Context: The UN Charter Framework

1. Article 2(4): Prohibition of the Use of Force
2. Chapter VII: Collective Security Measures
3. Article 51: The Right of Self-Defense

C. Case Studies

1. Kosovo
 - a. Historical Background
 - b. Unilateral response of the international community
2. Ukraine
 - a. History of the Tension
 - b. Different Interpretations of the Same Issue
3. Rwanda
 - a. Pre-Genocide Context
 - b. The Genocide and International Inaction
 - c. Aftermath
4. Iraq
 - a. Pre-Intervention Context
 - b. The Intervention and Justifications
 - c. Aftermath
5. Syria
6. Libya



7. Gaza

D. Global Power Politics In Intervention Decisions

1. Power Politics and P5 Positioning
2. Role of Regional Organizations
 - a. African Union
 - b. NATO
 - c. Arab League
 - d. ECOWAS
3. Non-State Actors and Civil Society

E. Ethical Context

1. Moral Obligations vs Legal Mandate
2. Neocolonialism and the Politics of Intervention
3. Intervention and Post-Conflict Responsibility
4. Power, Bias, and Legitimacy: How and Who Gets to Define “Justice”?

F. How to Analyze and React?

1. Regional and Global Stakes Involved
2. Humanitarian Conditions
3. Key International Actors

III. Questions to be Considered

IV. References and Suggested Readings



Letter From the Secretary-General

Meritorious participants of BoğaziçiMUN Advanced 2025,

It is with warm hugs, sincerity and utmost privilege to welcome you all to this edition of BoğaziçiMUNAdvanced. I'm Selin Ayaz, a senior Double Major of Political Science & International Relations and Sociology at Boğaziçi University. Having four years of university Model UN experience (alongside 5 years prior) under my belt, I will be serving as your Secretary-General.

For this version of BoğaziçiMUN, both of our teams have worked from day to night to give you the best experience ever. I would first like to thank my amazing Deputy-Secretaries-General, Maya Gençdiş and Emir Elhatip, for their continuous effort and clever wit. Another person that I'm thankful for is our esteemed Director-General, Irem Ayber. She and our Deputy-Director-General Azra Çökük are some of the most hardworking people I've known, they are tireless in their work and you will get to experience the fruits of their labour when we meet in September.

We've prepared 9 different committees covering a wide range of topics. UNSC is a one them, a one of a kind committee, with the important agenda item of "Emergency Session on the Right to Intervene / Responsibility to Protect (R2P)". As by the theme of our conference, this committee honors the legacy of Kaan Aktaş, our previous club coordinator as well as the former Secretary-General of BoğaziçiMUN 2025. I would like to thank the hardworking Under-Secretaries-General Kaan Aktaş himself and Eda Güçhan as well as their Academic Assistant Rüzgar Avcı for their efforts in making this committee come to life.

We've always used the phrase "Bridging the Gap" as our motto. This year, we are combining this with the legacy. Each edition of BoğaziçiMUN has been about providing our participants with the best experience they've ever had so far. Each time, we try to outdo ourselves and become the best version so far. This edition has been no different as all of us have vigorously and tirelessly worked so far. Now the ball is in your court. I invite you all to take a step forward and feel the legacy.

Warmest regards,

Selin Ayaz

Secretary-General of BoğaziçiMUN Advanced 2025



Letter from the Under-Secretaries General

Most Distinguished Participants,

It is our utmost pleasure to welcome you all to the BoğaziçiMUN'25 Advanced. We are Kaan Akkaş and Eda Güçhan, students of Boğaziçi University and Bilgi University, will serve as the Under-Secretaries General responsible for the United Nations Security Council.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the principal organs of the United Nations (UN), which is responsible for international peace and security. UNSC has some different powers than other UN bodies. Within the UN system, the UNSC is a strong and influential body whose decisions can have a big impact on the entire world, like in the Iraq War of 2003 which was marked by several UNSC resolutions, most notably Resolution 1441 adopted on November 8, 2002 and ended with the US-led invasion of Iraq. The marks of UNSC's actions can also be seen in Syria, Libya, Rwanda, Gaza and other conflicts that we've discussed in this study guide.

In this committee, you delegates are urged to find a solution to one of the most complex issues of modern international relations: the legitimacy and necessities of intervention, often framed under the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This committee requires to understand more than UN politics; As humanitarian crises become imminent and geopolitical paralysis deepens, this emergency session calls upon delegates to question core tensions between state sovereignty and moral obligation during times of conflict. You, delegates, will decide whether intervention today, and in all, is a genuine act of justice, or a disguise for unregulated and politicized power.

Lastly, we would like to thank our academic assistant Rüzgar Avcı for their contributions to the study guide and committee in general. We are asking delegates to send us their questions regarding the committee via the email addresses below. Please send to both email addresses. We hope that all participants will leave this conference with a greater understanding of social sciences and world politics.

Best Regards,

Kaan Akkaş & Eda Güçhan

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I. Introduction to the committee: UNSC

A. Overview

The question of when, how, and by whom states or international organizations may intervene in the affairs of a sovereign state resonates deeply with ongoing debates over sovereignty, human rights, and the ethics of power. In an era defined by complex civil conflicts, proxy wars, and the increasing visibility of atrocities through global media, the tension between legal restraint and moral obligation has never been more salient. From Rwanda to Libya, Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, and Gaza, the international community has faced repeated tests of its ability to respond effectively, equitably, and consistently to humanitarian crises.

Understanding this tension is not merely an academic study: the decisions taken in moments of crisis carry profound consequences for millions of people, for the legitimacy of international institutions, and for the stability of global order. Delegates to this committee are tasked with critically evaluating not only the historical record of interventions but also the structural, legal, and ethical frameworks that shape possibilities for action today.

B. Importance in Contemporary Geopolitics

The relevance of intervention debates is amplified by contemporary geopolitical shifts. Major powers often exercise veto authority in the UN Security Council to safeguard strategic interests, while smaller states and regional organizations navigate a landscape of uneven protection and accountability. The rise of non-state actors, proxy conflicts, and digitalized warfare has further complicated assessments of both threat and responsibility. Ethical questions, whose suffering demands response, and whose interests dictate the terms of that response, are inseparable from political calculation. Consequently, the study of intervention is crucial not only for understanding past failures and successes but also for anticipating future challenges in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and humanitarian protection.



