



CIVIL WAR INTERVENTIONS AND THEIR BENEFITS

UNEQUAL RETURN

ISAAC M. CASTELLANO

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Syrian Case

As the Arab Spring spread across the Middle East, Syrians fed up with the Assad family's grip on power and their failure to address a growing economic crisis fueled by drought walked into the streets of Damascus, Aleppo and Daraa and began to protest.¹ The state's response was harsh and swift; the Assad regime opened fire on unarmed protesters and quickly turned peaceful activists into insurgents. Initially, the emergence of a civil war in Syria was overshadowed by events in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. But over time the intensity of the Syrian conflict, the immense flow of refugees out of the country, and the presence of radical Islamists drew the world's attention as a new problem presented itself to Western policy makers. Over the course of 2011 and 2012, a debate emerged in the United States regarding how the Obama administration should react to the successful efforts of the Syrian Free Army to destabilize the Syrian regime. Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney and U.S. Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) entered the fray, advocating for the arming and training of the Syrian rebels.² In a February 22, 2012 Republican Party presidential debate, Romney advocated for arming the rebels and called out President Obama for his inaction on the conflict. Romney continued his push for intervention throughout the 2012 election cycle, aided by other members of the GOP establishment who proposed a bill to fund and arm the Syrian Free Army. While not fully articulated in their public statements, they argued that the Assad regime, if removed, would benefit the United States in a number of ways, including the curtailment of Iranian influence in the region and help weaken a long time rival of the United States, demonstrate American leadership, and facilitate democracy in the region.³ Commentators raised questions, asking who the rebels were, what their interests were, and what their plans for a future Syrian regime would be. Al-Qaeda aligned suicide terrorist attacks on July 3, 2012, which successfully

targeted the Syrian Defense Secretary and two top security officials, clarified the complicated nature of the United States entering into this civil conflict.⁴ Moreover, the involvement of Al-Qaeda raised questions as to the risks of an intervention, even as reports surfaced that the Obama administration was supplying communication equipment and other supplies to part of the Syrian rebel forces.⁵

In the early hours of August 21, 2013, multiple missiles carrying a nerve agent landed in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, a well-known rebel stronghold. While not the first of its kind in the three-year old civil war, gruesome video and photographs, which detailed the suffering of civilians throughout the attack, were extensively shown by various media, including international and American press, YouTube, and various forms of social media. Images of children gasping for breath and dying from toxic exposure glossed the front pages of CNN.com and the *New York Times*. Initial reports claimed only some 400 were killed, but it became clear in subsequent days that that number was an underestimation, with the final death toll reaching upward of 1,400 people, including over 400 children. These media images illustrated the tragic progression of the war in Syria, from peaceful demonstrations to all-out war, with civilians making up most of the casualties. The attack may have passed for another day in a conflict, that at that point had taken some 100,000 lives, generated thousands of refugees, and left more than 20,000 injured. President Obama, however, feeling pressure from Republicans, as well as other international and domestic actors,⁶ made a series of comments about how the use of chemical weapons was a “red line” that, if crossed, would prompt the United States to intervene in the conflict. This was widely interpreted as official U.S. policy. As UN inspectors surveyed sites of chemical attacks and Syrian rebels posted more video and photographic evidence to support their claim of a chemical attack, pressure on Obama to intervene increased. The stakes had risen as several European and Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, had funneled weapons and supplies to the rebels in response to Iran and Hezbollah’s support of the Assad regime that had helped turn the tide against the rebels and created the conditions of a stalemate by the middle of 2013. The rebels themselves welcomed an intervention and attack by the United States on Assad’s forces, and Obama set out to make his case to the American people, arguing that the intervention was in the U.S. interest and would ensure American credibility and enforcement of international norms concerning weapons of mass destruction. The President’s comments on crossing a “red line” created a credibility problem that had repercussions on other proliferation standoffs, such as the conflicts with Iran and North Korea, as well as the general reliability of the United States to follow through on their threats. Further, not responding to Syria’s use of chemical weapons by the international community, according to President Obama, would embolden

tyrants the world over and could create conditions in which U.S. troops might face such weapons on the battlefield.⁷

