

Connecticut Debate Association

March 2, 2013

Darien High School, Guilford High School and Pomperaug High School

Resolved: The US should not intervene militarily in foreign countries.

Why there will be no foreign military intervention in Syria

The Christian Science Monitor , By John Hubbel Weiss / July 3, 2012

Last weekend's international conference in Geneva seeking agreement on a path to resolving the crisis and escalating violence in Syria produced vague proposals for a transition government unlikely to go anywhere but Kofi Annan's personal archive. Despite this failure, new Human Rights Watch reports of systematic torture by the Assad regime, and the continuing call for intervention from many activists, including the Free Syrian Army, it is unlikely that there will be any armed foreign intervention in Syria as there was in Libya.

The tactical situation in Libya made intervention relatively easy: Essentially all that was needed to prevent a massacre of civilians in Benghazi was to interdict Muammar Qaddafi's forces along a single road running eastward along the Mediterranean shore to that city. This was done, and lives were saved. Such a situation does not exist in Syria, where the planes or missiles would have to attack formations surrounding many cities and towns as well as locate the bases of the less visible government-sponsored militias.

Whereas Libya's regime was unpopular with just about everybody in the Arab world and the West, Syria – and the regime of Bashar al-Assad – is Russia's last remaining ally in the region as well as the most important ally of Iran.

Various international agreements made since 1945 might seem to give legitimacy to international intervention, specifically to attempts to give effective aid to victims attacked by the Syrian government and its militias.

Chapter VII of the UN charter authorizes “such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.” French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius invoked this provision in mid June 13 when he said France would push the UN Security Council to enforce Kofi Annan's peace plan and ceasefire. A probable ongoing Russian veto in the Security Council makes such a resolution unlikely to be adopted.

The would-be interveners would be left with only a “Kosovo” option: NATO actions, independent of the UN. Yet even in the Kosovo crisis, the Serbian defeat depended on Russia's eventual withdrawal of support for Milosevic as much as it did NATO's bombing.

The Genocide Convention of 1948, signed by almost all countries, has not prevented any genocide from running its course, whether in Cambodia, Guatemala, Rwanda, or Sudan. In any case, policy advisers would probably say that this convention does not apply to Syria because the targets of the regime do not fit the convention's criteria: They are not a “national, ethnical, racial, or religious group;” they are “merely” political opponents, a category not included in the convention.

More relevant is the “Responsibility to Protect” resolution passed unanimously by the UN in 2005 accepting the responsibility of all governments to protect citizens of any other country being attacked by their own governments. The Responsibility to Protect resolution, however, leaves many avenues for states to escape having to intervene effectively, an escape that has proven to be the preferred option in cases like Sudan.

Mr. Assad has successfully kept out the international press and has prompted the failure of the UN monitor mission by restrictions and deliberately inadequate protection. The operators of amateur social media have not been able to compensate effectively for such blockage. World leaders could be hesitant to create an intervention policy based on the killing of children, for example, when it is not fully clear who did the killing.

They have perhaps learned a lesson from the babies allegedly killed in Kuwait in 1990 by Saddam Hussein's soldiers according to the congressional testimony of Kuwaiti diplomats. When investigators attempted to confirm these stories after Iraq was expelled from Kuwait in 1991, they turned out to be fabrications.

Despite its rhetoric condemning the Syrian regime, there is also reason to doubt that Washington really wants Assad to fall. Assad's regime is “the devil we know,” and one with demonstrated weaknesses: Witness its expulsion from Lebanon and its defeats by Israel. At the same time, it has a professional and mostly loyal army and an identifiable and mostly loyal power base in one-fifth of the population: the Alawite and Christian minorities.

The Free Syrian Army and other adversaries of Assad are far less professional and unified, with a possibly far more volatile power base, the country's Sunni Muslim majority.

Nor does the American and UN response to the Sudanese government's atrocities give Syrians cause to hope for a rescue. Senators Lieberman and McCain have called for giving military support to the Syrian rebels. Despite the fact that in Darfur alone the Sudanese government under Omar al-Bashir has caused the death of nearly a 100 times more civilians and created 80 times more refugees than Assad has done in Syria, the United States has never seen fit to arm Darfur rebels.

Elie Wiesel has called for Assad to be charged with crimes against humanity. Although such a charge would serve as a gesture of moral concern and solidarity with the Syrian people, it would probably not deter the Syrian president from continuing his attacks. After all, an International Criminal Court indictment for genocide has not caused any change in the intensity of Sudanese president Mr. Bashir's 22-year-long string of atrocities against the people of Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, Abyei, the South, and elsewhere in Sudan.