C. Objectives and Expectations for Delegates

Delegates are expected to engage in rigorous, multidimensional analysis of intervention scenarios, balancing legal mandates with ethical considerations. The committee will encourage debate on the following points:

- Evaluating the legitimacy and limits of the Responsibility to Protect in diverse case studies.
- Reconciling state sovereignty with moral obligations to prevent or halt atrocities.
- Assessing the historical successes, failures, and unintended consequences of past interventions.
- Considering mechanisms for accountability, post-conflict responsibility, and equitable rebuilding.
- Exploring the influence of power asymmetries, political interests, and neocolonial patterns in the authorization and execution of interventions.

II. Agenda Item: Emergency Session on the Right to Intervene / Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

A. Conceptual Context

1. The Westphalian Principle and the Evolution of Sovereignty

The modern international system is often traced back to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which enshrined the idea that states hold supreme authority within their borders. This principle of sovereignty, the ability of a state to exercise exclusive control over its population, territory, and resources has long been regarded as the cornerstone of international law. It was intended to guarantee stability by preventing outside interference in domestic affairs, regardless of a government's internal character. The relevance of the Westphalian System to the United Nations Security Council is quite significant for this agenda item, as this system fundamentally forms the legal basis for non-intervention. It suggests that no entity has the right to interfere with a country regarding its domestic affairs, even if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens from tragedies such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, etc.



Yet in today's world, sovereignty is no longer understood in absolute terms. The experience of atrocities highlighted the dangers of an international system that shields governments from scrutiny while their populations suffer. Over time, sovereignty has been reconceptualized not only as a right but also as a responsibility. The birth of the notions, the Right to Intervene and the Responsibility to Protect, has raised contradictions with the basis of the Westphalian System. Said notions suggest that the international community might have a responsibility to interfere with the domestic affairs of a state if certain criteria are violated.

This evolution raises an enduring tension: if sovereignty is conditional on responsibility, who determines when a state has “failed” its people, and who is entitled to act? Such questions remain at the center of Security Council deliberations on intervention, where Westphalia is never far away.

2. Types of Intervention

Intervention is not a single act but a spectrum of measures, ranging from soft diplomatic initiatives to coercive military operations. Intervention in international relations occurs in different styles that range from rather soft measures to acts that are arguably more drastic. These styles depend on the character of the crisis that requires intervention. Interpretation of these different styles is essential in order to deeply understand the motive behind the actions that are taken by the United Nations Security Council and how it addresses crises and stabilises the situation. Intervention under the Responsibility to Protect is usually a graduated approach, as the first aim is to prevent crises using diplomacy. Then a reaction is given, ranging from sanctions to military action if deemed necessary. Finally, a rebuilding plan that aims to stabilize the situation is implemented.

- **Diplomatic Intervention:** Negotiations, fact-finding missions, and mediation often represent the first response to emerging crises. In Syria, Palestine and Iraq numerous envoys attempted to broker ceasefires long before military options were tabled. This method respects sovereignty to the greatest extent, yet it often falters when parties act in bad faith.

While trying to reach a common ground between conflicting parties, reducing the suffering of civilians is an essential goal of the intervening entity. It should be kept in mind that this approach does not necessarily require the existence of a conflict between two parties, as the reason for the suffering might lack a conflict between two



parties. Incidents such as natural disasters can also be the reason for this method of intervention if the state where the incident took place ends up insufficient to relieve the citizens. If that is the case, this method of intervention is commonly conducted with the approval of the said state. However, if the approval is absent, this approach may be deemed as a breach of the sovereignty of the state.

- **Humanitarian Assistance:** At times, intervention takes the form of relief operations in the wake of natural disasters or armed conflicts. Such efforts often require host-state consent, but when denied (as in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis 2008) they pose difficult questions about sovereignty versus necessity.
- **Economic Intervention:** Sanctions, embargoes, or aid suspensions are designed to pressure governments into compliance. Their record, however, is mixed: in Iraq during the 1990s, sweeping sanctions arguably hurt civilians more than elites, raising ethical concerns about collective punishment.
- **Legal Intervention:** International tribunals and the International Court of Justice seek to ensure accountability for mass crimes. While these mechanisms aim to deter future atrocities, critics argue they are selective in their prosecutions and slow to deliver justice, as seen in post-genocide Rwanda and currently in Palestine.
- **Military Intervention:** The most controversial form, ranging from peacekeeping deployments to coercive strikes. NATO's campaign in Kosovo (1999) and the coalition invasion of Iraq (2003) illustrate how military action often sparks heated debate over legality, proportionality, and long-term consequences.

The actions that take place during the implementation of this method make military intervention undisputedly the most debated upon method. It is seen as the last resort under the Responsibility to Protect framework. Common tools can range from peacekeeping operations to airstrikes and full-on ground deployments. While the motive of this method of intervention can be thought to offer immediate help to suffering civilians, it risks escalation of conflict, consequently resulting in long-term instability.



Thus, intervention is not a binary of “war or peace” but a continuum. Still, each step up the ladder of coercion increases both its potential impact and its potential for abuse.

3. The Right to Intervene versus the Responsibility to Protect

The Right to Intervene and the Responsibility to Protect are the main concerns of this agenda item thus, it is essential to interpret them correctly and understand the differences between them. The Right to Intervene emerged as a consequence of humanitarian debates about whether states or international entities should have the authority to intervene another states’ internal affairs in the case of severe human rights violations. The main point that makes this right questionable is the fact that it directly contradicts the Westphalian principle of the sovereignty of states. It is also criticized for being open to misuse for the purpose of political and strategic gain without clear legal boundaries. Consequently, concerns about legitimacy and selectivity arise.

The Responsibility to Protect, by contrast, reframed the debate. Adopted at the 2005 UN World Summit, it shifted the emphasis from external powers to states themselves: sovereignty entails a duty to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Only when states are “manifestly failing” does responsibility shift to the international community, and even then, coercive action requires Security Council authorization.

