

# Background Guide: UNSC

## *The Rise of Interventionism and its Implications on the International Legal Order.*

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# Letter from the Executive Board

United Nations Security Council

Dear Delegates,

It is our distinct pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Security Council for MCGS MUN 2026. As you prepare to deliberate on the rise of interventionism and its implications on the international legal order, you are stepping into a debate that defines the very boundaries of global power, ethics, and law.

At its core, interventionism is an exercise of influence that challenges the most fundamental pillar of the post-war system: the sovereign equality of states. For decades, the international community has sought to balance the rights of states to govern their own affairs with the moral and legal imperative to intervene when those states fail to protect their populations or threaten global stability. Today, that balance is under unprecedented pressure. The tools of intervention have evolved beyond the traditional battlefield to include the digital realm, global financial networks, and the strategic manipulation of legal institutions. This evolution has made intervention more frequent, less visible, and increasingly difficult to regulate.

The United Nations Security Council holds the primary responsibility for navigating this complexity. As the only body with the authority to authorize the use of force and impose binding sanctions, the Council is the gatekeeper of international legitimacy. However, the Council's ability to function as an impartial arbiter is often constrained by the very power dynamics it was designed to manage. The rise of Great Power competition has frequently paralyzed collective action, leading states to pursue unilateral or regional interventions that bypass the UN architecture entirely.

Your task as delegates is to engage with these structural realities. You must move beyond simple condemnations or endorsements of intervention and instead examine the underlying shifts in the international legal order. You will need to consider how the doctrine of sovereignty as responsibility has transformed the Westphalian system, why selective enforcement has eroded the credibility of international law, and what the future of global cooperation looks like in an era of digital subversion and economic warfare.

We urge you to approach this committee with the gravity it deserves. The issues we discuss are not merely theoretical: they determine the survival of governments, the security of regions, and the lives of millions of individuals caught in the crossfire of interventionary diplomacy. We look forward to a debate characterized by analytical depth, diplomatic restraint, and a commitment to the principles of the United Nations.

Warm regards,

The Executive Board

United Nations Security Council



# **The United Nations Security Council: Mandate, Authority, and Committee Structure**

## **Mandate of the United Nations Security Council**

The United Nations Security Council was established in 1945 as the primary organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Under the Charter of the United Nations, the Council was granted unique powers that distinguish it from all other international bodies. While the General Assembly provides a forum for universal representation and moral consensus, the Security Council was designed to be the executive arm of the international system, capable of taking prompt and effective action to prevent conflict and restore order.

The mandate of the Council is grounded in the collective security system, a revolutionary departure from the historical reliance on unilateral force and shifting alliances. Under Article 24 of the Charter, member states confer on the Security Council the primary responsibility for peace and security, agreeing that in carrying out its duties, the Council acts on their behalf. This delegation of authority is coupled with the obligation found in Article 25, where all members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council. This makes the Council the only international body with the legal authority to issue resolutions that are binding on all states.

The Council's mandate covers three broad areas of activity: the pacific settlement of disputes, action with respect to threats to the peace, and the implementation of regional arrangements. In cases of emerging friction, the Council is authorized under Chapter VI to investigate any situation that might lead to international instability and recommend procedures for peaceful resolution. When a situation escalates to a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the Council transitions to its Chapter VII powers. These include the authority to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions or to authorize the use of military force to restore international security.

## **Why the Security Council Discusses Interventionism**

Interventionism is a central concern for the Security Council because it involves the direct intersection of state sovereignty and global security. The Council is the primary arena where the international community decides when the internal affairs of a state have become a matter of international concern. This determination is often the most controversial part of the Council's work, as it requires balancing the principle of non-intervention with the need to prevent regional instability or mass atrocities.

The rise of interventionism today is characterized by several factors that necessitate Council attention:

The globalization of domestic crises, where civil wars and internal repression generate transboundary threats such as refugee flows, the spread of extremist ideologies, and the disruption of critical supply chains.

The evolution of coercive tools, including cyber operations and economic sanctions, which allow states to interfere in the internal affairs of others without a formal declaration of war.

The contestation of international norms, specifically the tension between the traditional Westphalian model of absolute sovereignty and the emerging doctrine of the responsibility to protect.

The return of Great Power rivalry, where intervention is used as a tool for strategic influence, frequently bypassing the collective security system.

Because the Security Council is the only body that can grant legal authorization for intervention, it is the site where the legitimacy of such actions is contested. Whether an intervention is seen as a lawful defense of international norms or an illegal act of aggression often depends on the Council's ability to reach a consensus on the nature of the threat.

| <b>Mechanism</b>      | <b>Charter Basis</b> | <b>Nature of Authority</b>    | <b>Primary Objective</b>                                    |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Pacific Settlement    | Chapter VI           | Non-Binding Recommendations   | Mediation, Arbitration & Peaceful Dialogue                  |
| Provisional Measures  | Article 40           | Non-Prejudicial Directives    | Halting Hostilities without Judging the Underlying Disputes |
| Economic Sanctions    | Article 41           | Legally Binding on All States | Diplomatic & Financial Pressure without using Force         |
| Military Action       | Article 42           | Legally Binding Authorisation | Use of Force to Restore International Peace & Security      |
| Regional Arrangements | Chapter VIII         | Collaborative Enforcement     | Utilising Regional Bodies for UN-Authorised Missions        |

## **Powers and Limitations of the Security Council**

The powers of the Security Council are extensive, but they are subject to significant political and structural limitations. Under Article 41, the Council can call upon member states to apply measures such as the complete or partial interruption of economic relations, the severance of diplomatic ties, and the imposition of travel bans or arms embargos. These tools are designed to provide a coercive alternative to military force, allowing the Council to pressure a state or non-state actor to comply with international law.

If non-kinetic measures are deemed inadequate, the Council is authorized under Article 42 to take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace. This includes the authorization of military interventions by member states or regional organizations, as well as the deployment of UN peacekeeping operations. These powers are the ultimate expression of the Council's authority, representing the only lawful exception to the general prohibition on the use of force in international relations.

However, the Council's power is limited by the requirement of P5 unanimity. The veto power held by China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States means that the Council cannot act against the vital interests of these states or their close allies. This structural feature was intended to ensure the participation of the major powers in the UN system, but in practice, it has led to frequent paralysis. When the Council is deadlocked, the international community is left with a choice between inaction in the face of a crisis or unilateral intervention that operates outside the legal framework of the Charter.

Furthermore, the Council lacks its own independent enforcement mechanism. It relies entirely on the voluntary contribution of troops, funding, and logistical support from member states to implement its resolutions. This dependence means that even when the Council reaches a consensus, its effectiveness is determined by the willingness of states to bear the costs of intervention.

## **Committee System and Subsidiary Bodies**

To manage its broad mandate and the complex nature of modern interventionism, the Security Council utilizes a variety of subsidiary bodies and committees. These organs provide the technical expertise and oversight necessary to implement the Council's decisions and monitor the shifting dynamics of international conflict.

Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions are the most visible subsidiary bodies. Peacekeeping missions are deployed to monitor ceasefires, protect civilians, and support the implementation of peace agreements. In recent years, these missions have taken on increasingly complex mandates, often involving security sector reform and the protection of human rights.

Special political missions focus on mediation, conflict prevention, and the building of political institutions in post-conflict states.

Sanctions Committees are established for each specific sanctions regime authorized by the Council. These committees are responsible for monitoring the implementation of sanctions, considering requests for exemptions, and maintaining lists of individuals and entities subject to asset freezes or travel bans. The work of these committees is essential for ensuring that sanctions are targeted and effective while minimizing unintended humanitarian impacts.

The Counter-Terrorism Committee was established after the attacks of September 11, 2001, to coordinate international efforts to prevent and combat terrorism. This committee monitors the implementation of relevant resolutions and provides technical assistance to member states to strengthen their domestic counter-terrorism frameworks. In the context of interventionism, this committee plays a key role in addressing the transnational threats that often trigger international interference.

International Tribunals, such as those created for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, were established as subsidiary bodies of the Council to prosecute individuals for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. While these bodies have largely concluded their work, they established the critical precedent that sovereignty does not provide immunity for the gravest violations of international law. This legacy continues to shape the normative environment in which the Security Council operates.

## **The Role of the P5 and the Veto**

The structure of the Security Council is defined by the unique status of its five permanent members. The P5 possess the power to block any substantive resolution through a negative vote, regardless of the level of support from the rest of the Council or the General Assembly. This veto power is the most significant structural obstacle to collective action in the international system.

The original rationale for the veto was to ensure that the Council did not take action that would lead to a direct conflict between the major powers. It was a stabilizing compromise intended to keep the most powerful states within the multilateral system. However, in the 21st century, the use of the veto has become a tool for shielding allies and pursuing strategic competition. This has led to the perception of the Council as a geopolitical instrument rather than an impartial arbiter of peace.