It is more than likely, therefore, that an assessment of American and international policy toward intervention in the Libyan and Sudanese cases will do little to shake the Syrian government's confidence that it can continue down a path of the most ruthless repression.

The Syrian people themselves, with an enduring courage that has prompted a growing but still small number of high Syrian officers to abandon the regime, are the only ones who will convince Assad it is time to choose a less murderous path.

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Direct foreign intervention is the only feasible option for Syria crisis

The Christian Science Monitor , By Brock Dahl / July 3, 2012

Over the weekend in Geneva, world powers penned a vague agreement to support the establishment of a transitional government in Syria – potentially composed of members of the opposition and the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The purported solution appears ill fitted to the reality on the ground, however, and a new Human Rights Watch report details widespread, systematic torture by the Assad regime.

Direct intervention is quickly appearing to be the only feasible means for halting gross human rights violations, stabilizing the conflict, and ensuring a sustainable transition.

The Geneva proposal, which was agreed upon by the United States, Russia, China, the Arab League, the European Union, and others, makes calls for a state of equilibrium and transition without providing a definitive road map to such a state. This crippling ambiguity may be an inevitable result of Russia's support for, and Western nations' opposition of, the Assad regime. Given those differences, however, it is difficult to imagine how such an ambiguity can be corrected.

Regrettably, the scale of the atrocities in Syria to date, the lack of buy-in from key opposition groups such as the Free Syrian Army, and the vagaries of this last-ditch proposal make any prospect for peaceful co-existence between Assad and Syria's population remote.

Poignantly, the Assad regime has reportedly engaged in war crimes for which it must eventually be held to account, and stands to lose the political and economic hegemony that underlies its existence. The opposition, in turn, foresees a future under Assad in which it would be subjected to even more repressive and humiliating strictures.

In short, both sides of the Syrian conflict appear to be nearing, if they have not already crossed, a point of no return into a zero-sum fight for their very survival. In such a climate, the Geneva agreement offers no reasonable means for setting the conditions necessary to a peaceful settlement, and any means short of intervention seem increasingly unlikely to do so.

To be certain, America cannot act as a global policeman that deploys troops to every crisis-ridden situation. An ill-defined principle of intervention could stretch our forces and resources too thin to be effective while still responsibly honoring our core national security priorities. But whatever principle is most appropriate, it seems clear that the increasingly common atrocities in Syria would be well beyond its threshold for tolerance.

What would tactically constitute the most effective way to intervene is a question for military experts. In the face of negligible commitments to human dignity by China and Russia, their ability to block UN Security Council action, and the likelihood that Russia is actually aiding the Syrian regime, it is arguable that a smaller group of nations will have to find a way to stop further destabilization.

Nonetheless, there are significant reasons to hesitate when considering intervention in Syria. No doubt, the specter of Iraq's civil conflict, the rise of a potentially intolerant and abusive strain of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the infighting in Libya must haunt the thoughts of those responsible for such a decision. There are counterpoints to these legitimate concerns, however.

With respect to the legacy of Iraq, an overwhelming show of force in Syria now (whether through properly focused assistance or more direct allied action) could eliminate the most dangerous actors within Syria: groups who would seek to create the type of prolonged conflict suffered by Iraqis. Immediate action could also dissuade parties who are still riding the fence from choosing sides and violently engaging.

In addition, concerns about the identity of the resistance movement are well founded. A responsible intervention requires that the US and its allies understand which elements of the resistance would ensure the implementation of an open, democratic governance structure. Clearly, moreover, it is unacceptable to abet attacks on civilians such as those in which some elements of the opposition have allegedly engaged. But there are ways to focus assistance on the most promising allies while constraining the influence of Salafist or other radical ideologies.

Finally, options exist to address post regime-change infighting such as we have seen in Libya. For starters, transition governments, and the international community on whose assistance they often depend, must ensure that robust law enforcement and judicial institutions can act to immediately contain local unrest. Doing so will channel disputes about the future of the country, which might otherwise turn violent, towards legitimate, political forums.

Ensuring the end of the Assad regime, if done properly, also has strategic benefits for the US that policymakers should consider. In Muslim societies, the concept of justice enjoys a place of hallowed reverence akin to the idea of freedom in the United States. Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to justice in defense of Syria's civilians could build goodwill that would pay big dividends as a new government emerges after Assad is gone.

Moreover, this commitment to toppling the Assad regime could help sever the lifeline, running through Syria, between Hezbollah and its patron, Iran. Finally, removing Assad from Syria would further isolate Iran, providing timely leverage against one of America's greatest foes.

