

Interventionism and State Sovereignty in the 21st Century: A Study of Modern Global Conflicts

Kaisha Kandhari

Mayo College Girls' School, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Interventionism has become a defining feature of twenty-first-century international relations, raising important questions about its impact on state sovereignty and global stability. This study examines the relationship between interventionism and state sovereignty by analysing selected contemporary conflicts. Using a qualitative and descriptive research design based on secondary sources, the study explores military, humanitarian, political, and economic forms of intervention, along with the role of major powers and international organisations. The findings indicate that modern interventionism has evolved beyond conventional military action to include sanctions, diplomacy, strategic alliances, cyber operations, and information warfare. While intervention can contribute to addressing security threats and humanitarian crises, it may also weaken state sovereignty and intensify geopolitical rivalry when driven by strategic interests. The study concludes that balancing international responsibility with respect for state sovereignty and international law remains essential for promoting lasting peace and stability.

Keywords: Interventionism, State Sovereignty, Humanitarian Intervention, International Relations, Global Conflicts

1. Introduction

Interventionism and state sovereignty have become one of the most discussed topics in the field of international relations today. Traditionally, sovereignty has been regarded as the fundamental principle of the international system, granting every state the authority to govern its territory without external interference. Simultaneously, this principle has been undermined by globalization, transnational security threats, humanitarian crises, terrorism and regional conflicts. Therefore, powerful states and intergovernmental bodies have been more inclined to intervene in the internal affairs of states, sometimes under the pretext of promoting international peace and security, human rights, or regional stability. This increasing tension between protection of sovereignty and perceived responsibility to intervene has become a hallmark of global politics in the 21st century.

Intervention was traditionally associated with direct military action and territorial expansion. However, the nature of interventionism has changed significantly over the past few decades. In the modern era, there are no limits on the means of intervention except armed combat: economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, cyber operations, information warfare, humanitarian assistance, strategic alliances, political influence. They are often used by international organizations and great powers for intervention into the actions of states without the use of full-scale military forces. Interventionism has therefore become a foreign policy

tool with multiple dimensions that influences political choices, security policies and international relationships worldwide.

There have been a number of wars in the twenty first century that illustrate the evolution of interventionism. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, international sanctions against Iran, and more recently in the geopolitical arena, have underscored the growing presence of external players in domestic and regional conflicts. Interventions in many instances have been deemed as a result of various crises such as the war against terrorism, humanitarian emergencies, nuclear security or in contravention of international law. These practices have also sparked significant discussion about the legality and legitimacy of such action, as well as its effectiveness and ramifications for state sovereignty. Some interventions have prevented humanitarian catastrophe or reinforced international security while others have led to long-lasting instability, political fragmentation, humanitarian crises and geopolitical competition.

The issue of interventionism still has a lot of complexity, as it has several different legal, political, ethical and strategic considerations. According to the realist approach, interventions are driven mainly by national interests and by balance of power; according to a liberal approach, the view is that international cooperation, collective security and the role of international institutions prevail. Humanitarian approaches, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), hold that the international community is responsible to act when governments are failing to protect their people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The opposing viewpoints are making interventionism one of the most controversial topics in modern diplomacy.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how interventionism influences state sovereignty in contemporary international conflicts and to analyse the changing forms of intervention in the twenty-first century. It also seeks to understand the role played by major powers and international organisations in shaping these interventions while evaluating their broader political, humanitarian, and legal consequences. By comparatively examining selected global conflicts, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with interventionism in the contemporary international system.

2. Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does interventionism affect the sovereignty of states in contemporary international conflicts?
2. What role do major global powers play in shaping the nature and outcomes of modern conflicts?
3. How effective are international organizations, particularly the United Nations, in regulating intervention and maintaining international peace and security?
4. What lessons can be drawn from the conflicts in Afghanistan, Russia-Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine regarding the future of interventionism and state sovereignty?