The use of the veto has profound implications for the international legal order. When a permanent member uses its veto to block action in the face of mass atrocities or a clear act of aggression, it erodes the normative authority of the UN and encourages states to act unilaterally. This has led to a growing legitimacy crisis, as many states in the Global South and the wider

international community argue that the P5 are more concerned with their own interests than with the maintenance of global peace.

| <b>P5 Member</b> | <b>Historical Veto Priority</b>                   | <b>Current Approach to Intervention</b>                       |
|------------------|---|---|
| United States    | Protection of Regional Allies & Counter Terrorism | Support for Proactive, often Unilateral, Intervention         |
| Russia           | Sovereignty, Resistance to Western Regime Change  | Use of Veto to Shield Allies and Pursue Near-Abroad Interests |
| China            | Non-Interference, Territorial Integrity           | Emphasis on Consent & State-Led Peace Processes.              |
| United Kingdom   | Rule of Law & Collective Security, Stabilisation  | Support for Multilateral, Mandate-Driven Interventions.       |
| France           | Human Rights, R2P, European Security              | Advocacy for Limiting the Veto in Cases of Mass Atrocities    |

# Introduction to the Agenda - The Rise of Interventionism

## Why Interventionism Matters Today

The international legal order is currently facing its most significant challenge since the end of the Second World War. This challenge is defined by the rise of interventionism: the increasing frequency with which states interfere in the domestic affairs of others through coercive means. While the UN Charter was founded on the principle of the sovereign equality of all nations, the practice of intervention has evolved from a rare and extreme exception into a routine tool of statecraft.

Interventionism matters today because it touches on every aspect of global stability. In the modern era, the internal affairs of a state are rarely contained within its own borders. Technological advancement, economic interdependence, and the globalization of security threats mean that a crisis in one nation can rapidly destabilize an entire region. This interconnectedness has provided states with both the motivation and the means to interfere in the domestic processes of others.

The designation of a mineral as critical or a political situation as a threat is often the first step in an interventionary process. This securitization allows states to justify actions that would otherwise be seen as violations of international law. Whether it is the protection of human rights, the combatting of terrorism, or the securing of strategic resources, the rationales for intervention are expanding, even as the formal rules governing them remain static. This gap between the law as written and the law as practiced is the primary source of instability in the international legal order.

## Securitization and the Expansion of Interference

The rise of interventionism is driven by a process known as securitization, where issues that were previously considered domestic or economic are reframed as matters of national and international security. This expansion of the security mandate allows states to invoke exceptional powers and justify interference in areas such as trade, digital infrastructure, and internal political organization.

Digital transformation has created a new frontier for intervention. Cyber operations are now a primary tool for subversion, allowing states to target the electoral processes and critical infrastructure of their rivals with a high degree of deniability. These interventions are often more effective and less costly than traditional military force, but they are significantly harder to

regulate. The lack of a clear legal definition for what constitutes a cyber armed attack has created a normative grey zone that is being exploited by major powers and non-state actors alike.

Economic statecraft has also undergone a dramatic expansion. The use of sanctions and financial blockades is no longer a secondary tool used in support of diplomacy; it has become a primary method for coercion. For many states, the ability to restrict access to global financial markets or critical supply chains is a more powerful weapon than kinetic force. However, the widespread and often unilateral use of these tools has led to concerns about the weaponization of the global economy and its impact on the sovereignty of smaller nations.

## The Shift from Markets to Strategic Coercion

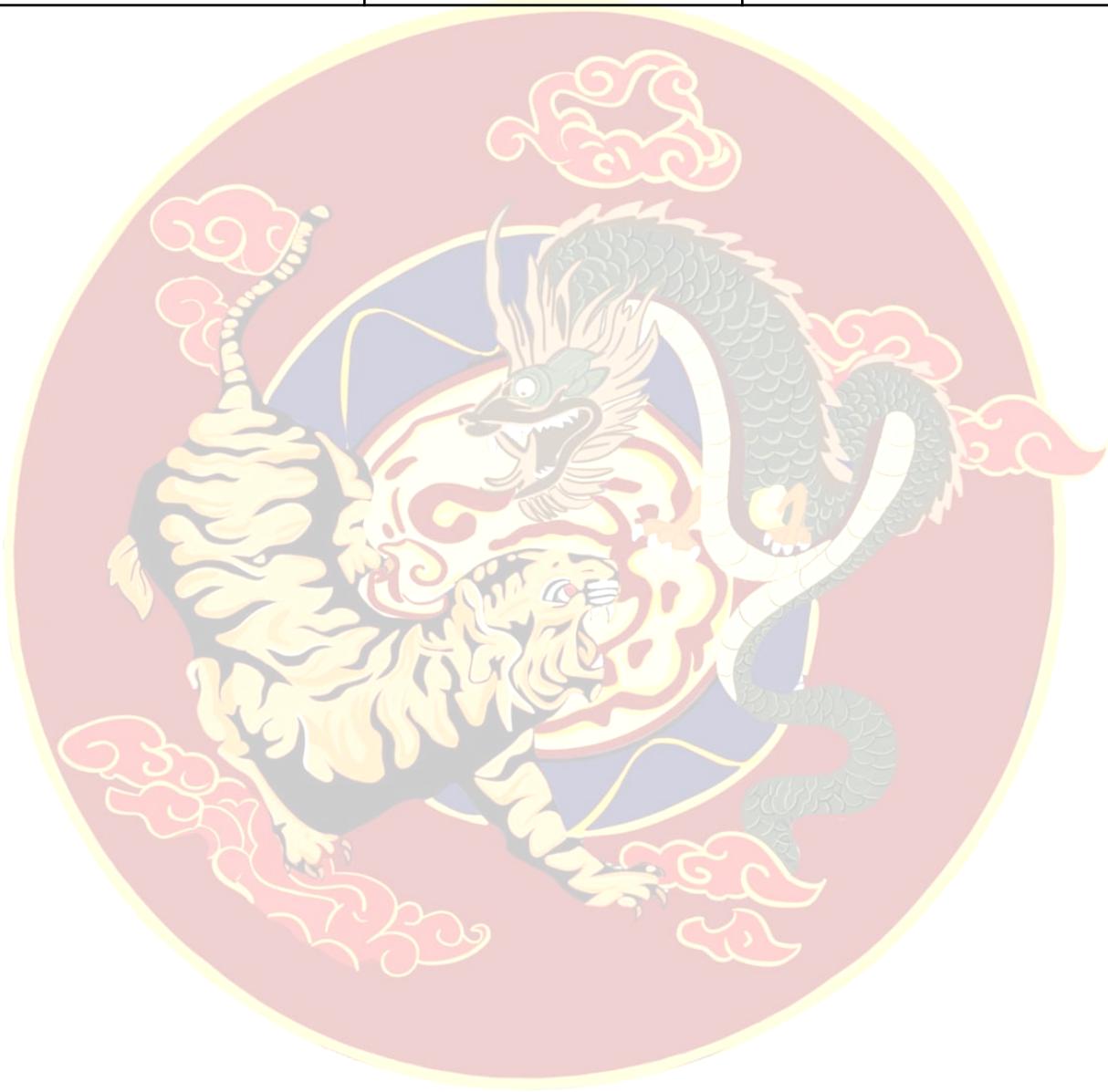
In the late 20th century, global interactions were largely governed by market logic and the promotion of international trade. It was believed that economic interdependence would lead to a more stable and peaceful world. However, in the 21st century, this interdependence is increasingly viewed as a vulnerability. States are now weaponizing the very connections that were intended to prevent conflict.

This shift from markets to strategic coercion is evident in the rise of interventionism. Control over value chains, financial networks, and information platforms has become a form of structural power. States that possess this power can intervene in the domestic affairs of others by threatening to disrupt these vital connections. This has led to a return of zero-sum thinking, where every international interaction is evaluated for its impact on strategic leverage.

The Security Council is the primary body tasked with managing this transition. However, the Council's traditional focus on kinetic conflict and interstate aggression means that it is often ill-equipped to address these new forms of intervention. The implications for the international legal order are profound: if the rules of the UN Charter only apply to traditional military force, then the majority of modern interventionary practices remain outside the reach of collective security.

| <b>Aspect of Intervention</b> | <b>Traditional Model (1945-1990)</b> | <b>Modern Model (2020s)</b>           |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Primary Tool                  | Kinetic Military Force               | Hybrid (Cyber, Sanctions, Lawfare)    |
| Target                        | Territorial Integrity                | Political Legitimacy & Infrastructure |
| Visibility                    | High (Visible Troop                  | Low (Deniable Cyber or                |

|                     |                            |  |
|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
|                     | Movements)                 | Financial Acts)                            |
| Legal Justification | Self-Defense or UN Mandate | R2P, Counter-Terrorism, Security-by-Demand |
| Actor Type          | State Militaries           | States, PMCs & Proxy Networks              |



# **The Historical Evolution of International Intervention**

## **Westphalian Foundations and the Principle of Non-Interference**

The modern international legal order is built upon the foundational principle of state sovereignty, a concept that emerged from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Following the devastation of the Thirty Years' War, European powers sought to create a system that would prevent future religious and political interference in the internal affairs of other nations. This Westphalian model established that each state has exclusive authority over its territory and population, and that no external power has the right to interfere in its domestic governance.