The difference is crucial: the Right to Intervene suggests a permissive power vested in outsiders, while R2P begins with an obligation within. Yet, in practice, the line often blurs. Was NATO’s operation in Libya an embodiment of R2P’s Pillar Three, or a revival of the Right to Intervene under another name? The distinction is not merely academic; it determines whether interventions are perceived as legitimate or imperial.

4. The Responsibility to Protect: Background and Structure

The concept of R2P emerged directly from the failures of the 1990s. The genocide in Rwanda and the inaction in Bosnia led the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to articulate R2P in 2001. The doctrine was formally endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit and rests on three pillars:



- **Pillar One (The Responsibility of the State):** States themselves have the primary responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.
- **Pillar Two (The Responsibility of the International Community to Assist:** The international community has a responsibility to assist states in fulfilling this duty, through capacity-building, aid, and preventive diplomacy.
- **Pillar Three (The Responsibility of the International Community to Take Timely and Decisive Action):** If a state manifestly fails to protect its population, the international community must be prepared to take collective action, ranging from sanctions to military force through the Security Council.

B. Institutional Context: The UN Charter Framework

The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, is the pillar of contemporary international law governing the use of force. The Charter represents a compromise between two imperatives: the preservation of state sovereignty, on the one hand, and the establishment of a system of collective security, on the other. Three provisions are most relevant to the question of intervention:

1. Article 2(4): Prohibition of the Use of Force

Article 2(4) declares: *“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”*. This prohibition is regarded as jus cogens, a peremptory norm from which no derogation is permitted, codifying one of the cornerstones of post World War II order, aiming to prevent unilateral aggression and ensure global stability. The scope of Article 2(4) has been the subject of significant doctrinal debate. It clearly prohibits armed invasion, but also encompasses indirect uses of force.

2. Chapter VII: Collective Security Measures

While Article 2(4) establishes the norm of non-intervention, Chapter VII introduces its principal exceptions. Under Articles 39-51, the Security Council is vested with the authority



to determine the existence of a threat to international peace and security and to authorize coercive measures, ranging from economic sanctions to military intervention. This mechanism allows the Council to act as the guarantor of collective security, though its application has often been shaped by political considerations. Articles 39-51 grant the United Nations Security Council authority to respond to “threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression”.

3. Article 51: The Right of Self-Defense

Article 51 recognizes the inherent right of individual and collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member State, “until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security”. This provision creates a limited derogation from Article 2(4), allowing states to respond to aggression even absent Council authorization, while still subject to Council oversight. In practice, however, Article 51 has been invoked expansively, sometimes controversially, to justify anticipatory or preventive interventions. Article 51 affirms the “inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs”. The ICJ (International Court of Justice) has clarified several aspects of this provision. Since 2001, states and the Council have recognized that Article 51 applies against non-state actors, but controversy persists regarding: Pre-emptive self-defense (anticipating an imminent attack, as argued by Israel in 1967); preventive self-defense (neutralizing potential threats, as argued by the U.S. in Iraq, 2003).

Thus, while the Charter establishes a strict prohibition on force, the exceptions - collective security and self-defense - are interpreted loosely, leaving considerable room for political discretion.

C. Case Studies

Having elaborated the conceptual foundations and normative debates surrounding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), in the following it is necessary to examine how this doctrine has been interpreted and applied in real life practice. Case studies serve as a critical lens through which the strengths, weaknesses, and contradictions of R2P become visible, revealing not only the capacity of the international community to mobilize in the face of atrocity crimes, but also the persistent political, legal, and ethical dilemmas that complicate its implementation.



The following cases: Rwanda, Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and Palestine ; have each -in different ways- shaped the trajectory of intervention norms in the global scene. Rwanda and Kosovo highlight the historical tragedies and failures that gave rise to the doctrine; Iraq demonstrates how claims of humanitarian intervention can be distorted; Libya represents both the most notable instance of R2P authorization and the controversies that followed; Syria and Palestine underscore the paralysis of international consensus in the face of ongoing suffering; while Ukraine poses new questions about geopolitics, sovereignty, and selective enforcement.

By situating these cases side by side, this chapter seeks to highlight recurring patterns: when R2P has been invoked and acted upon, when it has been resisted or ignored, and what these outcomes suggest for the future credibility of the principle.

1. Kosovo 1999

a. Historical Background

In 1989, Albanians started to non-violently protest against the actions taken by the president of the Serbian Republic, Slobodan Milošević, in the Serbian province of Kosovo. Said actions were aiming to terminate the autonomy in the region. Milošević and the people of the Serbian minority residing in Kosovo had refused the fact that the Muslim Albanians were in demographic control of an area held sacred to the Serbs. While the tension between the two sides had been increasing, there was no visible action that was being planned to be taken by the international community. Absence of international recognition for the issue paved the way for the occurrence of more radical ideas, mainly around the idea of the issue being unsolvable through peaceful means.

Then in 1996, the Kosovo Liberation Army emerged and its attacks on Serbian police and politicians began, lasting over the next 2 years. By 1998, the actions of the Kosovo Liberation Army could be deemed as a serious armed uprising. Following the efforts of the Serbian law enforcement to reassert control over the region, the Yugoslav armed forces had to get involved. Atrocities committed during the conflict in the region by every party of the conflict caused many people to be obliged to flee the area. This period of the conflict was widely publicized in the international media. A group consisting of the leading countries of the world, regarding political power, demanded an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of



Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo, the return of the refugees and unlimited access for international monitors. Milošević, who had become president of Yugoslavia in 1997, agreed to meet the demands of the international community but failed to comply with his promises. The Kosovo Liberation Army regrouped and rearmed during the ceasefire efforts. Consequently, the Yugoslav and Serbian forces responded ruthlessly, engaging in a program of ethnic cleansing of the Albanians.

b. Unilateral Response of the International Community

Following the catastrophic events, NATO launched a bombing campaign that would last 78 days to stop the violence. This arguably harsh intervention campaign occurred without explicit authorization from the United Nations Security Council, Russia and China opposing any resolution that would grant the use of force, highlighting the sovereignty of the state and the importance of the Westphalian principle. This particular event makes Kosovo a critical part of this topic. The debate of state sovereignty and the right to intervene had been going on for years by then. Said debates mainly focused on these notions in theory. With everything that took place in Kosovo, it was proven that the actions that became available for the international community to take under the protection of notions of the Right to Intervene and the Responsibility to Protect might not follow the requirements of the framework that comes with these notions.