3. Review of Literature

The concepts of interventionism and state sovereignty have been widely discussed in international relations, particularly after the end of the Cold War. The increasing involvement of powerful states in the political, military, economic, and humanitarian affairs of other countries has generated significant academic debate regarding the legitimacy, objectives, and consequences of intervention. While some scholars view intervention as a necessary mechanism to maintain international peace and protect human

rights, others argue that it often serves the strategic interests of powerful nations at the expense of weaker states. Consequently, the existing literature presents diverse perspectives on interventionism and its impact on sovereignty in the 21st century.

Evolution of Interventionism in International Relations

The concept of interventionism in international relations, and its objectives, have been a subject of debate for a long time, and today there are discussions of it based on classical theories of state behaviour. A leading realist scholar, John J. Mearsheimer (2001) argues that states primarily act to maximize their security and protect their national interests within an anarchic international system. From this realist perspective, intervention is rarely motivated solely by humanitarian concerns; instead, it is often driven by strategic calculations, regional influence, and the balance of power. Mearsheimer's reading offers a valuable theoretical justification for the persistence of great-power intervention in international affairs even in the face of state sovereignty and international law.

On the basis of these theoretical underpinnings, scholars argue that interventionism has developed substantially over the years. Today's interventionism does not only involve military incursions; it also incorporates political influence, economic sanctions, humanitarian aid, cyber operations, and diplomatic pressure. In "The Art of War in the Americas in the Nineteenth Century," Fischer (2020) recounts the history of interventionism in the Americas in the nineteenth century, looking at doctrines like the "*Manifest Destiny*" that rationalized territorial expansion and resort to force. Fischer (2020) states that often intervention was presented as a civilizing mission while it often led to the domination of a weaker society.

In examining the issue of intervention in post-Cold War, Dobson (2002) suggests that during the 1990s the U.S. foreign policy slowly shifted to a more interventionist approach, where democracy, free markets and global security served as the core principles. However, through examples of Panama and Bosnia, interventions often had results that were different from what they were aiming for. However, Dobson (2002) doubts whether interventionist policies can really achieve political stability in the long run without bringing about unforeseen humanitarian and geopolitical repercussions. Likewise, Samad et al. (2023) define interventionism as a proactive foreign policy in which the state tries to influence the political, economic or social activities of another state. According to their study, such interventions might be "justified" on humanitarian or security grounds, but also have strategic, political or economic motives. The authors demonstrate, for instance with the cases of Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, how interventionism has become increasingly used as a tool for the exercise of international influence by powerful states.

In the post-Cold War world, Doyle (2001) continues, interventionism has taken on new forms. The current nature of military interventions is a multi-lateral aspect, which is characterized by international cooperation and the support of international institutions like the United Nations. Doyle (2001) noted that international interventions include multiple elements beyond military aspects, such as institution building, governance reform, and post-war reconstruction. Taken together, these studies prove that interventionism has evolved from a direct policy of territorial expansion to a foreign policy that is multi-dimensional, incorporating military, political, economic, humanitarian and diplomatic means. While the goals and authority of interventionism are subject to various interpretations, there is a consensus that intervention is now an integral part of the twenty-first century's international relations.

Sovereignty and Humanitarian Intervention

The relationship between interventionism and state sovereignty remains one of the most contested issues

in international relations. Traditional understandings of sovereignty emphasize the right of every state to govern itself without external interference. However, humanitarian crises and internal conflicts have challenged this principle by raising questions about whether the international community has a responsibility to intervene when governments fail to protect their populations. Stephen D. Krasner (1999) further argues that sovereignty has often been treated as an "organized hypocrisy," suggesting that while states publicly support the principles of non-intervention and sovereign equality, these principles are often overlooked when powerful nations pursue their strategic interests. His argument highlights why the application of sovereignty in international politics is often inconsistent.