For nearly four centuries, this doctrine of non-interference was the primary rule of international relations. It was based on the simple analogy that just as individuals should be free and equal in their private spheres, states should be independent in their internal affairs. Sovereignty was seen as an absolute shield, providing a zone of autonomy that other states were legally obligated to respect. This principle was essential for the maintenance of international order, as it provided a clear boundary for the legitimate exercise of power and reduced the justifications for interstate war.

However, the Westphalian system was primarily designed by and for European states. Outside of Europe, during the era of colonization, sovereignty was often denied to nations that did not meet what the West considered the standard of civilization. This historical double standard meant that for much of the world, the principle of non-interference was a luxury rather than a right. This legacy continues to shape contemporary debates, as many states in the Global South remain deeply suspicious of any framework that seeks to qualify the absolute nature of sovereignty.

## **The Nineteenth Century: Standard of Civilization and Humanitarian Roots**

In the nineteenth century, the absolute doctrine of non-interference began to evolve as international law moved beyond purely territorial concerns. As the international community became more integrated through trade and diplomacy, a consciousness of collectivity began to emerge among legal scholars and political leaders. This led to the development of the idea that certain violations of the laws of humanity were a legitimate concern for all civilized nations.

This period saw the first formal attempts to justify intervention on humanitarian and religious grounds, particularly in the context of the Ottoman Empire. European powers intervened on

several occasions to protect Christian minorities, arguing that the Turkish government had failed in its duty to guarantee basic legal rights. These interventions were often framed as a defense of the values of the international community, creating a precursor to the modern responsibility to protect.

Legal experts of this period were divided on the legitimacy of these actions. Some, like Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns, argued that sovereignty could not be used as a shield to protect a state from its duties toward its inhabitants. Others, particularly from the positivist tradition in France and Prussia, adamantly condemned intervention as a violation of the essential principles of law. They argued that there could be no right against a right: since law is founded on independence, intervention is by definition a violation of law. This debate established the fundamental tension between sovereignty and human protection that remains at the heart of the Security Council's work today.

## **The UN Charter and the Cold War Paradigm**

The creation of the United Nations in 1945 represented the most significant effort to institutionalize the governance of intervention. The UN Charter sought to prohibit the unilateral use of force while creating a centralized mechanism for collective security. Article 2(4) established a general prohibition on the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, while Article 2(7) protected the domestic jurisdiction of member nations.

For the first time, the right of intervention was formally restricted to the United Nations Security Council acting under Chapter VII. This was intended to end the era of Great Power interventions and ensure that force was only used in the common interest of the international community. However, the onset of the Cold War quickly undermined this vision. The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union led to frequent paralysis in the Security Council, as each superpower used its veto to protect its ideological allies and spheres of influence.

Interventionism during the Cold War often took the form of covert subversion and proxy wars. Because formal military intervention was risky and difficult to authorize, states turned to clandestine means to influence the domestic authority structures of their rivals. This period reinforced the perception that intervention was primarily an instrument of geopolitical competition rather than a genuine effort to uphold international law. The legacy of the Cold War is a profound trust deficit that continues to hamper efforts to reform the collective security system.

## **The Post-Cold War Surge and the Responsibility to Protect**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a surge in international interventionism. Without the threat of a superpower veto, the Security Council became significantly more active,

authorizing a series of interventions in internal conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. This period was characterized by a renewed optimism that the international community could finally implement the collective security promised by the UN Charter.

However, the tragedies of the 1990s, specifically the failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide and the ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica, revealed the limitations of the existing framework. It was argued that the international community’s traditional focus on sovereignty had allowed mass atrocities to occur unchecked. In response, a new norm began to emerge: the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Formally adopted at the 2005 World Summit, R2P redefined sovereignty not as an absolute right of control, but as a sovereign responsibility to protect citizens from core international crimes.

This shift represented a normative revolution in international law. It established that if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population, the international community has a duty to intervene. While R2P was intended to provide clear guidelines for intervention, its implementation has remained deeply controversial. The 2011 intervention in Libya, which began as a humanitarian mission but evolved into a regime-change operation, led to a significant backlash. Since then, states like China and Russia have become increasingly reluctant to authorize interventions under the R2P framework, leading to a new era of paralysis in the face of crises like the Syrian civil war.

| <b>Era</b>                | <b>Key Principle</b>      | <b>Legal Justification</b>          | <b>Primary Target</b>                              |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Westphalian (1648-1815)   | Non-Interference          | Territorial Supremacy               | Religious & Dynastic Stability                     |
| Imperial (1815-1914)      | Standard of Civilisation  | Humanitarian & Religious Protection | The Ottoman Empire & Non-European States           |
| Post War (1945-1990)      | Sovereignty & Prohibition | Self-Defense or UN Mandate          | Cold War Ideological Rivals                        |
| Liberal Order (1990-2011) | R2P                       | Responsibility to Protect           | Fragile State and Internal Atrocities              |
| Multi-Polar (2011-2026)   | Strategic Coercion        | Security-by-Demand & Lawfare        | Geopolitical rivals & Technological Infrastructure |

# **What Is Interventionism and How Its Mechanics Work**

## **Military Intervention: Kinetic Force and Regime Change**

Military intervention is the traditional and most visible form of interventionism. It involves the deployment of armed personnel or the use of kinetic weapons across international borders for the purpose of altering the political authority structure or security environment of a target state. In the context of the Security Council, military intervention is the ultimate coercive tool, authorized under Article 42 when non-kinetic measures have failed.

The mechanics of military intervention have evolved dramatically. In the past, interventions were often large-scale invasions aimed at territorial control. Today, they are more frequently limited in scope, involving precision air strikes, drone operations, or the deployment of special forces. These interventions are often aimed at achieving a specific strategic goal, such as the degradation of a terrorist group or the protection of a civilian population, rather than the total defeat of a state.

Regime change remains one of the most controversial objectives of military intervention. While often framed as a humanitarian necessity to remove a brutal dictator, foreign-imposed regime change seldom leads to long-term stability. Research indicates that the act of overthrowing a government often causes the collapse of domestic institutions and the disintegration of the military, leading to insurgencies and civil war. This pattern explains why the Security Council is increasingly wary of authorizing interventions that do not have a clear and sustainable post-conflict plan.

## **Economic Intervention: Sanctions and Financial Statecraft**

Economic intervention has emerged as the preferred tool of modern statecraft. It involves the use of financial and trade measures to coerce a target state into changing its behavior. The primary mechanics of economic intervention include the imposition of asset freezes, travel bans, sectoral restrictions, and the blocking of access to the global financial system. These measures are often authorized by the Security Council under Article 41 or imposed unilaterally by major economies.

Financial statecraft is particularly effective because of the high degree of global economic interdependence. States that control the primary reserve currencies and the infrastructure of international payments can exert significant pressure on others. The capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in 2026 followed a decade of reliance on sanctions that cratered the country's oil exports and destabilized its infrastructure. This case illustrates how sustained economic intervention can weaken a state to the point where kinetic action becomes possible.

However, the widespread use of economic intervention raises serious humanitarian concerns. Intensive sanctions often lead to the collapse of essential services and the impoverishment of the general population, while having limited impact on the regime's elite. Furthermore, the unilateral imposition of sanctions is seen by many as a violation of the principle of sovereign equality, leading to the fragmentation of the global economy as targeted states seek to build alternative financial networks.

## **Cyber and Digital Intervention: The New Frontier of Subversion**

Cyber intervention is the newest and most complex mechanic of modern interventionism. It involves the use of digital operations to disrupt, influence, or sabotage the internal processes of another state. Because cyber operations are often covert and difficult to attribute, they allow states to intervene with a high degree of deniability. This has made the digital realm the primary arena for modern subversion.

Interference in electoral processes is a prominent form of digital intervention. This involves the hacking of voter registries, the intrusion into digital systems used for balloting, and the use of informational measures to surreptitiously manipulate online discussions. In the 2024 and 2025 election cycles, informational measures were the most popular tactic, used in over 24 countries to distort the media landscape and undermine public confidence in democratic institutions.