A decision to intervene in Syria is complex and daunting. Yet, the escalating atrocities, the remote likelihood for a negotiated settlement in the current state of conflict, and the numerous strategic benefits, provide sufficient grounds for the US and a group of allies to act. No people will tolerate the intolerable forever, and the people of Syria will eventually see that justice is done in their homeland. America and other nations of goodwill would do well to ensure they have our full support.

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Why We Must Help Save Mali

The New York Times, January 14, 2013, By VICKI HUDDLESTON

FRENCH airstrikes that began on Friday have stopped, for now, a network of terrorists, criminals and religious extremists from taking over Mali. Until the French stepped in, the near-collapse of the military had threatened to turn Mali, a landlocked, desperately poor country, into a desert stronghold for jihadists.

America, which has spent more than \$500 million over the last four years to keep Islamist militants at bay in West Africa, has its hands full in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Libya, among other places, but it is in our national interest to support the French. North African countries, in particular Algeria, must also help save Mali from catastrophe.

This conflict is not like other African wars that had only marginal effects on the West. The Islamists in Mali have linked up with Boko Haram, the Nigerian militant group that blew up United Nations offices in Abuja in 2011, and with Ansar al-Shariah, which is thought to be responsible for the murders last September of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya.

The French aerial attacks have stopped the Islamists — including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, its offshoot the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, and Ansar Dine, a group of Tuareg rebels from the north — from seizing an airport and river port, and marching on the capital, Bamako. But the militants are reconstituting and rearming in their northern desert stronghold.

The United States need not put combat troops on the ground. Instead, we should provide intelligence, equipment, financing and training for a West African intervention force that the United Nations Security Council approved in

December (but did not finance). The French will not be able to depart quickly — even if the West African force is assembled, France will have to mentor and coordinate troops from its former colonies like Mauritania, Niger and Chad.

International cooperation has been effective against Al-Shabab, a Qaeda affiliate in Somalia, and it can succeed in Mali. In Somalia, American troops and contractors trained and equipped African Union troops, including soldiers from Uganda and Burundi. Together with a new Somali army, they pushed Shabab terrorists out of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia last year.

North Africa, not West Africa, is the key to saving Mali. One proposal, to have Nigeria lead a coalition of West African forces in Mali, has little chance of success; Nigeria lacks the capacity to fight a guerrilla war or an urban war. It has English-speaking Christian troops who might exacerbate Mali's ethnic and religious tensions, and its heavy-handed attempts to counter its own Boko Haram extremists have so far failed.

Algeria is the only country on the continent with the military capacity, seasoned officers, counterterrorism experience and geographic proximity to take over from France in bringing peace to Mali. Algeria's military leaders know the extremists' tactics and their leaders. It defeated them in a civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002 and resulted in extremists' setting up terrorist operations in northern Mali. Algeria has a moral responsibility to act, but if it continues to stay on the sidelines, then Morocco or another North African country should take the lead — with support from Niger, Mauritania, Mali and Chad, which, like Algeria, have been fighting Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb for the past eight years.

Algeria is also essential to ending the rebellion of the nomadic Tuareg, who are culturally, ethnically and linguistically North African and resist the rule of the sub-Saharan ethnic groups that run Mali. Their rebellion began in late 2011, when Tuareg fighters who had fought in Libya alongside its deposed ruler, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, returned home. They joined with Islamist militants who had moved in to northern Mali from Algeria, but the Islamists then turned on many of the Tuaregs and consolidated power.

Algeria has negotiated the peace during past Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali and can do so again. The key to peace in Mali is to first defeat the Islamist insurgents and then for Bamako to negotiate autonomy for the northern nomads — who, in concert with the African peacekeepers, will be responsible for their defense. The arrangement might look something like that of Somaliland, a region of northern Somalia that has held democratic elections, maintained peace and become a de facto sovereign state.

Mali's army has never effectively controlled the region north of the Niger River; its troops fear the warlike nomads. A tribal chief in northern Mali once told me, "If you want to control the Sahara, you will have to work with us. We have been masters of the desert for thousands of years and we will continue to rule here."

Years of training by United States Special Forces did not stop the Malian military from fleeing when the Islamist insurgency started last January. In fact, the military exacerbated the chaos by overthrowing Mali's democratically elected government last March.

Reconstituting Mali's broken government and discredited military will take years, but making sure that Mali doesn't become a launchpad for terrorism is an even greater priority. France has begun to exercise leadership; the United States must not dither in doing its share.