Pekdogan and Cirit (2017) argue that international security has gradually shifted from protecting state borders toward protecting individuals. According to the authors, this new understanding of "human security" has contributed to the emergence of humanitarian military intervention, where external actors use force to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other large-scale violations of human rights. Although such interventions remain controversial, Authors suggest that they have become an important instrument for addressing severe humanitarian crises.

The concept of humanitarian intervention is further developed through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework. Maccarrone et al. (2018) explain that R2P redefines sovereignty by emphasizing that states possess not only rights but also responsibilities toward their own citizens. When governments fail to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity, the international community may be required to respond collectively. However, the authors also observe that political interests frequently influence the practical implementation of R2P, resulting in selective interventions across different conflicts (Maccarrone et al., 2018). Similarly, Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun (2002) argue that sovereignty should be viewed not only as a state's authority but also as its responsibility to protect its people. Their work laid the foundation for the R2P principle and significantly influenced international humanitarian policy in the twenty-first century.

Holliday (2003) takes an ethical perspective of intervention using Just War Theory. He believes that military action should be used only when the following moral principles are met: legitimate authority, just cause, proportionality and reasonable prospects for success. Holliday (2003) thus calls for enhanced international processes to assess the ethical validity of intervention prior to the use of military force. A similar argument was made by Michael Walzer (2006), who suggests that in "exceptions" the moral argument for military action may be valid, particularly to save or stop "massive human suffering. But, he stresses, intervention is always a last resort, and should adhere to ethical guidelines; his work is therefore valuable to the ongoing discussion of humanitarian intervention.

Doyle (2001) also asserts that modern peace operations have evolved to become a blend of humanitarian relief and institutional reconstruction to create sustainable peace. As these scholars show, the issue of humanitarian intervention continues to be one of the most controversial issues in modern international relations, and there is still a lot of discussion going on.

Interventionism in Contemporary Global Conflicts

In recent years, the focus has been on grasping interventionism in the context of current conflicts. Researchers stress that the intervention is not limited to military operations, as the contemporary conflicts are a mix of military, political, economic, technological and informational warfare.

Russia's conflict with Ukraine is one of the most researched cases of today's interventionism, as it constitutes a traditional power-political and modern geopolitical competition. The realist view is that the expansion of western institutions, like NATO, inevitably gave rise to security concerns for Russia, making

conflict more likely, (Mearsheimer, 2001). On the basis of this theoretical framework, Jensen argues that the Russian intervention can be analyzed from two angles: realist and liberal, and that both these and domestic political aspects have to be taken into consideration. The realist view is that the conflict was driven by security threats and geopolitical competition, while the liberal view is that it was the result of internal political developments and leadership decisions in Russia. The Ukraine conflict, therefore, does not lend itself to a one-sided interpretation, but has to be analyzed both from an international and national standpoint.

Supporting this view, Zandi (2025) describes the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a defining example of twenty-first-century warfare. According to the author, the conflict extends far beyond conventional military operations by incorporating economic sanctions, political narratives, information warfare, cyber operations, and diplomatic competition. He further argues that these multiple dimensions have transformed the conflict into a broader geopolitical confrontation while increasing concerns regarding global security and the possibility of nuclear escalation.

Much scholarly interest has also been devoted to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Inbar (2006) explores the political hurdles after Hamas' electoral success, and suggests that the prospect of long-term conflict management is more realistic than of a hasty conflict resolution. Instead of endorsing the two-state solution, Inbar (2006) suggests a strategy of prioritizing security and a slow political process. His work depicts the intricacies of interventions in old conflicts of the region where humanitarian, political, and security concerns are still tightly intertwined.

Economics intervention is also an important field of study. Prokopowicz (2025) examines government actions in times of significant economic emergencies, such as the global financial crisis of 2008, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the energy crisis of 2022. The study has arrived at the following conclusions: Fiscal and monetary policies can have a stabilizing effect during a crisis, but can also create long-term structural issues if not implemented properly. Similarly, Karagiannis argues that contemporary interventionism is expanding beyond military intervention to encompass economic planning, institutional reform, and strategic public administration, pointing to the fact that today's interventions are not restricted to military operations.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that interventionism has become increasingly multidimensional, with military force operating alongside economic sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, humanitarian aid, cyber operations, information campaigns, and institutional reforms. Collectively, the literature suggests that contemporary conflicts can no longer be explained through military intervention alone but must also be understood through the broader interaction of political, economic, humanitarian, and strategic factors.