Cyber intervention also targets the physical infrastructure of states. Attacks on power grids, communication networks, and financial systems can cause significant damage without the use of a single soldier. The 2026 U.S. Cybersecurity Strategy reflects a significant shift toward offensive cyber operations as a form of deterrence by punishment. This indicates that major powers now view the digital domain as a legitimate battlefield for interventionary diplomacy. The implications for international law are profound, as the lack of clear rules for cyber warfare increases the risk of unintended escalation and the collapse of digital norms.

## **Political and Legal Intervention: Lawfare and Institutional Capture**

Political and legal intervention involves the strategic use of international institutions and legal mechanisms to influence the domestic affairs of a state. This includes the support of domestic opposition groups, the promotion of democracy through conditional aid, and the phenomenon of lawfare: the use of legal processes to achieve a strategic military or political objective.

Lawfare has become a multidimensional tool in modern conflicts. States like Ukraine and Armenia have launched projects to file cases and submit complaints before international courts, such as the ICJ and the WTO, as a way to delegitimize their opponents and secure tactical

advantages. While seeking accountability through legal avenues is in the spirit of international law, the strategic use of these mechanisms can also lead to the perception that the legal system is a weapon rather than an impartial arbiter.

Institutional capture refers to the effort by states to influence the norms and standards of international organizations to favor their interventionary goals. This can involve the creation of new multilateral forums that assert national sovereignty over matters of civil rights, or the weakening of existing human rights standards through the strategic use of veto power and voting blocs. For the Security Council, this means that the very rules it is supposed to enforce are often the subjects of intense political competition.

| <b>Intervention Type</b> | <b>Operational Mechanic</b>   | <b>Primary Tool</b>               | <b>Effect on Target State</b>                    |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Kinetic                  | Article 42<br>Military Action | Special Forces, Air Strikes       | Destruction of Infrastructure, Regime Collapse   |
| Financial                | Article 41<br>Sanctions       | Asset Freezes, Trade Blockades    | Hyperinflation, Loss of Essential Imports        |
| Informational            | Digital Subversion            | Disinformation, Social Media Bots | Social Polarisation, Loss of Institutional Trust |
| Judicial                 | Lawfare                       | ICC/ICJ Filings, Sanctions Law    | Delegitimisation, Political Marginalisation      |
| Technical                | Cyber Shortage                | Malware, Infrastructure Hacking   | Disruption of Power Grids & Communications       |

# **Why Interventionism Has Become a Geopolitical Issue**

## **From Collective Security to Strategic Competition**

The original vision of the United Nations was to create a collective security system where the use of force was centralized and regulated by the Security Council. Intervention was intended to be a rare and extreme measure, authorized only when the common interests of the international community were at stake. However, in the 21st century, the logic of collective security is being replaced by the logic of strategic competition.

Interventionism has become a primary instrument of Great Power rivalry. Major powers use intervention not just to solve humanitarian crises, but to secure regional influence, project power, and undermine their opponents. This shift has turned the Security Council into a venue for geopolitical signaling rather than an effective body for conflict resolution. Decisions on when and where to intervene are increasingly determined by the strategic calculus of the P5 rather than the legal merits of a situation.

The securitization of international relations has accelerated this trend. Issues ranging from energy supply to technological standards are now framed through a security lens, providing states with new justifications for interference. When minerals like lithium or cobalt are designated as critical, or when a cyber operation is framed as an act of war, the threshold for intervention is lowered. This competitive environment ensures that intervention is no longer a tool of last resort, but a routine part of geopolitical statecraft.

## **Selective Activism and the Crisis of Neutrality**

One of the most corrosive effects of the rise of interventionism is the perception of selective activism and double standards. The international community has demonstrated a consistent willingness to act decisively in some crises while remaining paralyzed in others. This inconsistency is the direct result of the political interests of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Selective enforcement undermines the foundational premise that international law applies equally to all states. When the Council authorizes intervention in Libya but fails to act in Syria, it sends the message that the protection of human rights is contingent upon geopolitical alignment. This has led to a deep crisis of neutrality for the UN. States subject to sanctions or intervention perceive international law as rigid and binding, while those protected by a veto experience the same legal framework as flexible and negotiable.

For the Global South, this selectivity is a primary source of mistrust. The perception that international law is an instrument of political convenience has weakened the willingness of states to rely on the Security Council for protection. This legitimacy deficit is cumulative: each instance of veto-induced inaction or unauthorized intervention reinforces the belief that the international order is anachronistic and biased.

## Rise of Non-Western Powers and Rival Ordering

The rise of new global powers, specifically China and Russia, is reshaping the geopolitics of interventionism. These states have become vocal defenders of a strict Westphalian interpretation of sovereignty, challenging the Western-led liberal international order. They argue that the rise of interventionism, particularly under the guise of democracy promotion and human rights, is a form of Western imperialism that destabilizes the international system.

However, this opposition to interventionism is often selective. Both China and Russia have developed their own interventionist practices, focusing on economic leverage, political subversion, and the use of private military companies. Russia’s use of groups like the Wagner Group in Mali and Sudan illustrates a shift toward rival forms of interventionism that pursue different goals from Western-led missions. China’s increasing economic footprint and its use of investment-driven security agreements allow it to project influence without the traditional deployment of troops.

The result is the emergence of rival orderings. The world is no longer moving toward a single set of universal norms; it is moving toward a pluralistic architecture where different powers promote different rules for intervention. This systemic rivalry makes collective action through the Security Council nearly impossible, as the P5 are more concerned with preventing each other from gaining an advantage than with managing shared threats to the peace.

| <b>Geopolitical Dynamic</b> | <b>Key Actor</b>   | <b>Primary Goal</b>              | <b>Impact on Legal Order</b>        |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Persistent Engagement       | United States      | Deterrence by Punishment         | Lowering the Threshold for Force    |
| Dictatorial Drift           | Autocratic Leaders | Regime Survival & Control        | Erosion of Democratic Norms         |
| Asian Century               | China & NGPs       | New International Economic Order | Fragmenting Western-Led Trade Rules |
| Near-Abroad                 | Russia             | Regional Hegemony                | Direct Violation of                 |

|                 |                |                           |                                   |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Policy          |                |                           | Article 2(4)                      |
| Club Governance | G7, BRICS, G20 | Self-Legitimated Security | Bypassing the UN Security Council |



# **International Law and Global Rules Governing Intervention**

## **The Prohibition of Force and Article 2(4)**

The prohibition on the threat or use of force is the most fundamental rule of the international legal order. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter was intended to create a stable world where the sovereignty of states was absolute and interstate aggression was illegal. It remains the core principle that the Security Council is tasked with upholding. However, the rise of interventionism has subjected this rule to intense pressure.

Some legal scholars argue that Article 2(4) is no longer a freestanding rule of customary law, but rather a formal treaty obligation that is frequently violated with impunity. They point to the rise of unauthorized interventions and the development of new doctrines like humanitarian intervention and preventive self-defense as evidence that the normative superstructure of the Charter has collapsed. Others maintain that the rule remains unshaken, noting that even when states use force, they go to great lengths to find legal justifications under the Charter, thereby affirming its continued relevance.

The challenge for the Security Council is that Article 2(4) is being adapted to a security environment it was not designed to manage. The rise of non-state actors, the use of cyber technology, and the emergence of mass atrocities as threats to the peace have created a demand for a more flexible interpretation of the prohibition of force. This flexibility, however, risks opening the door to unchecked interventionism, as states use the language of protection and deterrence to justify self-interested actions.

## **The Domestic Jurisdiction Exception and Article 2(7)**

The principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs is codified in Article 2(7) of the Charter. It establishes that the United Nations has no authority to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. This principle was intended to be the primary defense of states against external interference. However, the rise of international human rights law and the doctrine of the responsibility to protect have fundamentally transformed the meaning of domestic jurisdiction.

Today, many issues that were once considered the exclusive concern of the state are now matters of international concern. The treatment of ethnic minorities, the conduct of elections, and the management of internal displacement are all subject to international scrutiny. This shift is often described as the humanization of sovereignty: the idea that state sovereignty only exists to the extent that it respects human rights and needs.

This has led to a direct conflict within the Charter itself. While Article 2(7) prohibits intervention, the Charter also commits the UN to promoting fundamental freedoms for all. The Security Council has increasingly used its Chapter VII powers to resolve this conflict, determining that grave human rights violations constitute a threat to international peace. While this allows for intervention in extreme cases, it also creates the perception that the UN is a threat to the autonomy of its member states, particularly when the Council's actions are seen as selective or politically motivated.

### **Article 51 of the UN Charter**

Article 51 of the UN Charter recognizes the inherent right of states to act in self-defense if an armed attack occurs. In the context of the rise of interventionism, this provision has become central to debates over the legality of unilateral or pre-emptive military actions undertaken without explicit authorization from the UN Security Council. States increasingly invoke Article 51 to justify cross-border operations against non-state actors, terrorism, or perceived imminent threats. This trend raises important questions about the limits of self-defense and whether broad interpretations of Article 51 risk weakening the prohibition on the use of force and reshaping the balance between sovereignty and security within the international legal order.