This action taken by NATO divided the international community in half, one side suggested that the international community could not remain silent and should take action in the face of atrocities, even if the United Nations Security Council was blocked by political divisions or acted rather slowly. However, bypassing the UN Security Council in the decision-making of a process that involves interfering with the internal affairs of another state can be seen as undermining the legitimacy of international law and can enable countries and entities that are independent from each other to take unilateral action, consequently creating a risk of complexity in the region. With all said factors existing, Kosovo became a critical part of every debate regarding the issue of intervention and heavily influenced the formal adoption of the Responsibility to Protect in 2005.

2. Ukraine



a. History of the Tension

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is undoubtedly one of the most significant challenges to international peace and security that the modern world has faced. The conflict is not an abrupt one; rather, it has deep roots that can be traced back decades. It can be stated that the tension was born and started its never-ending rise in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, after which Ukraine became an independent state. Ever since its independence, Ukraine has found itself right in the middle of two different parties that shape international politics. On one side, Russia, who possesses historical, cultural and geopolitical claims since day one, and on the other side, the European Union and NATO, with which Ukraine started to grow aspirations for closer integration. A notable escalation in the tension between Ukraine and Russia took place in 2014, when large-scale protests under the name of the Euromaidan movement forced the resignation of the pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, after he refused to act upon a planned cooperation agreement with the European Union. In response, Russia annexed Crimea, justifying its actions by explaining the motive, which was to protect the rights of Russian-speaking civilians in the region. Simultaneously, pro-separatist movements backed by Moscow took control of certain parts of Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk). This action sparked a conflict in the Donbas region.

In 2022, the ongoing volcano of tension finally erupted when Russia decided to invade Ukraine. The Russian Government portrayed the actions as a “special military operation” that aims to protect civilians in Donetsk and Luhansk, specifically preventing an alleged genocide against Russian-speaking civilians. By portraying its offensive actions under this roof, Russia aimed to achieve an unjust justification for its actions in the international community by justifying its actions under the Responsibility to Protect. However, the majority of the international community, including the European Union, NATO and many states, condemned the justification for the atrocious actions of Russia and viewed them as not only illegitimate and unjust, but also in clear violation of the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine. Actions of Russia can be deemed as an example to how the principles of the Right to Protect can be misused.

b. Different interpretations of the same issue



The viewpoint from the Ukrainian side highlights how the narrative of protection can vary internationally. NATO and EU member states have fulfilled their responsibilities to help Ukraine protect its citizens by presenting military, economic and humanitarian support. Meanwhile, Russia is keen on its view that its every action can be justified under the pure intention to protect vulnerable populations.

On an international scale, there are different views. Some states choose to implement a more cautious approach. Some are criticizing the so-called Western double standards in implementing humanitarian principles, reminding Iraq 2003, Libya 2011, etc. In which the motive behind the interventions was portrayed as purely humanitarian, but was later criticized for being motivated by strategic gains. Plausible or not, this issue raises questions about the efficiency of the framework and the validity of the boundaries of the Responsibility to Protect.

Ukraine is one of the key points for this agenda item as it shows several essential concepts. Firstly, a perfect example of how the notion of protection can include weaponization, subsequently using the Responsibility to Protect to unjustifiably legitimize offensive actions that might undermine international laws. Second, it shows how hard it is to distinguish between genuine humanitarian protection and political manipulation of the Responsibility to Protect. It also illustrates how different states or entities may have different views on the same issue, determining whether an intervention or exercising its rights given by the Responsibility to Protect is morally genuine or for strategic gain.

3. Rwanda

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda represents one of the most tragic failures of the international community in the post Cold War order and remains central to the debate on humanitarian intervention and the emergence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

a. Pre-Genocide Context

The roots of the 1994 Rwandan genocide lie in a long history of ethnic division between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. These socio-economic distinctions were solidified during the Belgian colonial administration, which institutionalized identity cards and entrenched Tutsi dominance in governance and education. After independence in 1962, the



balance shifted with Hutus coming to power, and cycles of violence, exclusion, and displacement followed. Hundreds of thousands of Tutsi fled into neighboring states, forming exile communities and -eventually- armed groups. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) -composed largely of Tutsi exiles- invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, sparking a civil war that exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Despite international mediation, the Arusha Accords of 1993 (which sought to establish a power-sharing arrangement between the RPF and the Hutu-led government of Juvénal Habyarimana) faced resistance from hardline Hutu factions. These groups mobilized militias such as the “Interahamwe” , disseminated ethnic hatred through radio propaganda (notably Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines), and stockpiled weapons. By early 1994, Rwanda was a state primed for mass violence: political deadlock, militarized society, and an ethnic narrative framing Tutsis as antagonists.

b. The Genocide and International Inaction

On 6 April 1994, the assassination of President Habyarimana in a plane crash acted as the catalyst for an extermination campaign. Within hours, Hutu militias and state security forces began systematic massacres of Tutsi civilians and moderate Hutus. Over the course of roughly 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people were killed marking it as one of the swiftest genocides in modern history.

The international response has since been described as one of the greatest failures of the post Cold War order. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was deployed with a limited mandate and lacked both resources and political backing. Despite urgent warnings - including detailed intelligence of imminent massacres - the mission was denied reinforcements. Following the killing of Belgian peacekeepers, key troop contributors withdrew, further weakening UN capacity. The Security Council, constrained by the reluctance of permanent members to intervene, reduced UNAMIR’s strength at the height of the killings.