Critiques of Modern Interventionism

Although intervention is increasingly recognised as a policy tool for international action, there are some scholars who are sceptical of the efficacy and authority of intervention. But, as Gelot and Soderbaum (2012) state, many interventions are unsuccessful because they are primarily from the point of view of those who are external to the situation, and neglect to take into account the local political, cultural, and social context. The authors argue that solutions imposed from the outside do not necessarily tackle the root causes of conflict and can sometimes exacerbate inequalities.

Similarly, Dobson (2002) claims that interventionist policies often overlook the political realities of the situation. In addition, Samad et al. (2023) argue that, at times, humanitarian claims are justified to cover up more extensive geopolitical and/or economic goals. It is in this criticism that interventionism is not considered a humanitarian response, but also as a reflection of international power politics.

Therefore, there is no consensus in the literature on the issue of interventionism. Realist scholars, like Mearsheimer (2001), focus on national interest, security, and the balance of power, whereas liberal scholars, such as Doyle (2001), stress the need for international cooperation, institutions, and collective responsibility. Humanitarian scholars rather than those in the field of human rights are interested in civilian protection, including concepts such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The ongoing conflict between these points of view illustrates the fact that there is no single theory of intervention. Rather, it has been one of the most subject to debate in modern international relations, and each modern conflict has to be analyzed in its specific political, historical and humanitarian context instead of with generalizations.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into interventionism, state sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, and contemporary global conflicts. However, most studies examine these issues through individual conflicts or specific perspectives, such as military strategy, international law, or humanitarian ethics. Comparatively fewer studies analyze multiple contemporary conflicts together to understand how different forms of intervention influence state sovereignty within a broader international context. In addition, the literature often presents interventionism from contrasting viewpoints, either as a necessary humanitarian response or as an instrument of geopolitical power, with limited attempts to balance these perspectives. As the nature of intervention continues to evolve through economic sanctions, cyber operations, information warfare, and diplomatic pressure, there is a growing need for a more comprehensive analysis. This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining interventionism across selected twenty-first-century conflicts through a balanced approach, evaluating its implications for state sovereignty, international law, and global stability while considering both its intended objectives and its long-term consequences.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the relationship between interventionism and state sovereignty in the twenty-first century. The research focuses on understanding the nature, causes, and implications of interventionism through the analysis of ideas, policies, and contemporary global conflicts. A comparative approach has been used to examine selected conflicts, including Afghanistan, Russia-Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine, in order to identify common patterns and differences in military, political, economic, and humanitarian intervention.

The study relies entirely on secondary research and does not involve surveys, interviews, or fieldwork. Instead, it analyses existing academic literature, policy documents, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, reports of international organisations, policy papers, official United Nations documents and official reports to understand how interventionism has evolved and how it continues to influence state sovereignty in contemporary international relations. This approach enables the study to present a balanced and evidence-based analysis of the subject. The collected data has been critically reviewed, compared, and synthesised to identify key themes, differing perspectives, and emerging trends related to interventionism and state sovereignty.

5. Interventionism in Modern Global Conflicts

The twenty-first century has witnessed a significant rise in international interventions carried out in the name of security, humanitarian protection, counterterrorism, and regional stability. Contemporary global conflicts demonstrate that intervention takes different forms depending on the political, security, and humanitarian context. These interventions have reshaped international relations while raising important

questions regarding sovereignty, international law, and the role of major powers. These interventions have reshaped the nature of global conflicts while raising important questions about state sovereignty, international law, and the role of major powers. These developments show that modern interventionism rarely takes a single form; military action is often accompanied by economic pressure, political influence, and international involvement, making its impact on state sovereignty more complex and far-reaching.