### **Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT)**

The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties establishes the rules governing the interpretation, application, and termination of international treaties. As interventionist practices expand, the VCLT plays an important role in determining how key legal instruments such as the UN Charter and regional security treaties are interpreted by states and international institutions. Different interpretations of treaty provisions relating to sovereignty, consent, and collective security often shape the legal arguments used to justify or challenge intervention. In this way, the VCLT provides the framework through which states attempt to legitimize their actions within the evolving structure of international law.

### **Article 2(1) of the UN Charter**

Article 2(1) of the UN Charter affirms the principle of the sovereign equality of all member states, which is a core foundation of the international legal order. The rise of interventionism challenges this principle when powerful states intervene militarily, politically, or economically in the affairs of other states without their consent. Such actions raise concerns about unequal power relations and the erosion of the traditional doctrine of non-interference. The tension between sovereign equality and interventionist practices highlights the broader struggle within international law to reconcile respect for state sovereignty with emerging claims of humanitarian responsibility and collective security.

## **Legal Implications of Intervention by Invitation**

Intervention by invitation is a well-established doctrine where a state invites foreign military forces into its territory to assist in domestic security. This is generally considered a lawful exercise of sovereignty and does not violate Article 2(4). However, in an era of internal civil strife and questionable governmental legitimacy, the mechanics of invitation have become a site of legal dispute.

The emerging concept of protection legitimacy suggests that a government’s right to invite external forces is contingent upon its protection of its population. If a regime is actively committing war crimes or ethnic cleansing, it can be argued that it has lost the right to represent the state internationally. In such cases, an invitation for foreign military support may be legally invalid.

Furthermore, a state that intervenes by invitation in a situation involving mass atrocities may be held legally complicit in those crimes. This has significant implications for states that provide security assistance to autocratic regimes. The Security Council has the authority to declare when a state has lost its protection legitimacy, but the use of the veto often prevents such a determination, leaving the legal status of many interventions by invitation in a state of dangerous ambiguity.

## **The Rules-Based Order vs. the International Legal Order**

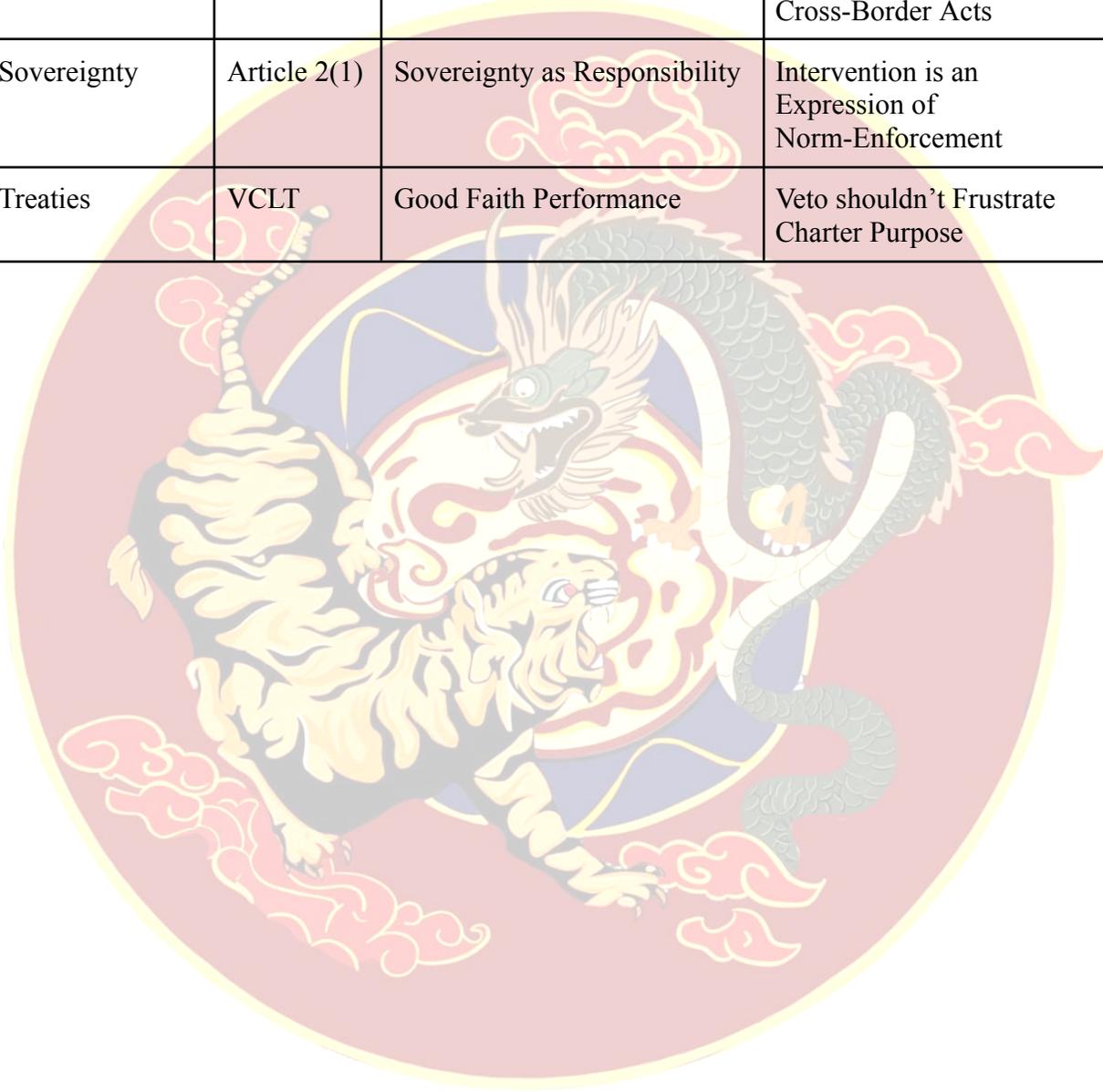
The term rules-based international order has become a central point of debate in the discourse on interventionism. For many Western countries, this term refers to the framework of rules, principles, and institutions that have governed the international system since the Second World War. It is often seen as synonymous with international law.

However, many scholars and non-Western states argue that the rules-based order is a political concept rather than a legal one. They contend that the use of this term allows powerful states to bypass the strict requirements of international law and the UN Charter. By invoking a rules-based order, states can justify interventions that may lack Security Council authorization but are seen as consistent with certain liberal norms.

This distinction is not merely semantic; it touches on the very source of authority in the international system. The international legal order is founded on the consent of states and the formal structure of the UN Charter. The rules-based order is seen by its critics as a discretionary system where rules are interpreted and applied based on political convenience. This tension is a primary driver of the rise of interventionism, as the move away from formal law toward discretionary rules reduces the predictability and accountability of state actions.

| <b>Legal Concept</b> | <b>Primary Article</b> | <b>Contemporary Interpretation</b> | <b>Impact on Interventionism</b> |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

|                      |              |                               |   |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Non-Intervention     | Article 2(7) | Conditional on Human Rights   | Permits Scrutiny of Internal Affairs              |
| Prohibition of Force | Article 2(4) | Flexible under 'Protection'   | Lower Threshold for Authorised Strikes            |
| Self-Defense         | Article 51   | Preemptive and Anti-Terrorist | Justifies Unilateral Cross-Border Acts            |
| Sovereignty          | Article 2(1) | Sovereignty as Responsibility | Intervention is an Expression of Norm-Enforcement |
| Treaties             | VCLT         | Good Faith Performance        | Veto shouldn't Frustrate Charter Purpose          |



# **The Role of the United Nations System in Managing Intervention**

## **The Security Council as Gatekeeper of Legitimacy**

The United Nations Security Council is the primary institutional mechanism for managing interventionism. Under the Charter, it is the only body with the mandate to authorize the coercive use of force. This role as a gatekeeper of legitimacy is essential for preventing a return to a world of unregulated conflict. When the Council authorizes an intervention, it provides a legal framework that limits the scope of action, defines its humanitarian objectives, and establishes mechanisms for oversight and accountability.

However, the Council's role is increasingly defensive. In a fragmented international order, the Council is often used as a platform for states to justify their own interventions or block those of their rivals. This has led to the emergence of emergency powers thinking, where some Council actions are seen as exceptional measures that operate on the edge of legality. The lack of a binding legal oversight mechanism for the Council means that its legitimacy depends entirely on the perceived fairness and effectiveness of its decisions.

The Council also manages intervention through its control of peacekeeping and stabilization mandates. These missions are the primary tool for the UN to engage in conflict environments. However, the rise of geopolitical polarization has made it difficult to secure the long-term funding and political support necessary for these missions to succeed. The trend toward stabilization and counter-terrorism operations has also blurred the line between neutral peacekeeping and partisan intervention, further challenging the UN's credibility.