The argument for intervention, which was proposed as a limited strike using cruise missiles targeting key Syrian Army positions with no “boots on the ground” fell flat. The Obama administration had little sway with a war weary American public, even in the face of chemical attacks on civilians. Members of Congress of both parties, including Democrats such as Senator Mark Udall (D-Colorado) and Representative Alan Grayson (D-Florida), advocated for voting against any resolution authorizing an attack. The rationale for the opposition was varied, but included a general concern that deeper involvement in a protracted conflict would be difficult, expensive, and dangerous in terms of retribution by Iran and Hezbollah against American interests and allies, including Israel. Further, there was concern that the attack advocated by the administration would not change the course of the conflict or do anything to help American interests other than damage their regional reputation and drag the country into another Middle East conflict. Public opinion was decidedly against the intervention, with 50% of the American people against the intervention, 29% for it, and 20% undecided.⁸ Luckily for the administration, no vote was needed, as Russia jumped on comments made by Secretary of State John Kerry that the United States would forgo a military strike in return for the decommissioning of the Syrian chemical weapon arsenal. On September 10, 2013, President Obama addressed the nation and asked Congress to delay votes on authorizing military strikes in Syria, allowing the chemical stockpile destruction agreement made with Russia and Syria to progress. The need to intervene was over.

This Syrian episode raises an important question: What does a state and its citizens get for intervening in a civil war? In this example, there was a clear division between the American public, exhausted from over a decade of wars in the Middle East, and many in the American foreign policy establishment, including the Obama administration, on the efficacy or usefulness of intervening in the Syrian civil war. The administration felt no need to intervene until there was clear evidence that chemical weapons had been used, and arguably only because President Obama had made public comments about the “red line.”⁹ On the other hand, Republican leaders such as McCain and Romney, the Republican Party’s top leaders at the time, argued that an intervention was an opportunity to push back Iranian influence in the region, something that would help Saudi Arabia and Israel, both U.S. allies in the region. Further, the radical group Hezbollah, a long time threat to Israeli security, would be badly damaged by losing their Syrian supporters, given the access to weapons, and safe haven that Syria has provided in the last two decades. Removing Assad would also break the Damascus–Moscow alliance, as Syria has remained one of the few close allies to Russia and acts as a destination for weapon sales in

the region, as well as the Russian naval outpost of Tartus. Further, the conflict threatened to destabilize other neighboring countries, including Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey. In short, the conflict in Syria was about a lot more than just chemical weapons use, as there were numerous American interests dependent on how the conflict plays out.

Yet the American people were not convinced that intervention was in their best interests. Perhaps it was fresh memories of American military involvement in the region, as many Americans know someone who had been deployed or had been exposed to the well-documented difficulties returning War on Terror veterans face. Further, a steady stream of bad news continued to emerge from Iraq and Afghanistan, and it was becoming increasingly clear that little stability had been brought to either nation after years of American involvement. This was further demonstrated by the gains made by the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL) in the summer of 2014. Further, many Americans were decidedly unclear about what benefits they gained personally from military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰ Clearly, no new major terrorist attacks had occurred, but beyond that it was unclear what Americans would receive from further involvement, particularly given how many American families' economic context was compromised during the 2008–2009 financial crisis and the bloated federal debt which had exceeded \$16 trillion dollars by 2012.

This book draws on the intuitive response many Americans had from the Syrian crisis, and addresses how states benefit from intervention, and how those benefits are distributed within the intervening state. I argue that interventions often produce substantial benefits for intervening states. However, these benefits, are retained by the political, economic, and security elite. Intervention as a policy is driven by elite interests, and the benefits of intervention are not distributed equally to the citizens of the intervening country, as interventions are designed to achieve limited elite interests and produce benefits that cannot be widely distributed to the public. This is a product of policy processes where political, economic, and security elites operate with rationalizations that are separate from the motivations, needs, and interests of the general public and dominate the security policy making process. Theory and findings from a range of subdisciplines within political science have concluded that individuals operate with some bounded logic dependent on their personal context in positions of power.¹¹ Policies and actions undertaken are therefore done based on their own (institutional and individual) rational interests and needs, not those of the general public. When applying this theory to examination of intervening in civil wars, the outcome of this dynamic is that states intervene into civil wars with the intent of securing elite benefits. Interventions are complex and layered, and thus unforeseen outcomes often hamper and reduce the benefits of intervention, and also alter how those benefits