5.1 Military Intervention and State Sovereignty

Military intervention remains one of the most visible forms of international intervention in the twenty-first century. Although it is often justified on grounds such as national security, counterterrorism, humanitarian protection, or regional peace, military intervention frequently creates tensions between the objectives of the intervening states and the sovereignty of the affected country (Ayoob, 2002). The conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine demonstrate how military intervention can reshape domestic governance, alter international relations, and generate long-term political and humanitarian consequences (Veronica, 2023).

The military intervention in Afghanistan began in October 2001 following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States. Led by the United States and supported by NATO allies, the intervention aimed to dismantle Al-Qaeda, remove the Taliban government, and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist organisations (Wright et al, 2010). Over the following two decades, international forces remained involved in military operations, institution-building, and security sector reforms. Although democratic institutions, education, and infrastructure showed some improvement during this period, the country continued to face political instability, corruption, and security challenges. The withdrawal of international forces in 2021 and the Taliban's return to power highlighted the limitations of prolonged external military intervention in establishing sustainable governance (Ahmed, et al 2026). From the perspective of state sovereignty, Afghanistan illustrates the complexity of balancing national security with external intervention. While the intervention received international support under the objective of combating terrorism, the long-term presence of foreign military forces significantly influenced Afghanistan's domestic political and security institutions. Critics argue that although the intervention weakened terrorist networks initially, it also reduced Afghanistan's ability to independently determine its political future, raising concerns about the extent to which external powers can reshape sovereign states without achieving lasting stability (Dobson, 2002).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict represents another important example of military intervention in contemporary international relations. Russia's military actions, beginning with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and expanding into a full-scale invasion in February 2022, have fundamentally challenged the principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty (Aziz, 2024). The conflict has also demonstrated how modern military intervention extends beyond conventional warfare to include cyber operations, economic sanctions, information warfare, and diplomatic competition.

From a realist perspective, Mearsheimer (2001) argues that the expansion of Western institutions such as NATO created security concerns for Russia, making confrontation increasingly likely. Building upon this view, Jensen explains that Russia's intervention can be understood through both realist and liberal perspectives, combining geopolitical security concerns with domestic political factors. At the same time, Zandi (2025) argues that the conflict represents a defining example of twenty-first-century warfare, where military operations are accompanied by economic sanctions, strategic communication, and information campaigns. The conflict has resulted in widespread humanitarian suffering, economic disruption, and one of the largest refugee crises in Europe since the Second World War.

The international response to the Ukraine conflict also illustrates how military intervention is increasingly accompanied by indirect forms of involvement. While NATO member states have largely avoided direct military engagement, they have provided extensive military assistance, intelligence sharing, financial support, and advanced defence equipment to Ukraine (Jakupec, 2025). Simultaneously, Western countries imposed unprecedented economic sanctions on Russia, demonstrating that contemporary military conflicts often involve multiple forms of intervention operating simultaneously.

A brief comparison can also be drawn with the Iraq War 2003. The United States-led invasion was justified primarily on the grounds of eliminating weapons of mass destruction and promoting democracy (Perritt, 2004). However, the failure to find such weapons, coupled with prolonged instability and violence, generated widespread criticism regarding the legitimacy of military intervention without broad international consensus. The Iraq experience continues to influence debates surrounding the legality, effectiveness, and long-term consequences of external military intervention (Dobson, 2002).

Overall, the experiences of Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Iraq demonstrate that military intervention can produce both immediate security outcomes and long-term political consequences. While interventions may address urgent security threats or humanitarian concerns, they often raise difficult questions regarding state sovereignty, international legitimacy, and the ability of external powers to achieve sustainable peace. These conflicts also indicate that military intervention alone is rarely sufficient to resolve complex political crises, highlighting the need for diplomatic engagement, institutional development, and long-term international cooperation.