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The Lessons of the Afghanistan War, 12 Years Later

US News & World Report, By Robert Nolan, October 11, 2012

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It's been said that those who don't remember history are bound to repeat it. But Americans seem to want nothing more than to forget about the war in Afghanistan. Sunday marked the start of the 12th year of U.S. military operations there, making it the longest war ever fought in our nation's history, but you sure wouldn't know it from reading the news media. Indeed, the dearth of coverage related to the war's anniversary was even more conspicuous as NATO defense leaders met in Brussels to chart the end of combat operations there in 2014, and Mitt Romney continues to make foreign policy a new pillar of his campaign.

Public Opinion

Despite billions invested and the loss of more than 2,000 brave U.S. soldiers, Americans long ago tuned out events in Afghanistan. As I noted in my post last week, a whopping 67 percent of those polled told the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) that the war in Afghanistan was "not worth it" and seven out of 10 said the war has not made the United States any more safe from terrorism. Nearly two thirds of Americans supported the war effort in 2002. What a difference a decade makes.

On the campaign trail, President Barack Obama rarely mentions Afghanistan outside of the context of drawing down and bringing home American troops. His rival Mitt Romney learned early in his campaign that discussing Afghanistan—even in the context of the withdrawal as a politically-driven decision by President Obama—was a lightning rod for a war-weary American public, though he's attempted to reassert this case as of late.

As Ian Bremmer of the Eurasia Group has stated simply, "The American appetite for global intervention is going to decrease. There aren't many Americans who want to keep going in Afghanistan after 2014." (The exception might be Lara Logan of *60 Minutes*, who gave an [impassioned speech in support of intervention](#) to the Better Government Association in Chicago last week.)

Mission Accomplished?

The complicated nature of this long, drawn out conflict has contributed greatly to the erosion of public support over the years, which even policymakers have been at ends to understand. For the past three months, I've interviewed scores of top NATO and U.S. officials, as well as think tank experts, about national security issues and intervention for the upcoming season of [Great Decisions in Foreign Policy](#) on PBS. Many of them addressed the situation in Afghanistan.

"One of the reasons we're in trouble in Afghanistan is because we went well beyond our mission. We accomplished the mission then we took our eye off the ball and intervened, invaded Iraq, and occupied Iraq," former Sen. Chuck Hagel, now chairman of the Atlantic Council, told me at the NATO summit in Chicago last May. "And now, 12 years later, we're not sure what our mission is. Is our mission to eliminate the Taliban? That never was our mission. Is it nation building? Is it sending children to school? Is it building sewer systems? Is it going after al Qaeda?"

While the answer to the former senator's question from American and NATO leaders might once have been "all of the above," today it's much more narrow in scope.

"I think we have succeeded in what we laid out as the goal right from the outset," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in a recent interview from NATO headquarters in Brussels. "The reason why we are in Afghanistan is that we want to prevent a country from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorist who could use that safe haven as a launching spot for terrorist attacks against United States or Europe. And since the international operations in Afghanistan started, we have clearly seen that Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists."

Lessons Learned

So what are the lessons learned for the United States and its allies in Afghanistan? While it would be tough to examine them all comprehensively in a blog post, many of the experts I interviewed offered some insights.

"Initially the U.S. went about pursuing Al Qaeda and Afghanistan in the right way, which was committing small numbers of special forces and CIA operatives working with the locals to overthrow the Taliban in pursue of al Qaeda," says terrorism analyst Will McCants.

In many respects, that is the direction war fighting efforts have taken, particularly in neighboring Pakistan, where anti-American terrorist elements remain. According to the Foreign Policy Association's National Opinion Ballot Report due out next week, 74 percent of engaged Americans said the United States should increase its efforts fighting insurgents in Pakistan. There, the controversial use of armed drones have introduced an effective new weapon for achieving U.S. goals there.

"Before the Afghanistan invasion the U.S. had 2 drones—one was armed one was not," according to Micah Zenko of the Council on Foreign Relations. "Today we have 7,500 drones and 400-500 of them can be armed. So we have more capability."

Retired Gen. Richard Meyers, who was head of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, says cultural issues also challenged the U.S. and its allies. "I think we've learned a lot about how culture plays a role in what we do post-conflict, after major combat," he said. "As well as we thought we'd studied the culture—and I'm not just talking about the DoD [Department of Defense], the U.S. government, other governments, NATO for that matter—in Afghanistan our understanding was pretty naïve at first."

Other lessons learned, according to NATO's Secretary-General and others, is the importance of getting training missions started early. "In future operations we should establish training missions at much early stage than we did in

Afghanistan with the aim to hand over responsibility for security to local security forces," he said. "Politically, it's much better to give the defense of a specific country to a local face than to deploy foreign troops for a very long time. And economically, it's also less expensive to train and educate local security forces to conduct combat operations than to deploy foreign troops. Training activities are the main lessons learned from Afghanistan."