line up with the original motivation/s for intervening. This project evaluates the distribution of intervention benefits by tracking the motivations and the decision-making process to intervene, and how intervening states fare on the back end of conflicts they involve themselves in. Using three case studies, I examine what motivates states to intervene, how intervention shapes conflict dynamics, the benefits produced, and how those benefits are distributed in the short and long term following an intervention. Detailing the distribution of benefits is the “what” of this project, while the “why” is the causal logic rooted in the notion that states and foreign policy are separate entities distinct and disconnected from their citizens, with elite interests diverging from nonelite citizens, combined with the pattern examined here interventions are prompted by narrow interests that return benefits that are difficult to distribute to the general public. In the end, elites gain from interventions, while citizens foot the bill and carry the burden of their state’s involvement in the affairs of others. The use of state power for narrow interests is not new; there is a long history of elites dominating the policy process with unfavorable outcomes for the general public. Nevertheless, little to no empirical research has examined the ways in which civil war intervention benefits elites versus general citizens in the intervening state. This project provides empirical evidence to the notion that civil war interventions are myopic policy choices that serve the short-term interests of elites.

INTERVENTION AND CIVIL WARS

States have long intervened into civil wars in other countries. Civil wars can be defined as intrastate conflicts between the government and a non-state actor, where that actor’s origins are from within the country. Between 1945 and 2009 over 150 civil conflicts took place, with the average conflict taking 143,883 lives.¹² At the end of the Cold War in 1991 there were over 50 active conflicts, a number that declined to 35 in 2000.¹³ In January 2014, 38 remained active with only 8 of those having more than 1,000 battle deaths in 2013.¹⁴ These numbers are both uplifting and troubling, as the world system has yet to rid itself of conflict and the senseless violence that accompanies it, yet the number of major state wars and even civil wars has been on the decline. Internal divisions based on ethnic, religious, and class divisions around the world continue to make consensus, strong central governments, and overall stability goals as opposed to accomplishments. Many states, especially those with lower rates of income, preindustrial economies, and those dominated by natural resource extraction and agricultural production, continue to struggle to maintain stability and order in their countries, as well as build trust in government institutions, which is essential for political stability.¹⁵

The outbreak of political violence and challenges to central government rule are common events, as the figures quoted above demonstrate. Many countries have faced civil strife if not outright war in the last 50 years under a range of conditions. Those conditions and the process of conflict have been the focus of scholarship from a range of fields, particularly political science. Conflict scholars have built a wealth of knowledge about the onset, duration, termination, and internal dynamics of these conflicts. Most prominently, the field has discovered how violent and bloody these conflicts can be. This is well illustrated by the Congolese Civil War, which since the late 1990s has claimed over 5 million lives, spread into neighboring states, and has become known for brutal attacks on women.

Throughout history leaders have determined that intervening into civil wars would produce benefits. One of the most compelling findings in the literature on civil wars is that civil wars are often internationalized, in that they extend beyond the simple domestic fight between a government and a rebel group, but draw in outside states and non-state actors. In fact, very few civil wars remain contained to the borders of the countries in conflict. Of the 150 civil wars between the end of World War II and 1999, some 97 of them had an intervention by a state or an international organization.¹⁶ Since the end of the Cold War the number of civil wars has been on the rise, and the Global War on Terror has continued to focus on civil conflict, given the international ramifications of conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, and now Syria, all of which have involved interventions. What researchers have discovered about these interventions is that “they last longer, cause more fatalities, and are more difficult to resolve through negotiations” as there are more actors with a stake in the outcome of the conflict (Salehyan et al. 2011, p. 710). There were 4,215 intervention years¹⁷ between 1975 and 2009, with 2,202 occurring after 1988, by some 286 states, Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), and non-state groups. On average the United States was involved in 17 interventions each year. The year 1990 saw the heaviest involvement, with the United States intervening in 26 conflicts around the world. Of the intervention years, 632 were conducted by non-state actors including Al-Qaeda, the Ogaden National Liberation Front, and the Islamic Development Bank, demonstrating that non-state actors also have the capacity to shape conflict dynamics.¹⁸