5.2 Humanitarian Intervention and International Responsibility

Humanitarian intervention has become one of the most debated forms of international intervention in the twenty-first century. Unlike military interventions primarily driven by security or strategic interests, humanitarian interventions are generally justified on the basis of protecting civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (Wheeler, 2008). However, their implementation has often raised difficult questions regarding state sovereignty, international legitimacy, and the consistency of global responses. The experiences of Israel-Palestine, Libya, and Kosovo illustrate both the importance and the challenges of humanitarian intervention in contemporary international relations (Bhatia, 2003).

The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the longest-running humanitarian crises in the world (Ansori et al, 2026). Repeated cycles of violence have resulted in significant civilian casualties, large-scale displacement, and damage to essential infrastructure. International organisations, including the United Nations, have consistently called for humanitarian assistance, ceasefires, and the protection of civilians (Familoye et al, 2024). However, political divisions among major powers and differing interpretations of international law have often limited the effectiveness of international action. Inbar (2006) argues that the complexity of the conflict makes immediate political resolution difficult and instead supports a long-term conflict management approach. The ongoing humanitarian situation demonstrates the challenges faced by the international community in balancing humanitarian responsibilities with respect for state sovereignty and regional security.

One of the first major uses of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle is the Libya intervention of 2011. In the case of the Libyan civil conflict, the NATO military operation was undertaken in accordance with the UNSC resolution 1973, which is aimed at ensuring the protection of civilians (Payandeh, 2012). The intervention did help to stop the mass slaughter of civilians in Libya, but it contributed to political instability, institutional breakdown and chronic civil war following the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. The Libyan example highlights both the humanitarian opportunities and the practical constraints

of international action, as highlighted by Maccarrone et al. (2018), when the focus of humanitarian intervention is not given enough attention in post-conflict reconstruction.

The Kosovo intervention of 1999, although set in the last millennium, is still significant and is used as a reference in the debate on humanitarian intervention (Richmond, 2016). However, NATO acted militarily to stop ethnic cleansing and violation of human rights against Kosovo Albanians without any U.N. Security Council (UNSC) resolution (Alexander, 2000). Many governments saw the intervention as ethically and morally justified to halt further atrocities, while others held the opposite opinion, arguing that the action was not legal under international law. The Kosovo experience continues to influence debates on humanitarian intervention by highlighting the tension between protecting human rights and respecting the sovereignty of states (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002).

The above examples illustrate that humanitarian intervention remains one of the most challenging issues in contemporary international relations. Its main mission is to protect civilians, but political agendas, legal limitations and geopolitics can influence the timing and the way the international community acts. Thus, humanitarian intervention is currently subject of issues concerning international responsibility, accountability and uniformity in international law. The case of Israel-Palestine, Libya, and Kosovo has shown that human life protection must rely on immediate interventions from the international community as well as a lasting political dialogue and institutional commitment for peaceful and sustainable solutions.

5.3 Political and Economic Intervention

The role of political and economic interventions in international relations in the 21st century has grown its importance. The states, or the international organisations, often try to persuade other governments to change their behaviour through economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, political isolation, and strategic alliances (Patomaki, 2007). While these moves may be regarded as less harmful than an armed attack, they have the potential to have a major impact on a state's economy, foreign policy, and decision-making, posing questions of sovereignty and international legitimacy.

One of the most prominent examples of economic intervention is the case of Iran. In the last 20 years, the United States and some western countries have put in place extensive economic sanctions against Iran, mainly because of concerns about its nuclear programme and regional security policies (Hufbauer & Jung, 2020). These sanctions have been aimed at Iran's banking sector, oil export, trade and financial sectors, putting significant strain on the Iranian economy (Farzanegan & Batmanghelidj, 2024). Backing for sanctions presented as a peaceful option to military conflict, critics say they've also taken a toll on ordinary people, as they have raised inflation, joblessness and lowered access to essentials (Kenan, 2025). The Iranian case illustrates how economic restrictions can affect a country's policy, and also how they can bring about economic and humanitarian problems.