Indeed, so-called "green on blue" attacks carried out against NATO forces by the very troops they are training have dominated headlines in recent months, claiming the lives of 53 allied soldiers this year. Both the Red Cross and the respected International Crisis group have warned that Afghanistan risks "sliding into collapse." And a *New York Times* piece last week said that the United States and its NATO allies have all but given up on reaching some kind of peace deal with the Taliban that might leave the country in a position to sort itself out after 2014.

It will take much more than that for Americans to reengage with Afghanistan, according to Bremer. "If Afghanistan falls apart, falls apart worse, after the U.S. leaves in 2014, that's a problem for the U.S., more terrorism," he said. "But it's a much bigger problem for Afghanistan, for Pakistan, and for China, and India. What we are looking at is an environment where the world's policeman, for many decades, getting all of our allies with us, is suddenly just not willing to be the traffic cop on every beat."

As fighting in Syria rages on and interventionists call for a U.S. response to the attacks on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, perhaps Afghanistan is a moment in history we wish to remember.

Top 10 Lessons of the Iraq War

Foreign Policy Magazine, BY STEPHEN M. WALT | MARCH 20, 2012

Now that the war is officially over and most U.S. forces have withdrawn, what are the most important takeaways?

This month marks the ninth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Regardless of your views on the wisdom of that decision, it's fair to say that the results were not what most Americans expected. Now that the war is officially over and most U.S. forces have withdrawn, what lessons should Americans (and others) draw from the experience? There are many lessons that one might learn, of course, but here are my Top 10 Lessons from the Iraq War.

Lesson #1: The United States lost. The first and most important lesson of Iraq war is that we didn't win in any meaningful sense of that term. The alleged purpose of the war was eliminating Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, but it turns out he didn't have any. Oops. Then the rationale shifted to creating a pro-American democracy, but Iraq today is at best a quasi-democracy and far from pro-American. The destruction of Iraq improved Iran's position in the Persian Gulf -- which is hardly something the United States intended -- and the costs of the war (easily exceeding \$1 trillion dollars) are much larger than U.S. leaders anticipated or promised. The war was also a giant distraction, which diverted the Bush administration from other priorities (e.g., Afghanistan) and made the United States much less popular around the world.

This lesson is important because supporters of the war are already marketing a revisionist version. In this counternarrative, the 2007 surge was a huge success (it wasn't, because it failed to produce political reconciliation) and Iraq is now on the road to stable and prosperous democracy. And the costs weren't really that bad. Another variant of this myth is the idea that President George W. Bush and Gen. David Petraeus had "won" the war by 2008, but President Obama then lost it by getting out early. This view ignores the fact that the Bush administration negotiated the 2008 Status of Forces agreement that set the timetable for U.S. withdrawal, and Obama couldn't stay in Iraq once the Iraqi government made it clear it wanted us out.

The danger of this false narrative is obvious: If Americans come to see the war as a success -- which it clearly wasn't -- they may continue to listen to the advice of its advocates and be more inclined to repeat similar mistakes in the future.

Lesson #2: It's not that hard to hijack the United States into a war. The United States is still a very powerful country, and the short-term costs of military action are relatively low in most cases. As a result, wars of choice (or even "wars of whim") are possible. The Iraq war reminds us that if the executive branch is united around the idea of war, normal checks and balances -- including media scrutiny -- tend to break down.

The remarkable thing about the Iraq war is how few people it took to engineer. It wasn't promoted by the U.S. military, the CIA, the State Department, or oil companies. Instead, the main architects were a group of well-connected neoconservatives, who began openly lobbying for war during the Clinton administration. They failed to persuade President Bill Clinton, and they were unable to convince Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney to opt for war until after 9/11. But at that point the stars aligned, and Bush and Cheney became convinced that invading Iraq

would launch a far-reaching regional transformation, usher in a wave of pro-American democracies, and solve the terrorism problem.

As the *New York Times*' Thomas Friedman told *Ha'aretz* in May 2003: "Iraq was the war neoconservatives wanted... the war the neoconservatives marketed.... I could give you the names of 25 people (all of whom are at this moment within a five-block radius of this office [in Washington]) who, if you had exiled them to a desert island a year and half ago, the Iraq war would not have happened."

Lesson #3: The United States gets in big trouble when the "marketplace of ideas" breaks down and when the public and our leadership do not have an open debate about what to do.

Given the stakes involved, it is remarkable how little serious debate there actually was about the decision to invade. This was a bipartisan failure, as both conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats all tended to jump onboard the bandwagon to war. And mainstream media organizations became cheerleaders rather than critics. Even within the halls of government, individuals who questioned the wisdom of the invasion or raised doubts about the specific plans were soon marginalized. As a result, not only did the United States make a bone-headed decision, but the Bush administration went into Iraq unprepared for the subsequent occupation.