## **The General Assembly and "Uniting for Peace"**

In response to the frequent deadlock in the Security Council, the General Assembly has increasingly asserted its role in managing interventionism. Under the Uniting for Peace resolution, the Assembly can make recommendations for collective measures when the Council is unable to fulfill its primary responsibility. While these recommendations are not legally binding, they carry significant normative authority.

The General Assembly is the most representative body of the international system, and its debates provide a more inclusive platform for articulating global norms. In recent years, the Assembly has passed resolutions calling for an end to unilateral interventions and the upholding of the principle of non-interference. These actions signal a growing frustration with the P5-dominated Security Council and a desire for a more democratic and law-based international order.

The Assembly also plays an important role in defining the factual basis for intervention. By commissioning reports and investigations into human rights abuses, the General Assembly can establish a shared record of atrocities that the Security Council cannot easily ignore. This knowledge-production role is a critical check on the selective activism of the major powers.

## **The International Court of Justice: Judicial Settlement and State Responsibility**

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) serves as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, tasked with settling legal disputes between states and providing advisory opinions on questions of international law. In the context of interventionism, the ICJ plays a critical role in defining the legal boundaries of state behavior. Through its landmark judgments, the Court has clarified the content of the principle of non-intervention and the scope of the prohibition on the use of force under Article 2(4).

A primary function of the ICJ is to determine state responsibility for violations of international law. In cases like *Nicaragua v. United States*, the Court established that military and paramilitary support for domestic opposition groups constitutes a violation of sovereignty and a breach of customary international law. Furthermore, the Court has the authority to order provisional measures to prevent the deterioration of a conflict, which are legally binding on the parties involved. However, the ICJ faces significant structural limitations, most notably its reliance on state consent for jurisdiction and the lack of an independent enforcement mechanism. When a powerful state chooses to ignore an ICJ ruling, as has occurred in several high-profile cases, the effectiveness of judicial intervention as a check on power is severely compromised.

## **The UN Secretary-General: Preventive Diplomacy and R2P Advocacy**

The Secretary-General occupies a unique position within the UN system, serving as both the chief administrative officer and a high-level diplomatic mediator. The role in managing interventionism is centered on the exercise of "good offices" to prevent the escalation of domestic crises into regional or international threats. Through briefings to the Security Council and private mediation efforts, the Secretary-General seeks to find political solutions that avoid the need for coercive intervention.

The Secretary-General has been a primary advocate for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, working to advance its conceptual and practical development since its adoption in 2005. By articulating the "three pillar" framework, the Secretary-General has emphasized that the international community's responsibility begins with prevention and assistance, turning to collective action only when a state has manifestly failed to protect its population. Furthermore, initiatives like "Human Rights Up Front" were launched to transform the internal culture of the

UN, ensuring that all departments prioritize the early warning signs of mass atrocities. These efforts aim to move the UN beyond reactive crisis management toward a more proactive and norm-driven approach to global security.

## **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council**

The Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are the primary components of the UN's human rights architecture. Their role in the governance of interventionism is largely investigative and normative. The HRC often mandates Commissions of Inquiry and fact-finding missions to investigate allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in specific conflict zones.

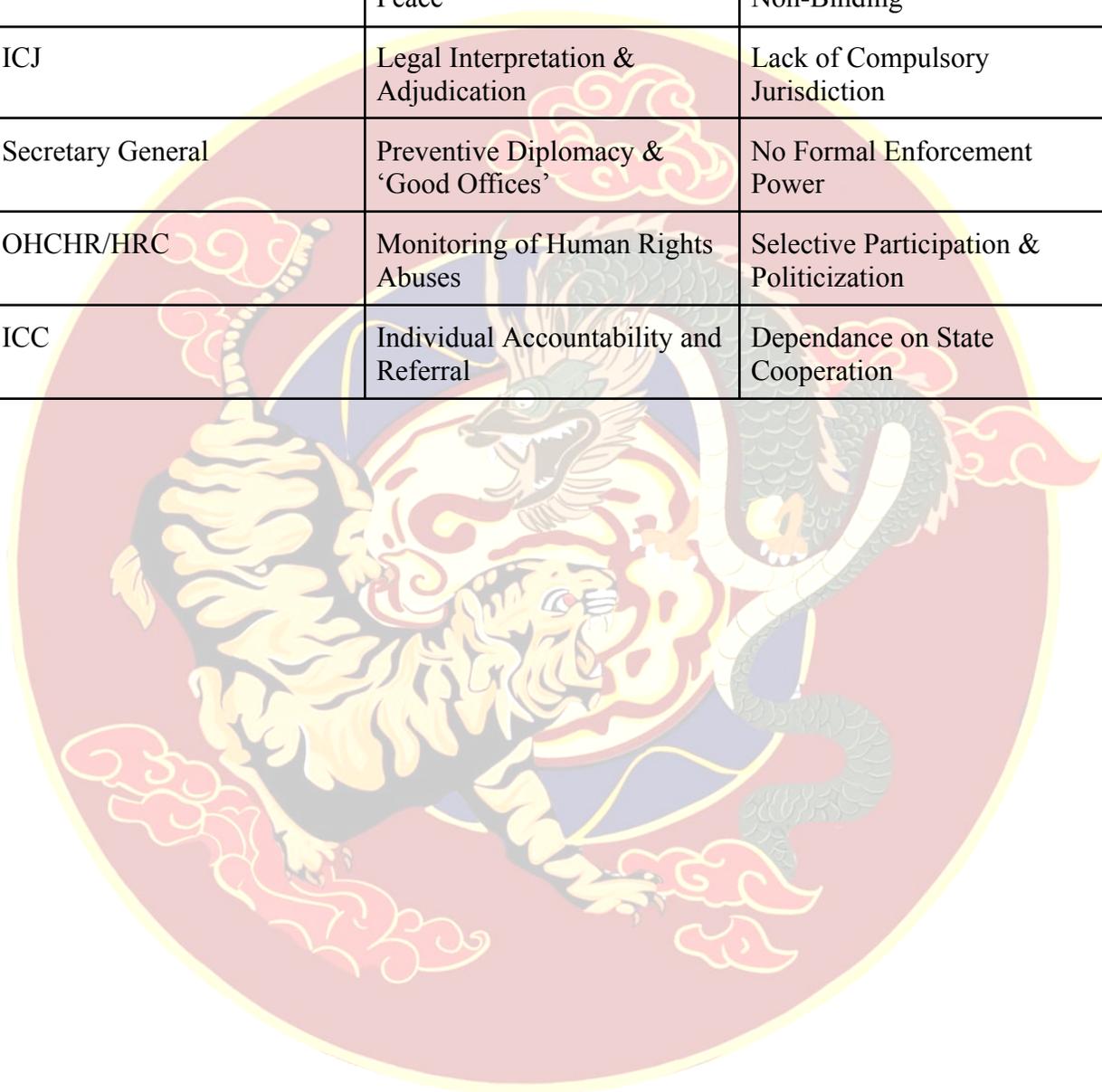
These investigative bodies play a vital role in establishing a shared record of atrocities, which serves as the factual basis for subsequent Security Council deliberations. By documenting abuses and identifying those responsible, the OHCHR and the HRC promote accountability and counter the culture of impunity that often fuels intervention. While these bodies do not possess the power to authorize force or impose sanctions, their reports carry significant moral weight and can mobilize international public opinion. The work of the HRC is, however, frequently criticized for its perceived politicization and the selective focus on certain country situations, reflecting the same geopolitical divisions that plague the wider UN system.

## **The International Criminal Court and Situational Referrals**

Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) is an independent judicial institution, its relationship with the United Nations is a central feature of the global framework for managing intervention. The Security Council has the unique authority under Article 13(b) of the Rome Statute to refer situations to the ICC prosecutor, even when the crimes occur in the territory of a state that is not a party to the treaty. This referral power allows the Council to utilize the ICC as a tool for legal intervention, seeking accountability for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The Council also possesses the power under Article 16 to defer ICC investigations or prosecutions for a renewable period of twelve months if it is deemed necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security. This creates a complex intersection between the requirements of justice and the necessities of political diplomacy. The use of referrals has been subject to intense debate, with critics arguing that the P5 use the court selectively to target their enemies while shielding their allies. The resulting perception of bias has strained relations between the ICC and many regional organizations, illustrating the difficulties of maintaining judicial independence within a political system of collective security.

| <b>UN Organ</b>   | <b>Role in Intervention</b>            | <b>Limitations</b>                       |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Security Council  | Sole Authority to Authorise Force      | Veto Power & P5 Rivalry                  |
| General Assembly  | Norm-Setting & 'Uniting for Peace'     | Recommendations are Non-Binding          |
| ICJ               | Legal Interpretation & Adjudication    | Lack of Compulsory Jurisdiction          |
| Secretary General | Preventive Diplomacy & 'Good Offices'  | No Formal Enforcement Power              |
| OHCHR/HRC         | Monitoring of Human Rights Abuses      | Selective Participation & Politicization |
| ICC               | Individual Accountability and Referral | Dependance on State Cooperation          |



# **Environmental and Social Impacts of Interventionism**

## **The Human Cost of Kinetic and Economic Coercion**

The rise of interventionism has profound and often tragic consequences for the populations of target states. While military interventions are frequently launched to protect civilians, they often result in significant unintended harm. Kinetic operations in urban environments lead to civilian casualties, the destruction of infrastructure, and the collapse of local health and education systems. These impacts are not easily reversed and often create a legacy of trauma and poverty that fuels future conflict.