Interventions can take many different forms, can be direct or indirect, and states can support rebels or governments. Some states directly intervene and take part in the actual fighting. For example, in 1979 the Vietnamese government sent troops into Cambodia to support the Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation’s efforts to topple the Khmer Rouge, after Cambodian forces massacred civilians in the Vietnamese village of Ba Chue the previous year. Cuba sent 25,000 troops to Angola in 1975, and Tanzania sent troops to fight in Mozambique the same year. The United

States intervened in the Vietnam Civil War, and left after nearly 20 years with thousands dead and wounded, billions of dollars spent, a destroyed presidency, and a divided nation. Between 1975 and 2009, there were 652 intervention years where states had direct military involvement¹⁹ in a civil war.²⁰ Given the risks, states are less likely to militarily intervene directly into a conflict on behalf of a state, because states typically have their own militaries and can do their own fighting, thus reducing the cost of the intervention for the third party state. Of course, military intervention does happen. Take, for example, the U.S. Special Forces targeting Al Shabaab militants in Somali with the approval of the state.²¹ The evidence suggests direct interventions are high risk but lead to higher control, relative to indirect interventions.

A more common government to government intervention is through indirect means, such as providing weapons, financial support, access to territory, training, and intelligence support. The United States has supported numerous governments militarily to fight rebel groups. For example, as discussed above, Iran has played a major role in arming and supplying the Assad regime in Syria in their fight against the Syrian Free Army and other rebel groups.²² States also intervene on behalf of rebel groups indirectly. Such indirect support can come in the form of training, resources, weapons, use of territory and financial support. For example, the Soviet Union supported leftist movements all over the world during the Cold War, as did the United States without putting troops on the ground in those conflicts. President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was known to support the Colombian rebel group the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), while Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi supported European groups such as the Basque separatist group the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (E.T.A), and the Irish Republican Army.²³ States often maintain a surplus of weapons and financial surplus to enable intervention in such conflicts. Indirect interventions offer states the ability to distance themselves from the conflicts and allow them to give as little or as much as they like. Such flexibility is obviously attractive to state leaders whose political, security, and economic situation can shift rapidly.

Few interventions utilize a direct approach. Fifteen percent of all intervention years from 1975 until 2009 involved direct interventions: only 11% of interventions relied on a direct military intervention,²⁴ and 6% utilized both a direct and indirect approach. While 90% of interventions included some indirect role, 84% were solely indirect interventions, indicating that a favorite choice of policy makers is to intervene indirectly into conflicts. This project only examines indirect interventions for two main reasons. First, as mentioned they are the primary choice for state leaders making up the vast majority of interventions into civil wars. Second, direct military interventions conflate intra- and interstate wars, making theorizing about their onset, processes, duration, and outcome difficult. By examining only indirect interventions,

this project can provide a more narrow and accurate analysis on this specific policy without involving the complicated element of interstate conflict.

When choosing to intervene indirectly, states have several options and often favor some strategies over others. Using the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data,²⁵ Figure 1.1 captures the different types of interventions utilized over the 1975–2009 period, and demonstrates the breakdown of strategies employed, however, this does not capture nonviolent or neutral-based intervention tactics such as mediation or other diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflicts; only biased interventions where the intervening party is clearly siding with one side or the other are examined. The breakdown of the tactics reveals the approach and the type of policy states utilize.