The United States of America, haunted by the recent failure in Somalia (1993), avoided the use of the term “genocide” in official discourse to sidestep legal obligations under the Genocide Convention. France, while later launching *Opération Turquoise* under a humanitarian mandate, has been criticized for supporting the Hutu-led government prior to and during the early stages of the genocide, and for creating safe zones that inadvertently



facilitated the escape of perpetrators. The overall picture was one of paralysis and prioritization of national interest over humanitarian urgency.

c. Aftermath

The genocide in Rwanda forced the international community to confront the inadequacy of existing mechanisms for preventing and halting mass atrocities. The Independent Inquiry into UN actions acknowledged “systemic failure”, while survivors and African states highlighted the scandalous absence of timely intervention. This memory shaped regional and global institutional evolution in profound ways.

At the continental level, the African Union (AU), established in 2002, departed from the OAU’s rigid non-interference principle by adopting the doctrine of “non-indifference”, explicitly permitting intervention in cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. At the global level, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) issued its landmark 2001 report, crystallizing the doctrine of the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P). Framed as a balance between sovereignty and human rights, R2P directly cites Rwanda as the case of failure that should never be repeated.

4. Iraq

a. Pre-Intervention Context

The 2003 intervention in Iraq represents one of the turning points in debates on the legality and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. Unlike Rwanda, where international inaction led to a humanitarian catastrophe, Iraq was a case of proactive military intervention in the absence of broad consensus.

In the years leading up to 2003, Iraq had already been subjected to a decade of United Nations sanctions following the Gulf War. The sanctions, imposed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, were intended to compel Iraq to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. Over time, these sanctions inflicted severe socio-economic consequences, with UN agencies such as UNICEF and WHO reporting high child mortality rates, deteriorating healthcare, and widespread malnutrition. By the late 1990s, Iraq had become a central test case for the humanitarian implications of prolonged sanctions regimes.



Iraq was ruled by Saddam Hussein's authoritarian Ba'athist regime, characterized by systematic repression of political opposition, ethnic minorities (notably Kurds), and suspected dissidents. Hussein's history of mass atrocities -including the Anfal campaign of the late 80s that involved chemical attacks on Kurdish populations- was frequently cited by proponents of intervention to frame the regime as an existential threat to its people and regional stability.

b. The Intervention and Justifications

The US led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, supported primarily by the United Kingdom, was launched without explicit authorization from the United Nations Security Council. The coalition justified the intervention on three primary grounds: First, Iraq's alleged possession of WMDs; second, links between Saddam Hussein's regime and international terrorism; and third, the moral responsibility to liberate the Iraqi people from dictatorship.

However, the absence of a new Security Council resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force was a central legal controversy. The United States and the United Kingdom argued that existing resolutions -particularly one which authorized force against Iraq during the Gulf War, and one which found Iraq in "material breach" of disarmament obligations- provided sufficient legal basis. Most international legal scholars and member states, however, disputed this interpretation, asserting that only the Security Council retained the authority to determine compliance and authorize further enforcement.

France, Germany, Russia, and China opposed the invasion, emphasizing the principle of state sovereignty under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and warning of the destabilizing consequences of unilateral action. The Security Council was thus paralyzed, reflecting once more the geopolitical divisions and the limitations of collective security when major powers' strategic interests cross.

c. Aftermath

The intervention's immediate aftermath was catastrophic for Iraq and raised profound questions for the international system. The anticipated WMD stockpiles were never found; the dismantling of Iraq's state apparatus under the Coalition Provisional Authority fueled violence, insurgency, and eventually the rise of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq and later the Islamic State (ISIS).



For international law and norms of intervention, Iraq became a cautionary case. Unlike the failure of intervention in Rwanda, which gave rise to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, Iraq demonstrated the dangers of abusing humanitarian or security arguments for strategic purposes. The unilateral action by a coalition of states, bypassing Security Council authorization, eroded global trust in multilateralism and further delegitimized claims of “liberal interventionism”.

The case sharpened the debate between sovereignty and *jus cogens* obligations, ultimately constraining the willingness of the Security Council to authorize robust interventions even in clear humanitarian crises in later years, such as Syria.

5. Syria

Between 2011 and 2024, Syria was the scene of one of the bloodiest and most destructive wars in history; estimates of the number of people killed in this conflict have reached the hundreds of thousands and are still rising. UN-verified counts reveal a substantial undercount, despite estimates from independent monitors that the war claimed between 580,000 and 650,000+ lives. In the midst of prolonged economic collapse, infrastructure degradation, and recurring cycles of displacement, the majority of the population needs some kind of aid, and over 7 million people are still internally displaced. Regional refugee dynamics continue to impact European and Levantine security and diplomacy.

Large-scale bombardment of cities, siege tactics spanning several years, and the recorded use of chemical weapons are examples of patterns of harm to civilians. Chemical weapons, such as chlorine, sarin, and mustard agents, were found to have been used frequently in Syria by the UN-OPCW processes. Assad government forces have been held accountable for several of these occurrences, and there is also evidence of ISIL's occasional use of mustard. Later, the OPCW released a thorough attribution for the Douma attack in 2018. Although Syria's declared chemical stockpiles were to be destroyed in accordance with the Security Council's 2013 Resolution 2118, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and other investigative organizations have found that chemical use continued after that date, highlighting enforcement flaws and the continued use of illegal warfare tactics.

Syria is a direct institutional illustration of the Security Council's continuous impasse over responsibility and security. Punitive measures were blocked and the use of coercive



diplomacy was limited as a result of Russia's and China's repeated vetoes of dozens of draft resolutions on sanctions, referrals, and civilian protection. For example, Resolution 2165 authorized humanitarian aid across borders without Damascus's approval, but its renewals were gradually reduced, leaving the aid architecture vulnerable to single-member veto politics and occasional disruptions to life-saving deliveries. This has led to an international protection regime with fragile, time-bound humanitarian access channels that rely on shifting geopolitical agreements.