Economic intervention can be equally devastating. The use of sanctions and blockades to pressure regimes often results in the deprivation of the entire population. In states like Syria and Venezuela, intensive economic pressure has led to hyperinflation, food shortages, and the collapse of the power grid. These conditions violate the basic economic and social rights of the population, including the rights to life, health, and an adequate standard of living. This creates a moral hazard: the very tools intended to promote human rights and stability can end up causing more harm than the problems they were designed to solve.

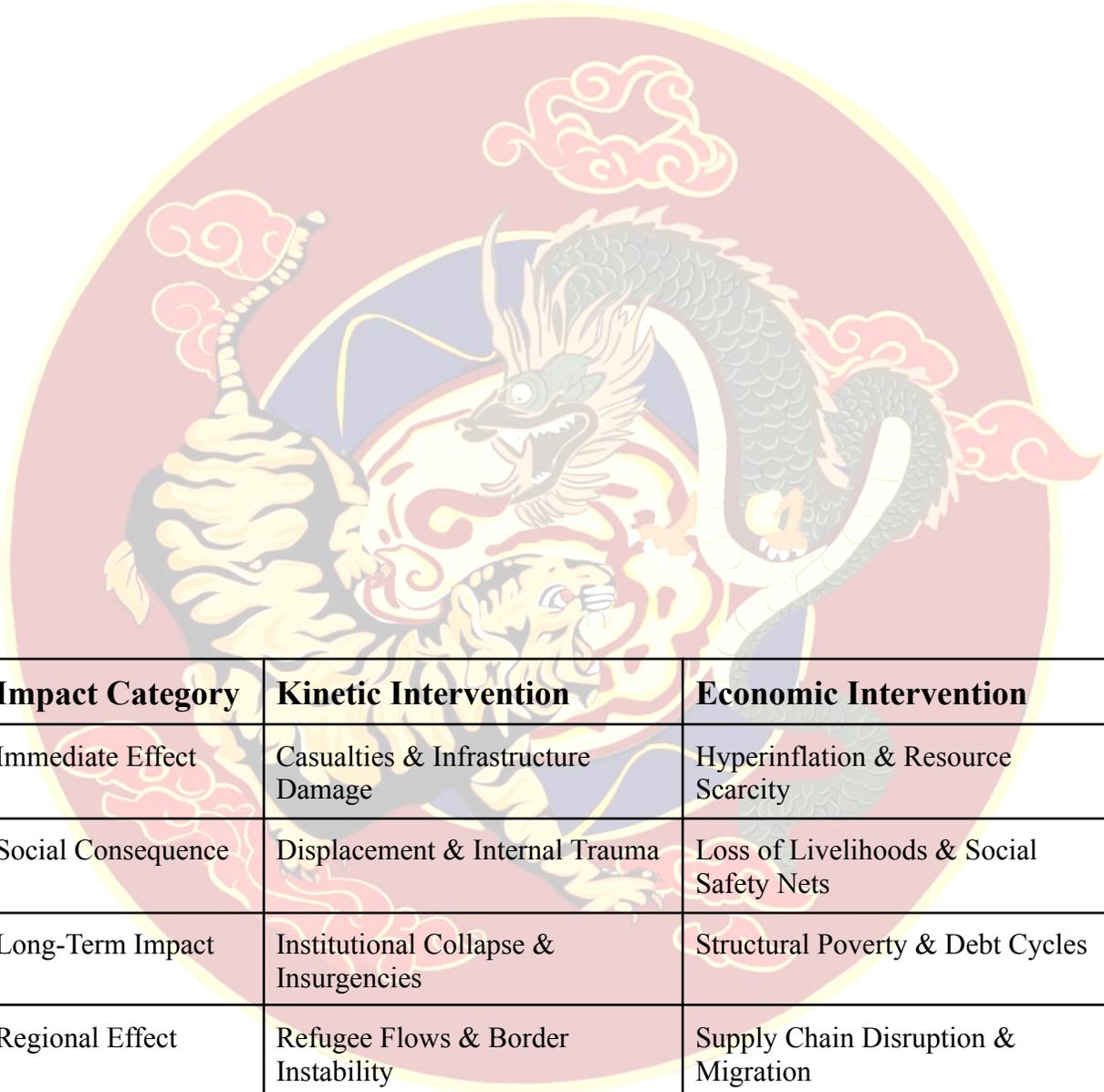
The social impact of intervention also includes the polarization of the target society. External interference often empowers certain domestic actors while marginalizing others, leading to a breakdown of social cohesion. The presence of foreign forces or the imposition of external political conditions can trigger a backlash that strengthens extremist movements and erodes the legitimacy of local institutions. This makes it harder for a state to achieve a sustainable and inclusive peace once the intervention ends.

## **Displacement, Migration, and Regional Instability**

Interventionism is a primary cause of the global migration crisis. Whether through kinetic force or economic collapse, interventions often produce massive flows of refugees and internally displaced persons. This displacement is not just a humanitarian issue; it is a major driver of regional and international instability.

Refugee flows can strain the resources and infrastructure of host countries, leading to social tensions and the rise of anti-migrant politics. In regions like the Middle East and Latin America, the transboundary consequences of intervention have led to a cycle of instability where displacement from one conflict fuels tensions in neighboring states. Furthermore, the focus on managing refugee flows often leads to the further securitization of borders and the erosion of international humanitarian standards.

From a governance perspective, the failure to address the displacement caused by intervention is a significant weakness of the international legal order. While states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens, they often treat the consequences of their interventions as external burdens. This unequal distribution of the costs of interventionism reinforces the perception that the international order is biased in favor of the interests of the powerful.



| <b>Impact Category</b> | <b>Kinetic Intervention</b>           | <b>Economic Intervention</b>             |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Immediate Effect       | Casualties & Infrastructure Damage    | Hyperinflation & Resource Scarcity       |
| Social Consequence     | Displacement & Internal Trauma        | Loss of Livelihoods & Social Safety Nets |
| Long-Term Impact       | Institutional Collapse & Insurgencies | Structural Poverty & Debt Cycles         |
| Regional Effect        | Refugee Flows & Border Instability    | Supply Chain Disruption & Migration      |
| Legal Concern          | IHL Violations & War Crimes           | Violations of Economic & Social Rights   |

# Case Studies and Patterns in International Intervention

## The Rwandan Genocide 1994: The Failure of Inaction

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda stands as one of the most significant moral and structural failures in the history of the United Nations Security Council. Over a period of one hundred days, approximately 800,000 people were slaughtered in a systematic campaign of violence. Despite clear warning signs and urgent pleas from the commander of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), the international community remained largely indifferent. The Security Council's response was characterized by bureaucratic hesitation and a lack of political will, particularly among the permanent members who were reluctant to authorize a robust intervention in what they framed as a domestic civil war.

The legal and political implications of the Rwandan case were profound. In the immediate aftermath of the start of the killings, the Council actually voted to reduce the peacekeeping force in the country rather than reinforce it. This decision illustrated the structural vulnerability of the collective security system when the interests of major powers are not directly engaged. The failure in Rwanda became the primary catalyst for the reevaluation of absolute sovereignty, leading directly to the development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. It established the precedent that if the Council fails to act in the face of mass atrocities, its own legitimacy and the moral standing of the international legal order are called into question.

## Kosovo 1999 and the Dilemma of Unauthorized Action

The 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo remains one of the most significant case studies in the rise of interventionism. It established the template for humanitarian intervention that operates without a Security Council mandate. While the intervention was intended to end ethnic cleansing, its lack of formal legal authorization led to a deep crisis of legitimacy for the UN Charter system.

The Kosovo case highlighted the gap between international legality and political legitimacy. For its supporters, the intervention was a necessary moral act to prevent genocide, demonstrating that the laws of humanity could override the principle of sovereignty. For its critics, specifically Russia and China, it was an illegal act of aggression that undermined the foundation of the post-war order and set a dangerous precedent for Great Power intervention. The legacy of Kosovo is a fragmented international legal order where states increasingly feel entitled to use force based on their own moral and strategic assessments.