Key to any successful military operation is weapons, something provided in 45% of all interventions.²⁶ Weapons can be as simple as small arms, such as assault rifles, which are typically used to assist rebels, but can also involve more complex weapon systems such as artillery. Famously, the United States provided stinger missiles to the Mujahedeen near the end of the Afghanistan conflict with the Soviet Union. State-to-state assistance can also include more complex systems such as aircraft, ships, and other technology transfers. For example, the Russian government continued shipping arms to the Assad regime in Syria through 2013, including training aircraft and other weapons systems, in order to bolster Syrian capabilities. Weapons are clearly an easy tool for interveners; they carry great influence in shaping the context of the conflict, and rebel groups and states can change their tactics and

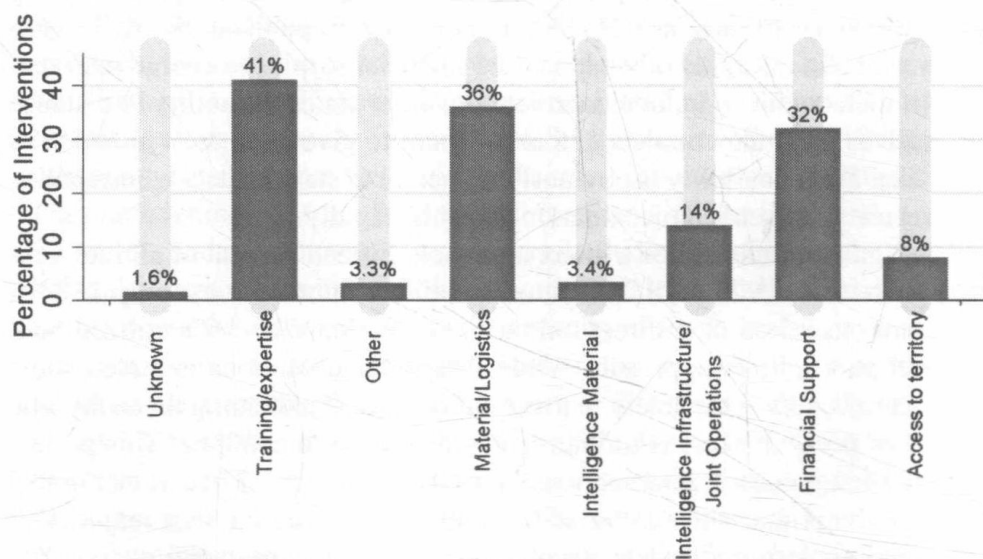


Figure 1.1 Percentage of Indirect Interventions Utilizing Different Intervention Strategies 1975–2009. *Source:* Högbladh et al. 2011.

thus outcomes on the battlefield with new, more sophisticated weapons or simply more of them. Weapons are separated from material support, which was used in 33% of interventions between 1975–2009. Material support can include clothing, transportation, or medical supplies, essentially anything that is not considered to be a weapon but is helpful and necessary for a successful military campaign. Logistical support is also included in the material category, and can include something as useful as transportation support. For example, as discussed below, the French assisted the revolutionary army with naval support, giving Washington its own navy ships.²⁷

Another common type of indirect intervention during the period of study was training and expertise, with 41% of all interventions involving some type of training. Training can occur by bringing rebels into the intervening state to train, or by supporting states sending military trainers to a state. For example, the U.S. military sends military advisors abroad to conduct trainings and assessments, such as the 2014 deployment of 600 military advisors to Iraq to assess Iraq's Army's capacity to combat ISIL, but also trains foreign military personnel on their own soil,²⁸ such as the U.S.'s School of the Americas, renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.²⁹ Training can consist of weapons instruction, logistics, medical, leadership, and other core functions essential for any successful military organization. Training requires the presence of seasoned and experienced leaders, facilities, and related resources (e.g. food, clothes, equipment to train on, etc.). Running a successful military operation with disciplined soldiers is not easy, and thus having the proper training can make a significant difference in the field. The importance of training is evident in chapter 5, which examines India's role in the Sri Lankan Civil War. This intervention started with training of Tamil Tigers in India, when the organization was small and weak. The training provided discipline, technical assistance, and helped consolidate leadership in the organization, resulting in the Tigers becoming one of the more sophisticated and long-lasting rebel groups of the last 50 years. Rebels are not the only recipients of training. States often use military training programs, especially major powers, to facilitate the development of official military capabilities in other states. For example, the U.S. government provides military training to dozens of countries under several programs, including the International Military Education and Training program (IMET), the Professional Military Exchange (PME) program, Unit Exchange, and the U.S. Security Assistance Training Program (SATP), costing U.S. tax payers millions of dollars each year.³⁰ Training is a primary form of intervention that can bolster the capability, discipline, and overall success of a military organization.