The current humanitarian profile is characterized by ongoing need and diminishing state capacity: Assessments show that the main reasons for vulnerability are lower incomes, high costs, and unemployment. However, OCHA's planning for 2025 shows that there are still many needs for food security, health, WASH, shelter, and protection. Finding long-term solutions is hard, and policies in the host country about refugees going back home are made even harder by unstable conditions and poor services, even when people are only going back to their own country. In this situation, there are still calls for humanitarian corridors, more oversight, and measures to hold people accountable. However, these calls are always filtered through different security agendas, such as those of foreign military forces in theaters and rivalries between great powers.

Syria is the primary challenge for the Council's Right to Intervene discussion. Even though there have been risk factors for atrocity crimes for years (like widespread civilian harm, the use of chemical weapons, aid obstruction, and nationwide displacement), collective action has been limited by veto politics and claims of sovereignty. The legal space set aside for humanitarian access has saved lives, but it hasn't stopped the number of civilian deaths or brought about punishment that fits the severity of the violations. So, when a member of the P5 doesn't agree with coercive measures, Syria is still a big topic of conversation about how the Council can put protection into action.

6. Libya

The UN Security Council only let the use of force under the Responsibility to Protect doctrine once, in Libya in 2011. After people rose up against Muammar Gaddafi's 40-year rule, the regime's troops tried to put down dissent in February and March 2011. Many people saw Gaddafi's public statement in Benghazi that he would "cleanse Libya house by house" as



a threat of mass violence, and they used words that suggested violence against civilians without regard for their safety. Reports of shelling, illegal killings, and mass arrests in populated areas made things even more urgent.

In response, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1970 in February 2011. Travel restrictions, a weapons embargo, and a referral to the International Criminal Court were imposed on Libya for the first time in the early phases of the conflict. A few weeks later, Resolution 1973 (March 2011) went even farther, explicitly stating that Chapter VII of the UN Charter allowed member states to establish a no-fly zone and take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. Because it restricted the mandate to protecting civilians rather than overthrowing the regime, the resolution's prohibition of any "foreign occupation force" was significant. Gaddafi's attack on Benghazi was halted by NATO's air campaign, which was supported by Arab League nations and altered the direction of the war. However, the intervention quickly gained controversy. In addition to providing immediate civilian protection, NATO operations deliberately undermined Libya's military capabilities, which helped bring about the fall of the government and the assassination of Gaddafi in October 2011. Many countries, especially China, India, South Africa, Brazil, and Russia, later asserted that the intervention had become a de facto regime-change operation, surpassing its original goal of protecting civilians. This sense of "mission creep" undermined R2P consensus and fostered mistrust that has shaped Security Council dynamics ever since, particularly in more recent contexts such as Syria.

Serious defects were discovered during the post-intervention phase. A divided state ruled by rival militias and tribal factions resulted from the quick fall of central authority. Political changes became unstable as rival governments and armed groups solidified their positions, undermining the UN's and other foreign actors' efforts to establish strong institutions. The jihadist activities that have occurred in Libya include the trafficking of weapons, illegal migration across the Mediterranean, and the growth of ISIS affiliates in Sirte. Even though the Security Council remained split and mostly absent, regional actors—including Egypt, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and others—fueled conflict through proxy engagement.

Turkey's 2019–2020 operation in Libya was designed to safeguard its maritime interests and offer military support to the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in line with the "Mavi Vatan" concept. In November 2019, Turkey signed a maritime boundary agreement with the GNA, extending its exclusive economic zone rights in the Eastern



Mediterranean by publicly challenging Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus. This agreement gave Ankara control over the rights to explore for hydrocarbons and enhanced its strategic position in Mediterranean geopolitics. In this way, the Libyan policy was a projection of Turkey's marine strategy under Mavi Vatan, which connected humanitarian discourse with particular geopolitical and oil security objectives, and a continuation of the R2P rhetoric, which was supported by international recognition of the GNA.

Libya continues to be contradictory from an R2P standpoint. On the one hand, it showed that the Council could take swift, decisive action to halt the massacre in Benghazi when mass atrocities were about to occur. However, the absence of stabilization planning following the intervention created a security and humanitarian void that may have been just as harmful as the initial violence that was halted. This result, according to many critics, demonstrated that military action under R2P could be readily used for political as well as humanitarian goals. Libya is now frequently cited by China, Russia, and others as a cautionary tale of how easily broad R2P authorizations can be abused. For the Council's ongoing discussions, Libya provides a case study of the potential and peril of intervention. It raises two recurring issues: first, can civilian protection mandates be actually protected from the dynamics of regime change? Secondly, is the Council required to ensure both robust reconstruction after a conflict and the avoidance of atrocities?

7. Gaza

The Gaza Strip today stands as one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of the 21st century and a direct test of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Ongoing Israeli operations and Hamas attacks as a reaction since October 2023 have had catastrophic civilian consequences: nearly two-thirds of the population has been displaced, and tens of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been slain. Civilian infrastructures, like hospitals, schools, water system and UN, have been methodically destroyed, Israeli military operations have been depriving the populace of the necessities of life. Both Israel and Hamas have been charged by human rights organizations with war crimes: Israel for its indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, forced relocation, and use of starvation as a weapon; Hamas for its rocket attacks on civilians and hostage-taking. Debates concerning whether the ongoing atrocities qualify as crimes against humanity or perhaps genocide have been sparked by these circumstances.



The near-total blockade exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. UN agencies warn of impending mass starvation as a result of Israel's blockade on food, fuel, and medical supplies as well as its bombardment of assistance convoys, which have created famine-like conditions. Civilian initiatives like Madleen or Handala are attacked by the Israeli army and the initiators are taken hostage. The hospital system is collapsing, and aid workers are being targeted—nearly half of the deaths in Gaza occurred in 2024, the worst year on record for relief workers. In reaction to South Africa's genocide complaint against Israel, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued temporary orders directing the facilitation of humanitarian aid; nevertheless, adherence to these orders has been patchy. At the same time, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is looking into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Hamas leadership and Israeli officials.