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and other nations imposed sweeping sanctions that cut off Russia's financial system, energy exports, technology imports and access to international markets (Bond et al, 2015). These included everything from making military attack more expensive and from steering clear of direct military confrontation between the great powers. While the sanctions imposed a strain on the Russian economy, they also had broader implications for global energy markets and international trade, highlighting the impact of economic measures beyond the sanctioned country (Zandi, 2025).

Political intervention also takes place in the form of diplomatic isolation and coordinated international pressure. Governments that have breached international law or human rights are often subject to

diplomatic penalties, including suspension from international organizations, travel bans for political leaders and loss of political cooperation. Such measures aim to influence state behaviour without the use of armed force. But they work only if there is international cooperation, and willingness of states to take collective action for enforcement.

The role of NATO further demonstrates how political and strategic alliances shape contemporary intervention. While NATO is primarily a collective defence alliance, its decisions in the areas of military cooperation, security assistance, and regional partnerships carry significant political implications (Yost, 1998). NATO's ongoing assistance to Ukraine, including but not limited to military training, intelligence exchange and defence assistance, has helped to shore up Ukraine's defence and security, while also aggravating geopolitical tensions with Russia in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Trif & Dumitraşcu, 2025). In a realist view, such alliances impact the strategic calculations of great powers and can impact regional balance of power (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Political and economic measures have become central instruments through which states seek to influence international affairs without resorting to direct military force. While these measures may discourage aggression and encourage compliance with international norms, they can also impose economic hardship and generate debates regarding sovereignty and the unequal application of international rules. These measures might curb aggression and promote adherence to international norms, but also lead to concerns about economic hardship, the uneven application of international rules, and the power of external actors in the domestic and foreign policies of sovereign states.

5.4 The Role of Major Powers

The role of major powers in the formation of modern interventionism is significant due to their increased military strength, economic influence, diplomatic power, and decision-making power within international institutions (Finnemore, 2013). Their actions can define the attention given to a conflict, whether sanctions are imposed, and whether military or humanitarian aid is given. The United States, Russia, China, NATO, and the European Union have played significant roles in shaping contemporary international interventions. Modern conflicts are therefore influenced not only by domestic conditions but also by competition among major powers and international alliances.

One of the most significant players in international interventions in the twenty first century has been the United States. It has been active in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other parts of the world by conducting military operations, imposing economic sanctions, diplomatic engagement, providing foreign assistance, and assisting allied governments. Often this has been defended on the grounds of counterterrorism, democracy, human rights and international security. However, Dobson (2002) and Samad et al. (2023) argue that American interventionism is often influenced by strategic, political, and economic interests alongside its stated security and humanitarian objectives. This gives rise to a question of what the purpose of the U.S. is, is it to safeguard international stability or to maintain its global influence?

Russia has also deployed military, political, economic and informational tactics to defend its security interests and region. With its actions in Ukraine, it also shows the tactics that can be used by the great powers in order to try to undermine the sovereignty of their neighbouring countries when they sense that the balance of power in the region is shifting. Mearsheimer (2001) sees major powers trying to prevent other alliances from developing in the region that they regard as being of strategic significance. Russia's action is thus part of a broader contest of regional security, influence, and power dynamics, not just Russian and Ukrainian.

The role of China differs in important ways. The Chinese Government has officially advocated the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs of other countries (Cohen, 1972). Its increasing economic, diplomatic and strategic power also gives it a growing influence over other nations' decisions, through its trade, investment, infrastructure and engagement in international organisations. With China's stance, it has made clear that it does not always need to intervene militarily. Economic relations and diplomatic ties can also affect the choices for sovereign states (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2014). Its view is also indicative of the growing trend to a multipolar world in which the West no longer dominates with little or no alternatives or opposition.