Lesson #4: The secularism and middle-class character of Iraqi society was overrated. Before the war, advocates argued that democracy would be easy to install in Iraq because it had a highly literate population and a robust middle class, and because sectarianism was minimal. Of course, the people who said things like this apparently knew nothing about Iraq itself and even less about the difficulty of building democracy in a country like Iraq. This failure is especially striking insofar as Iraq's turbulent pre-Saddam history was hardly a secret. But a realistic view of Iraq clashed with the neocons' effort to sell the war, so they sold a fairy tale version instead.

Lesson #5: Don't listen to ambitious exiles. The case for war was strengthened by misleading testimony from various Iraqi exiles, who had an obvious interest in persuading Washington to carry them to power. Unfortunately, U.S. leaders were unaware of Machiavelli's prescient warnings about the danger of trusting the testimony of self-interested foreigners. As he wrote in his *Discourses*:

"How vain the faith and promises of men who are exiles from their country. Such is their extreme desire to return to their homes that they naturally believe many things that are not true, and add many others on purpose, so that with what they really believe and what they say they believe, they will fill you with hopes to that degree that if you attempt to act upon them, you will incur a fruitless expense or engage in an undertaking that will involve you in ruin."

Two words: Ahmed Chalabi.

Lesson #6: It's very hard to improvise an occupation.

As the Army's official history of the occupation notes dryly: "conditions in Iraq proved to be wildly out of sync with prewar assumptions." Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Co. assumed that standing up a new Iraqi government would be quick work and that the light U.S. force would head home almost immediately. But when conditions deteriorated, U.S. leaders -- both civilian and military -- were extremely slow to realize that they faced a wholly different situation. And, as *FP* colleague Thomas Ricks has documented, once the U.S. military found itself facing a genuine insurgency, it took *years* before it began to adjust its tactics and strategy in a serious way. We tend to think of the U.S. military as a highly intelligent fighting force -- after all, we've got all those intelligence services, think tanks, in-house analysis operations, war colleges, etc. -- yet this case reminds us that the defense establishment is also big and unwieldy organization that doesn't improvise quickly.

Lesson #7: Don't be surprised when adversaries act to defend their own interests, and in ways we won't like.

This lesson seems obvious: Adversaries will pursue their own interests. But the architects of the Iraq war seem to have blindly assumed that other interested parties would simply roll over and cooperate with us after a little bit of "shock and awe." Instead, various actors took steps to defend their own interests or to take advantage of the evolving situation, often in ways that confounded U.S. efforts. Thus, Sunnis in Iraq took up arms to resist the loss of power, wealth, and status that the collapse of the Ba'hist regime entailed. Syria and Iran took various measures to strengthen anti-U.S. forces inside Iraq, in order to bog us down and bleed us. Al Qaeda also tried to exploit the post-invasion power-vacuum to go after U.S. forces and advance its own agenda.

Americans had every reason to be upset by these various responses, because they helped thwart our aims. But we should hardly have been *surprised* when these various forces did what they could to resist us. What else would you expect?

Lesson #8: Counterinsurgency warfare is ugly and inevitably leads to war crimes, atrocities, or other forms of abuse.

Another lesson from Iraq (and Afghanistan) is that local identities remain quite powerful and foreign occupations almost always trigger resistance, especially in cultures with a history of heavy-handed foreign interference. Accordingly, occupying powers are likely to face armed insurgencies, which in turn means organizing a counterinsurgency campaign. Unfortunately, such campaigns are extremely hard to control, because decisive victories will be elusive, progress is usually slow, and the occupation force will have distinguishing friend from foe within the local population. And that means that sometimes our forces will go over the line, as they did in Haditha or Abu Ghraib. No matter how much we emphasize "hearts and minds," there will inevitably be abuses that undermine our efforts. So when you order up an invasion or decide to occupy another country, be aware that you are opening Pandora's Box.

Lesson #9: Better "planning" may not be the answer.

There is little question that the invasion of Iraq was abysmally planned, and the post-war occupation was badly bungled. It is therefore unsurprising that U.S. leaders (and academics) want to learn from these mistakes so as to perform better in the future. This goal is understandable and even laudable, but it does not necessarily follow that better pre-war planning would have produced a better result.

For starters, there were extensive pre-war plans for occupying and rebuilding Iraq; the problem was that key decisionmakers (e.g., Rumsfeld) simply ignored them. So planning alone isn't the answer if politicians ignore the plans. It's also worth noting that had Americans been told about the real price tag of the invasion -- i.e., that we would have to send a lot more troops and stay there longer -- they would never have supported the invasion in the first place.