The UN Security Council's institutional inactivity is revealed by the Gaza case. The United States' vetoes of numerous ceasefire and protection resolutions demonstrate how great power politics impedes the implementation of R2P. For the Council, this presents important legal and political issues: Can military operations that result in such high levels of civilian casualties be justified by Article 51 self-defense? Does R2P's legitimacy as a principle suffer from the Council's inaction, particularly in light of the Global South's growing demands for accountability? Even if the Security Council is still at a standstill, regional and non-Western parties are working to expand the definition of R2P, as seen by South Africa's ICJ initiative and Arab League demands for international protection. Gaza highlights the discrepancy between R2P's political implementation and its normative promise. In addition to being a humanitarian crisis, Gaza poses a legitimacy dilemma for the UNSC.

D. Global Power Politics in Intervention Decisions

1. Power Politics and P5 positioning

P5 veto politics have the biggest influence on the Security Council's capacity to operationalize R2P. Due to its claims of sovereignty, consent, and skepticism of regime change spearheaded by the West, Russia has blocked sanctions, ICC referrals, and more stringent measures for the protection of civilians since 2011. China frequently joins Russia in vetoing these measures. China typically supports Russia on atrocity files and rarely vetoes



alone, emphasizing non-interference, host-state consent, and "win-win" development logics. The veto, which effectively restricts UNSC action on protection even in cases of severe civilian harm, has been used (or threatened) by the US more frequently in Israel/Palestine contexts. Though their support is often limited by coalition politics and post-Libya mistrust among non-Western members, the United Kingdom and France are typically the Council's most forward-leaning on protection mandates and have supported voluntary veto-restraint initiatives in mass-atrocity situations. The structural effect is a Council that produces uneven protection results by being able to take decisive action when interests align (as in Libya, March 2011) but becoming immobilized when they do not (as in Syria).

2. Role of Regional Organizations

a. African Union

In a conscious departure from the OAU's tradition of non-interference, the AU's "non-indifference" norm (Constitutive Act, Article 4(h)) permits intervention in serious situations, such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. With UNSC coordination when force is considered, the AU Peace and Security Council is intended to take the initiative and, if necessary, escalate to enforcement. Although capacity and political will differ in practice, Africa's support for protection in principle is based on this regional legal-political foundation.

b. NATO

The Council ordered a no-fly zone and "all necessary measures" in Libya (2011) (UNSCR 1973). By enforcing the arms embargo, NFZ, and civilian protection, NATO's Operation Unified Protector showed how a competent regional/collective defense organization can quickly turn an R2P-framed mandate into operations. However, many UN members continue to be skeptical of broad protection mandates due to the controversy surrounding alleged mandate overreach and post-conflict planning.

c. Arab League



The Arab League's March 2011 request for a no-fly zone over Libya was crucial in gaining UNSC authority and providing political justification for NATO action; in Syria, the League suspended Damascus and attempted observer missions and sanctions, but P5 splits meant that these efforts were not fully translated into coercive Council action. As a result, the League's position can swing Council politics in the direction of action (as it did in 2011) or, if split, leave the file at humanitarian access.

d. ECOWAS

One of the most assertive crisis-response toolkits in the Global South was created by ECOWAS in West Africa (Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, 1999). It uses force to protect civilians and maintain constitutional order (e.g., The Gambia 2017/ECOMIG). ECOWAS practice, supported by AU positions, has created regional expectations that serious violations (mass harm or unconstitutional usurpations) can trigger collective measures, with post-facto or parallel engagement with the UNSC, even though "pro-democratic intervention" lacks a clear general license in international law.

3. Non-State Actors and Civil Society

Elite cost-benefit calculations and conflict salience are influenced by the media: persistent, graphic coverage can spur public pressure for protection (the "CNN effect"), but access denial or information fog slows momentum and allows veto politics to win out. Human rights NGOs (such as international and regional organizations) record transgressions, confirm trends in incidents, and support attribution efforts that support proposals for accountability (ICC referrals, sanctions designations). NGOs serve as agenda-setters and norm-guardians in R2P discussions, advocating for humanitarian access, early warning, mitigation of civilian harm, and veto-restraint in cases of mass atrocities. Their impact is subtle but genuine: even in cases where coercive results stall, reports, briefings, and open-source investigations frequently serve as the empirical backbone of Council discussions and national stances.

E. Ethical Context

1. Moral Obligation vs Legal Mandate



The dilemmas surrounding humanitarian intervention often revolve around the tension between moral imperatives and the legal frameworks that govern international action. In Rwanda, the inaction of the international community despite clear evidence of mass atrocities raises the question of whether strict adherence to legal mandates can excuse the abandonment of moral responsibility. By contrast, NATO's intervention in Kosovo was framed as a moral necessity to prevent ethnic cleansing, yet it lacked explicit UN Security Council authorization, leaving it in a gray zone between legitimacy and legality. Similarly, Libya was presented as a case where the legal mandate of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) aligned with a moral call to prevent imminent mass killings, but its aftermath invited criticism that intervention extended beyond the original humanitarian purpose.

Here, one question: when is the weight of moral obligation strong enough to override the absence of legal authorization?

And if international law is designed to maintain order, does bypassing it in the name of morality strengthen or weaken its authority in the long run?¹

2. Neocolonialism and the Politics of Intervention

Humanitarian interventions often unfold within a political landscape shaped by power asymmetries and inequalities. Critics argue that interventions in Iraq or Libya reflect patterns of selective engagement, raising the suspicion that the language of humanitarian concern may mask strategic or economic interests. By contrast the prolonged inaction in Syria (from 2011 onwards), despite well-documented atrocities, highlights how geopolitical alignments and veto powers in the UN Security Council constrain action.

This dynamic recalls debates on neocolonialism: do interventions in the Global South risk perpetuating historical hierarchies where powerful states act as arbiters of legitimacy while weaker states are objects of intervention?

At the same time, can non-intervention be equally political, as in the reluctance to act decisively in Rwanda or Palestine, where silence or inaction may serve as a tacit political stance?

3. Intervention and Post-Conflict Responsibility

¹ Hi, this is a checkpoint stop. If you have reached this point send your best UN meme to the following address (do not forget to write your representative name): boun.unsc.25@gmail.com



Beyond the moment of intervention lies responsibility. In Libya, the removal of Gaddafi opened a vacuum that contributed to instability and civil war, prompting questions about whether intervening states bear responsibility for rebuilding societies they help disrupt. In Iraq, the failure to establish security and governance after the 2003 invasion arguably paved the way for the emergence of ISIS, highlighting the unintended consequences of regime change. Kosovo, though stabilized under international supervision, remains contested in terms of sovereignty and recognition, raising the question of whether international oversight is a solution or a form of prolonged dependency.