The EU's influence is primarily felt through economic, diplomatic, development, trade and sanctions mechanisms. The EU is not a military force; instead, it tries to influence the behaviour of states through the application of access to markets, financial limitations, negotiation, and legal parameters. Its sanctions against Russia show that economic integration can produce a lot of pressure on international markets without the use of military force. However, the effectiveness of the European Union depends largely on consensus among its member states, whose national interests and foreign policy priorities do not always align.

Interventionism is also shaped by international organisations and alliances. Peacekeeping, sanctions, humanitarian aid and collective action are governed primarily by the provisions of the United Nations, which, however, is often hampered by disagreement among the permanent members of the Security Council (Familoye & Toyin, 2024). NATO does so via collective defence, military cooperation, training, intelligence sharing, and security assistance, whereas the European Union primarily through sanctions, some trade restrictions, diplomatic negotiations, development aid, and legal pressure. Other organisations, such as the African Union, the Arab League, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and international financial institutions, may also influence conflicts through mediation, monitoring, economic assistance, or political pressure (Bailes & Cottey, 2006). These organisations may be able to manage the international response and diminish the unilateral action but they can also be influenced by the interests of their most powerful members. Consequently, they can help to facilitate peace and humanitarian protection in some contexts and fail to do so in others.

Overall, the actions of major powers and international organisations demonstrate that modern interventionism extends far beyond military force. Through a combination of military, economic, diplomatic, and institutional instruments, major powers and international organisations continue to shape the political and security environment of sovereign states. While these interventions may contribute to maintaining international peace, protecting human rights, and addressing global security challenges, they can also intensify geopolitical rivalries and limit the autonomy of weaker states. This highlights the continuing challenge of balancing international responsibility with the principles of state sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected world.

6. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of modern global conflicts shows that interventionism has become broader, more complex, and increasingly connected with global power politics. It has evolved beyond conventional military action into a multidimensional process that increasingly combines military and non-military instruments to pursue political, humanitarian, and strategic objectives. Recent developments, such as the United States' operation against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, illustrate how interventions justified in the name

of regional stability continue to raise important questions regarding state sovereignty and international law.

The conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, and the recent tensions involving the United States, Iran, and Israel demonstrate that intervention can achieve immediate security or humanitarian objectives but often struggles to produce long-term political stability. Military operations are increasingly accompanied by economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and information campaigns that shape international opinion and influence state behaviour. The 2025 India-Pakistan confrontation further highlighted how competing diplomatic narratives, including claims by the United States that it helped prevent further escalation, have become part of contemporary interventionism alongside traditional political and military measures.

The study further finds that major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, together with organisations including the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union, significantly influence international interventions through military cooperation, sanctions, diplomacy, and humanitarian assistance. However, their responses are often shaped by strategic interests and geopolitical competition. Overall, the findings indicate that modern interventionism offers both opportunities and challenges for the international community. While intervention can help respond to humanitarian crises, protect civilians, and address international security threats, it can also weaken state sovereignty, intensify geopolitical rivalry, and create long-term political instability when driven primarily by strategic interests. Therefore, the legitimacy and effectiveness of intervention should be assessed not only by its immediate objectives but also by its compliance with international law, its respect for state sovereignty, and its ability to contribute to lasting peace and stability. The study also indicates that achieving a balance between international responsibility and state sovereignty remains one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary international relations.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between interventionism and state sovereignty by analysing selected twenty-first-century conflicts including Afghanistan, Russia Ukraine, Israel Palestine, Iraq, Libya, Iran. The findings reveal interventionism has shifted from traditional military intervention to a multidimensional approach that combines both military and non-military instruments. Intervention can be part of the solution to security challenges and humanitarian crises, but it can also be against the principle of state sovereignty and can be a further source of geopolitical friction when based on a strategy. The authors' study adds that maintaining the balance among international responsibility, respect for sovereignty, and respect for international law is important for the long-term peace and stability in the modern international relations.

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