But more importantly, better plans don't guarantee success, because trying to do "statebuilding" in a deeply divided society is an immense challenge, and opportunities to screw it up are legion. As Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace concluded from [their study](#) of past attempts of "nation-building," "few national undertakings are as complex, costly, and time-consuming as reconstructing the governing institutions of foreign societies."

For example, having more troops on the ground might have prevented the collapse of order, but the U.S. army could not have kept a sufficiently large force (350,000 or more) in Iraq for very long. Moreover, an even larger U.S. presence might have increased Iraqi resentment and produced an insurgency anyway. Similarly, critics now believe the decision to disband the Iraqi army and launch an extensive de-Bathification process was a mistake, but trying to keep the army intact and leaving former Bathists in charge might easily have triggered a Shi'ite uprising instead. Lastly, state-building in countries that we don't understand is inherently uncertain, because it is impossible to know *ex ante* which potential leaders are reliable or competent or how politics will evolve once the population starts participating directly. We won't know enough to play "kingmaker," and we are likely to end up having to prop up leaders whose agendas are different from ours.

In short, as Benjamin Friedman, Harvey Sapolsky, and Christopher Preble [argue here](#), better tools or tactics are probably not enough to make ambitious nation-building programs a smart approach. Which leads to Lesson #10.

Lesson #10: Rethink U.S. grand strategy, not just tactics or methods.

Because it is not clear if *any* U.S. approach would have succeeded *at an acceptable cost*, the real lesson of Iraq is not to do stupid things like this again.

The U.S. military has many virtues, but it is not good at running other countries. And it is not likely to get much better at it with practice. We have a capital-intensive army that places a premium on firepower, and we are a country whose own unusual, melting-pot history has made us less sensitive to the enduring power of nationalism, ethnicity, and other local forces.

Furthermore, because the United States is basically incredibly secure, it is impossible to sustain public support for long and grinding wars of occupation. Once it becomes clear that we face a lengthy and messy struggle, the American people quite properly begin to ask why we are pouring billions of dollars and thousands of lives into some strategic backwater. And they are right.

So my last lesson is that we shouldn't spend too much time trying to figure out how to do this sort of thing better, because we're never going to do it well and it will rarely be vital to our overall security. Instead, we ought to work harder on developing an approach to the world that minimizes the risk of getting ourselves into this kind of war again.

A Chronology of US Military Intervention,

Frontline, PBS, From "Give War a Chance," May 1999

Examining the gulf between what diplomats want and what the military is prepared to deliver, from Vietnam to the Balkans

1961-1973 Vietnam War

The Vietnam conflict continues to be the touchstone for both the military and policy makers committed to avoiding future foreign military "quagmires." As the United States made the seemingly inexorable transition from being advisors to undertaking covert operations, bombing and deploying ground troops, the strategy of "incremental escalation" emerged as the military's bête noire. Military frustrations during the "war without fronts" were heightened by diplomatic and humanitarian constraints on operations in North Vietnam. Protest and resistance at home and abroad underlined the pitfalls of pursuing prolonged, costly and divisive wars alone. And the ultimate defeat of South Vietnam in 1975 strengthened the resolve of those who would avoid "unwinnable" limited wars in the future.

April 1980 Iran Hostage Rescue Attempt

Sandstorms and equipment malfunctions caused the cancellation of the surprise attempt to rescue over sixty American hostages held by revolutionary students at the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Failure turned deadly when eight Americans were killed after a helicopter and a transport plane collided at a remote desert staging area. The disaster reflected military disarray and lack of preparedness and, after Ronald Reagan took office, helped launch the largest peacetime defense build-up in the nation's history.

1982-1984 Beirut

Twice during the early 1980s the United States deployed troops to Lebanon to deal with the fall-out from the Israeli invasion. In the first deployment, U.S. marines helped oversee the withdrawal of the PLO from Beirut. In the second deployment, 1,800 marines were sent as part of a multinational force after Israel's Lebanese allies massacred civilians in the Palestinian refugee camps. Given a vague mandate to restore order, support the weak Lebanese government, and work for the withdrawal of all foreign forces, the troops slowly became entangled in the Lebanese civil war. On October 23, 1983, a truck bomb exploded at the vulnerable marine headquarters, killing 241 marines -- the largest loss of life in a military operation since Vietnam. For the military, Beirut becomes a symbol of ill-considered political objectives and poorly-defined rules of engagement.