Meanwhile Syria and Palestine demonstrate the opposite problem: when external intervention is limited or inconsistent, the responsibility for reconstruction often falls on local actors and humanitarian organizations that are overwhelmed by the scale of destruction. Ukraine as well presents a pressing challenge: even as war continues, conversations about post-war reconstruction are already underway, raising questions about who will finance, control, and shape the rebuilding process.

If intervention is justified on humanitarian grounds, does that humanitarian responsibility not extend beyond the battlefield into the long-term rebuilding of societies?

And if so, who bears this burden: the interveners, the international community at large, or the people of the affected states themselves?

4. Power, Bias, and Legitimacy: How and Who Gets to Define “Justice” ?

The pursuit of justice after conflicts often reflects underlying questions of power and legitimacy. In post-genocide Rwanda, justice was pursued through both local mechanisms and international ones, yet tensions emerged about whose narratives were recognized and whose were silenced. In Iraq, the trials following the 2003 invasion raised questions about victor’s justice: was Saddam Hussein’s prosecution a triumph of international justice, or was it shaped by the geopolitical context of regime change?

In Ukraine, ongoing debates over war crimes accountability echo this concern: who defines the legal and moral framework of justice when the aggressor is a powerful state with global influence?

Justice, then, is not only a matter of principle but also of power.



If institutions like the International Criminal Court lack universal jurisdiction and enforcement capacity, is justice truly impartial; or does it inevitably privilege certain cases while neglecting others?

And in conflicts such as Gaza, where civilian suffering is immense but accountability mechanisms remain politically gridlocked, does the absence of justice deepen the perception that international law applies unevenly?

F. How to Analyze and React for Debate?

1. Regional and Global Stakes Involved

Any intervention or lack thereof changes the power dynamics between different regions. The military operations in Gaza, Syria, and Libya create consequences that extend beyond local actors to influence the competitive dynamics between regional powers including Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Egypt and their international supporters such as the United States, Russia, and the European Union. Whether an intervention increases or decreases the legitimacy of international law, U.N. authority, or great power influence is a topic of much discussion on a global scale.

Libya stands at risk of losing its maritime domains as well as its migration pathways and energy facilities. The Syrian conflict is influenced by regional spoilers Iran and Turkey because they pursue different security and ideological goals which affect Syrian refugees and militias and supply routes. The Gaza conflict has led Egypt and Qatar to abandon their alliances in favor of Iran which creates new challenges for Lebanon and Jordan. Iran and Turkey vie for influence in Syria and Libya; Saudi Arabia and Qatar backed different Libyan factions; Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have extended their influence into Libya. Humanitarian crises risk becoming battlegrounds for regional power conflicts because of these rivalries. The US, Russia, and EU actors negotiate these disputes to establish their geopolitical dominance.. Moscow has increased its regional influence by using its military presence in Syria. The Western powers US, UK, and France demonstrate R2P-driven positions which are often restricted by internal political considerations and strategic prudence.

2. Humanitarian Conditions



Assessing whether humanitarian thresholds for Responsibility to Protect (R2P) are met requires independent reporting and trustworthy intelligence (e.g., crimes against humanity, genocide, ethnic cleansing). Nonetheless, the media frequently plays two roles: either selectively downplaying certain atrocities in order to serve political interests, or exaggerating crises (the CNN effect) to generate public pressure. Alternative documentation of atrocities can be obtained from independent observers, NGOs, and UN fact-finding missions.

Hospitals in Gaza face complete fuel collapse; there is a shortage of food, shelter, and drinkable water. Syria's healthcare system is disjointed, with hospitals damaged by fighting, COVID-19 effects, and economic collapse. Libya faces militia violence, displacement, and sporadic power outages. The extent of civilian damage is demonstrated by the frequent deaths of civilians from indiscriminate attacks, artillery (Syria), and airstrikes (Gaza, Libya). The use of chemical weapons in Syria raises concerns about atrocities. Refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) overrun regional borders; it is frequently unsafe or impossible to return. Regional politics are influenced by refugee pressure. Real-time, emotionally charged coverage from media outlets like CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and Reuters can increase public and political pressure too, but they are also vulnerable to political bias, access restrictions, and framing.

3. Key International Actors

The United States frequently presents intervention through a humanitarian lens; in 2011, it was active in Libya and supports calls for a ceasefire in Gaza but vetoes resolutions that contradict Israeli defense. maintains a balance between strategic alliances and moral responsibility. Russia supporter of Assad in Syria and a player in Libya. uses military installations and armaments supplies to sustain regional influence; vetoes a number of sanctions related to Syria. In terms of non-interference rules, China and Russia are largely in agreement. gives equal weight to economic diplomacy and sovereignty. France and the United Kingdom are major forces behind the Libyan intervention and are generally supportive of R2P mandates. Still wary because of the aftermath in Libya and the apprehension of "nation-building" at home. In addition, regional organizations are effective in the matter.



III. Questions to be Considered

1. When, if ever, is it justifiable to intervene morally without explicit legal authorization?
2. How should the international community weigh immediate humanitarian needs against the long-term authority of international law?
3. To what extent does state sovereignty limit intervention, and when might overriding it be ethically defensible?
4. How do power asymmetries influence which crises receive intervention and which are neglected?
5. Who determines what constitutes justice in post-conflict contexts?
6. Can intervention ever be truly impartial, or is it inevitably shaped by the political and strategic interests of powerful states?
7. After intervention, who bears the responsibility for rebuilding and maintaining stability?
8. How should unintended consequences, such as state collapse or insurgency, factor into decisions to intervene?
9. How do the lessons from Rwanda, Kosovo, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, and Gaza inform the limits, risks, and possibilities of intervention today?
10. What patterns emerge regarding international action or inaction, and how can they guide future decision-making?



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