Related to material and logistical support is outright financial support, which was used in 36% of interventions between 1975–2009.³¹ Details on how much money was involved is not provided by the UCDP data, and the

research conducted in this project on specific dollar amounts transferred was minimal given the secrecy and nature of funding. Nevertheless, data does suggest that states offer rebel groups and countries outright financial support. For rebel groups this means cash. This is illustrated in chapter 4, which examines the link between Libya and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Philippines. Findings suggest that an estimated \$42 million was transferred over the course of this intervention. Exactly how MNLF used the financial assistance from Libya is unclear, but it was certainly used to further the MNLF cause. Clearly, each conflict has its own context and rebel groups will have an array of needs; they may be weapons rich but not have the required medical supplies, food, and transportation resources needed to be successful. Compared to other forms of assistance, state-to-state financial assistance is more straightforward, as intervening states can offer support via legitimate currency exchanges and other financial tools. Unless a country is under some international banking sanctions, these types of transfers are relatively easy for states to make, while state to rebel contacts and exchanges face more complicated hurdles on the pathway to success.

There are several other intervention strategies that are utilized by states, including material intelligence and intelligence infrastructure, which make up 3% and 14% of intervention strategies used, respectively. The UCDP dataset separates intelligence infrastructure and material intelligence. Material intelligence is the actual data collected from the field, such as satellite photos and intercepted communications. Intelligence infrastructure involves the technology advances used to capture communications and other pieces of intelligence.³² Having additional information sources are critical, especially for rebel groups whose resources are limited. Useable intelligence can save lives and money, as opposed to costly allocations toward operations doomed from the onset. Modern capabilities such as communication intercepts and satellite imagery can make a world of difference, as reliable intelligence is both costly and in short supply for most conflict actors.

Access to territory is also a critical tool used by intervening states. Such access is especially helpful for rebel groups given their lack of safe havens, which are needed to regroup, train new recruits, tend to the injured, and safely import weapons and supplies. Take the recent actions of Rwanda, for example, who provided the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), a Tutsi dominated rebel group fighting the Congolese state in the 2000s, access to territory in addition to material support and training, tools that were critical to the CNDP's operations. Safe havens from the conflict zones are a clear benefit for rebel groups, and can also be of help for states who are given access to neighboring states to pursue their rebel groups. For example, how helpful would it be to Colombia if Ecuador would allow the Colombian government to pursue FARC rebels across the border as

opposed to creating an international incident such as the 2008 Andean Crisis. These are also cheap policy options for states, who are seeking the benefit of intervention without having to incur great costs.

States tend to utilize more than one strategy when intervening in civil wars. According to the UCDP data, 52.8% of states used one or more tactics, while only 47% used one.³³ Fifty-five percent of states who directly intervened utilized an indirect strategy in addition to direct interventions. States who only indirectly intervened tended to use more than one strategy. For example, South Africa's intervention into Angola and their support for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), who were fighting the Soviet backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), made up 10 of the 12 intervention years in the entire dataset where six or more strategies were used.³⁴ South Africa provided UNITA with a direct military intervention, access to territory, weapons, material, training, and financial support. A common combination of strategies was weapons and materials, with 34% of indirect interventions utilizing these combined strategies. It was less common to see a direct intervention and access to territory combined.

Most states in the world today, 148 of them, intervened into civil wars in the 1975–2009 period. There were 4,237 intervention years in this time period.