October 1983 Invasion of Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury)

Within days of the Beirut disaster, President Reagan ordered the invasion of Grenada, following the overthrow of Marxist President Maurice Bishop. Planners sought to protect 600 American students on the Caribbean island, and head off the possibility of another hostage scenario only two years after the freeing of the Iran hostages. In addition, the Reagan administration sought to use the invasion to eliminate Cuban and Soviet influence in Grenada. U.S. forces faced greater than expected resistance and took significant casualties. Though later cited as a model for similar actions, the operation also pointed up serious problems, including inadequate intelligence, poor communications, and inter-service rivalries.

April 1986 Raid on Tripoli, Libya

Following a bomb attack on a West Berlin discotheque frequented by American servicemen, the Reagan administration launched a punitive raid on Libya, the suspected sponsor of the bombing. Planes from aircraft carriers and Britain targeted sites allegedly associated with the training and support of terrorist activities. The raid was also part of a larger struggle with Libya throughout the 1980s over its support for international terrorism and its claims over the Gulf of Sidra. Though its long-term utility was debated, the attack was evidence of the Reagan administration's increasing willingness to use military force in pursuit of certain discrete, limited goals -- despite the Weinberger doctrine.

December 1989 Invasion of Panama and Arrest of Manuel Noriega

Involving over 27,000 U.S. troops, the Panama invasion was, up to that time, the largest American military operation since the Vietnam War. Dubbed "Operation Just Cause," the intervention's stated goals were the protection of the Panama Canal and the lives of 35,000 Americans in Panama, as well as the promotion of democracy and an end to drug trafficking. The powerful surprise attack quickly overwhelmed the Panamanian defense forces and resulted in the capture of its leader, Manuel Noriega.

1990-1991 Persian Gulf War

To force Iraq out of Kuwait, George Bush formed a large and diverse international coalition and deployed over a half-million U.S. personnel to the Persian Gulf region as part of an allied force. The success of Operation Desert Storm set a new high-water mark for the military and underscored the principle of committing overwhelming force to clear and achievable objectives. Both allied and popular support was largely maintained throughout the campaign. In this way, the Gulf War appears to validate the military doctrine espoused by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell.

1992-1993 Somalia

Toward the end of the Bush administration, the United States sent approximately 25,000 troops to Somalia to assist the United Nations with the distribution of famine relief supplies. By the time Bill Clinton took office in 1993, U.S. troop levels had been vastly reduced, largely replaced with forces operating under the UN flag. However as UN clashes with local "warlords" increased, American troops became engaged in policing and wider peacekeeping operations. After 18 U.S. Rangers were killed in a firefight in Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, the United States briefly reinforced its troops but retreated from the more ambitious "nation-building" agenda previously outlined by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Criticized for having made decisions that may have contributed to the disaster, Aspin resigned two months later.

September 19, 1994 Invasion of Haiti

After negotiations and sanctions failed, Clinton sent U.S. troops to Haiti to restore ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power and to head off a potential wave of Haitian refugees. A last-minute deal, brokered by former President Jimmy Carter, allowed the troops to go ashore unopposed by the Haitian military and police. Most U.S. troops withdrew within a year, though several hundred remained to pursue a wide agenda of peacekeeping, humanitarian and engineering activities. While Clinton administration officials consistently hailed the intervention as a model effort to restore democracy and promote stability abroad, political, economic and social conditions gradually eroded. In March 1999, the U.S. commander responsible for the remaining military personnel reportedly recommended ending the five-year military presence on the island due to continuing instability.

September 1995 Bosnia (Operation Deliberate Force)

Following the deadly bombing of a Sarajevo marketplace, NATO forces launched the largest military action in the alliance's history. Two weeks of NATO air strikes, combined with a strong Croat-Muslim offensive on the ground, pushed Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table. In November, all the warring parties met in Dayton, Ohio and agreed to a peace settlement. The airstrikes, painstakingly approved after years of negotiations with allies and the military, appear to support the position that limited military attacks can be useful diplomatic tools.

April 1999 Operation Allied Force

Citing Serb atrocities and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, the U.S. and NATO unleashed air attacks on Serbia after the failure of the "mini-Dayton" peace talks held in Rambouillet, France. President Clinton outlines no "exit strategies" and warns that air strikes will continue as long as necessary. From the start, the Clinton administration ruled out sending U.S. ground troops to the Balkans, though debate over the utility of air power alone repeatedly revives the issue. Vast floods of refugees spill into neighboring countries, threatening to enlarge the crisis and sparking criticism of the lack of contingency planning by NATO.

Sources: Congressional Research Service, "Case studies on use of force by US, 1950-91" Report 92-757-F (1992) 106 pp.; Richard N. Haass, *Intervention: The use of American military force in the post-Cold War World* (Washington: The Carnegie Endowment, 1994) 259 pp.