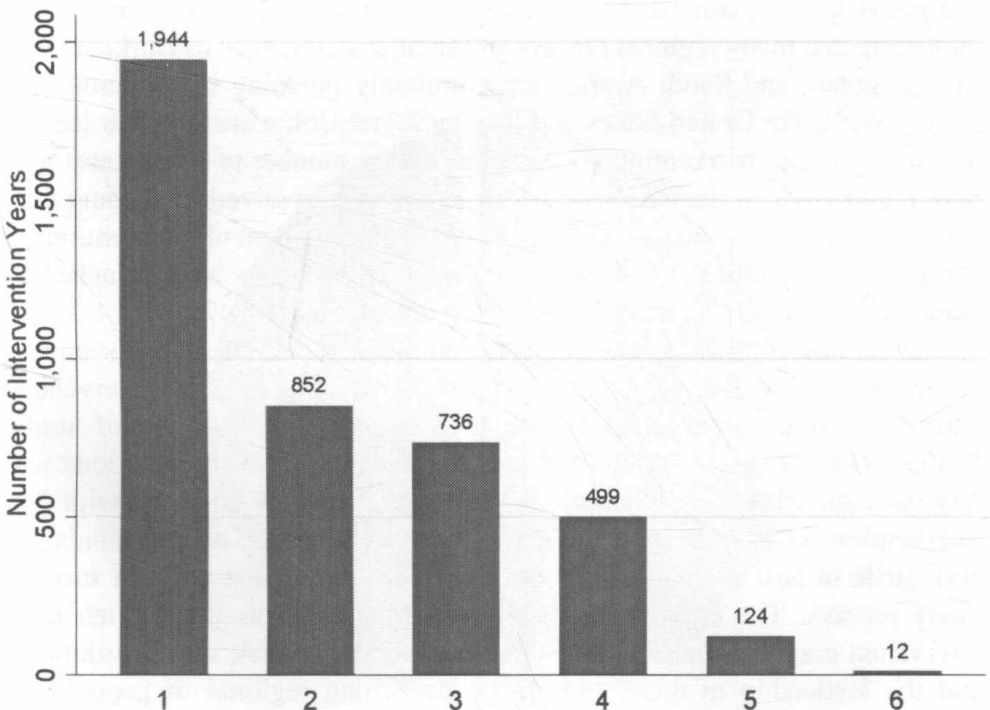


Figure 1.2 Number of Strategies Employed in Same Intervention Year. *Source:* Högbladh et al. 2011.

During this time period, the United States conducted 592 of the intervention years, or 14%, followed by the Soviet Union/Russia with 308, or 7%, of intervention years. Interventions are not just the purview of major states, however. Small states, such as Burkina Faso and Venezuela, have involved themselves in civil conflicts as they had 7 and 12 intervention years, respectively.³⁵ A complete list of the number of interventions by country can be found in Appendix, and readers will discover that states of all sizes intervene in civil wars. As Lemke and Regan (2004) argue, there are two types of states who do *not* intervene: those which review the tradeoffs of intervention and find that the costs are too high or the probability of success too low, and those that do not care about the civil war and do not consider intervening.³⁶ States that do intervene most frequently are those with the resources and the political capital to make an intervention worthwhile. This demonstrates that some states have more motivation and means to intervene than others. This will not be a new concept to many International Relations observers. As a superpower, the United States in particular³⁷ has worked to maintain global stability, a prime interest of the country. The notion that superpowers have more propensity to intervene is rooted in notions of power and control over the international system. Hegemonic Stability Theory, Realist thought, and theories of polarity all argue that certain states have more resources, power, influence, and thus motivation to act in the international system.³⁸ However, only 29% of intervention years were carried out by major powers in the 1975–2009 time period, indicating that many regional powers and smaller states, such as Burkina Faso, Libya, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia, are commonly pursuing intervention as a policy. While the United States and Russia/Soviet Union are the clear leaders in implementing intervention policies, there are a number of other states who play minor roles in the international stage who are involved in shaping civil war outcomes and dynamics. Given the U.S.'s employment of interventions, it is not surprising that a slight majority of intervention years were launched by democracies with 58%, while authoritarian states make up 42%.

The number of states who have experienced represent a much smaller group, relative to the number of countries who have acted as interveners. Only 77 countries experienced interventions during the period of study. In the 1975–2009 time period the country with the most interventions was Afghanistan, with 850 intervention years, followed by Ethiopia, with 360 intervention years. Clearly, these are two well-known battlegrounds for civil strife in past decades, and their placement on this list will not surprise many readers. The countries appearing in Figure 1.3 as the top ten most intervened countries can be characterized as having weak state institutions, and the leadership in these countries have strong regional or geopolitical implications. Afghanistan's central location and attraction as a country to intervene has brought in numerous interventions by both state and non-state