## **Libya 2011 and the Crisis of the R2P Doctrine**

The 2011 intervention in Libya was the first major test of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine in a kinetic context. The Security Council authorized all necessary measures to protect civilians, but the mission quickly expanded into a regime-change operation that ended with the death of Muammar Qaddafi. The intervention was initially hailed as a success for R2P, but the subsequent collapse of the Libyan state and the spread of instability across the region have made it a symbol of the dangers of interventionism.

The Libya case had a profound impact on the geopolitics of the Security Council. Russia and China felt that they had been deceived by the Western powers, who used a humanitarian mandate to achieve a political objective. This has led to a hardened stance against intervention in the Council, contributing to the paralysis over subsequent crises. The failure of Libya demonstrated that without a clear and limited mandate, and a commitment to post-conflict stabilization, humanitarian intervention can easily become a source of long-term instability.

## **Ukraine 2022 and the Failure of Collective Security**

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation represents the most direct challenge to the prohibition of force in the modern era. As a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia launched a war of aggression that explicitly violates Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. The Council has been completely unable to act because Russia uses its veto to block any resolution condemning its actions.

The Ukraine case illustrates the structural vulnerability of the UN system: it cannot prevent intervention when the aggressor is a P5 power. This failure has led to a significant shift toward unilateralism and regional security alliances, as states realize that the Security Council cannot guarantee their territorial integrity. The conflict in Ukraine has also accelerated the rise of non-kinetic interventionism, as both sides utilize cyber operations, economic sanctions, and informational warfare to achieve their goals.

## **Venezuela 2026: Sanctions, Raids, and Modern Intervention**

The events in Venezuela in January 2026 represent the current state of interventionary mechanics. The capture of Nicolás Maduro by U.S. military forces followed a decade of coercive economic measures and diplomatic isolation. This case highlights the fusion of kinetic force and economic statecraft as a tool for regime change.

The intervention in Venezuela was justified as a defense of democratic legitimacy and human rights, yet it was also driven by a clear interest in the country's oil and gas infrastructure. This duality is a recurring pattern in modern interventionism: humanitarian goals are often intertwined with strategic and economic interests. The Venezuela case also illustrates the rise of

executive-driven intervention, where actions are authorized and implemented by the president without formal legislative or international oversight. This trend toward discretionary power is a primary cause of the erosion of the international legal order.



| <b>Case Study</b> | <b>Year</b> | <b>Legal Justification</b>              | <b>Outcome</b>                                  |
|-------------------|-------------|---|---|
| Kosovo            | 1999        | Humanitarian Necessity (Unauthorised)   | Cessation of Ethnic Cleansing; Fragmented Order |
| Libya             | 2011        | Responsibility to Protect (Authorised)  | Regime Change; Decade of Civil War              |
| Syria             | 2012        | Non-Intervention (Paralyzed)            | Massive Displacement; Unregulated Proxy War     |
| Ukraine           | 2022        | Claimed 'Security Concern' (Aggression) | Continued Hostilities; P5 Credibility Crisis    |
| Venezuela         | 2026        | Democratic Legitimacy & Sanctions       | Capture of Leader, Oil-Sector Intervention      |

# Why Global Cooperation on Intervention Is Structurally Difficult

## The Veto as a Legal Source of Inaction

The most significant structural barrier to global cooperation on intervention is the veto power held by the permanent members of the Security Council. Under Article 27(3) of the Charter, any of the P5 can block a substantive resolution with a single negative vote. While the veto was originally intended to be a stabilizing force to keep major powers within the UN system, it has evolved into a legal source of inaction.

The central problem is that the veto is an unconditional negative power. Permanent members have no explicit duty to use it consistently with the purposes and principles of the UN. This has led to an asymmetry of accountability: the P5 can prevent any enforcement action against themselves or their allies, regardless of the gravity of the violation. In situations like Syria or Ukraine, the veto has been used to shield regimes accused of war crimes, leading to the hollowing out of the Council's authority.

Efforts to reform the veto have gained little traction. Proposals to limit the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities have been supported by a large majority of the General Assembly but are resisted by the very states that hold the power. This structural rigidity ensures that the Security Council remains a prisoner of Great Power geopolitics, unable to act even when the survival of the international legal order is at stake.

## Speed Mismatch Between Crises and Diplomacy

Another structural difficulty is the speed mismatch between modern crises and international diplomacy. The rise of interventionism is characterized by rapid shifts in digital infrastructure, financial markets, and domestic political environments. Cyber operations can destabilize a state in minutes, and the collapse of a currency can happen in days.

In contrast, the Security Council operates through slow, consensus-based processes. Negotiating a resolution and authorizing a mandate can take months, during which time a situation can deteriorate beyond repair. This mismatch creates a strong incentive for states to act unilaterally. Intervening powers argue that they cannot wait for a deadlocked Council to act when people are dying or their national security is at risk.

This trend toward unilateralism further weakens the international legal order. Each time a state bypasses the UN to act decisively, it reinforces the perception that the Security Council is anachronistic and irrelevant. To remain effective, the UN must develop more agile and

responsive mechanisms for managing intervention, yet this requires a level of trust and political will that is currently absent among the major powers.



| <b>Barrier to Cooperation</b> | <b>Mechanism of Failure</b>               | <b>Impact on Security Council</b>        |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| P5 Veto                       | Inaction is Fully Lawful under Article 27 | Paralysis During Major Crises            |
| Power Asymmetry               | Responsibility without Accountability     | Perceived Bias & Double Standards        |
| Speed Mismatch                | Crisis moves Faster than Consensus        | Incentive for Unilateral/Regional Action |
| Security Framing              | Everything becomes a 'Threat to Peace'    | Agenda Overreach and Loss of Focus       |
| Legal Fragmentation           | Rules-Based Order vs. Legal Order         | Loss of Shared Interpretive Baseline     |

# Key Governance Trade-offs and Dilemmas

## Humanitarian Protection vs. Sovereign Stability

The most persistent dilemma in intervention policy is the tension between humanitarian protection and sovereign stability. Intervening to stop atrocities often requires the dismantling of the existing political authority structure, which can lead to a vacuum of power and long-term instability. Conversely, respecting the principle of non-intervention can allow a state to perpetrate mass violence against its own people without consequence.

This trade-off is central to the debate over the responsibility to protect. While R2P provides a moral framework for action, it does not solve the practical problem of what happens after an intervention. The cases of Libya and Iraq demonstrate that removing a dictator in the name of protection can lead to a decade of civil war and misery. This risk of unintentional harm makes many states reluctant to authorize interventions, even when the humanitarian case is clear.

## Accountability for Atrocities vs. Political Peace Processes

A similar dilemma exists between the pursuit of legal accountability and the need for political peace processes. International law increasingly demands that individuals responsible for war crimes and genocide be prosecuted. However, the threat of prosecution can make it impossible for a leader to engage in peace negotiations or step down voluntarily.

In many conflicts, achieving a cessation of hostilities requires offering amnesties or political concessions to the very people accused of atrocities. This creates a fundamental conflict between the imperatives of justice and peace. The Security Council has the authority to suspend ICC investigations for a limited time to facilitate negotiations, but this power is rarely used, as it is seen as a compromise on universal human rights. This trade-off highlights the limits of a law-based approach to conflict management in a world of high-stakes political survival.

| <b>Dilemma</b>      | <b>Priority A</b>                    | <b>Priority B</b>                  | <b>Conflict Point</b>                         |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Security vs. Law    | Restoration of Order                 | Strict Adherence to UN Charter     | Unilateral Force often seen as Effective      |
| Justice vs. Peace   | Accountability for Atrocities        | Political Compromise for Ceasefire | Prosecution can Prevent Regimes from Yielding |
| Sovereignty vs. R2P | Non-Interference in Domestic Affairs | Duty to Prevent Mass Killing       | Atrocities often Happen within Borders        |

|                         |                                   |                                       |  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Urgency vs. Consensus   | Fast Response to Emerging Threats | Multilateral Agreement & P5 Unanimity | Delay Costs Lives; Speed cost Legitimacy |
| Efficiency vs. Equality | Centralized Great Power Control   | Democratic Reform of the Council      | The Veto Ensures Order but Creates Bias  |

## Jus Cogens and the Hierarchy of Peremptory Norms

The concept of jus cogens represents the highest tier of international law, consisting of peremptory norms from which no derogation is permitted. These rules, which include the prohibitions against genocide, slavery, and crimes against humanity, are accepted by the international community as a whole and possess a unique status that overrides conflicting treaty obligations or domestic laws. In the context of interventionism, jus cogens norms provide the ultimate legal justification for international interference, as they represent values that are considered essential for the survival of the global community.

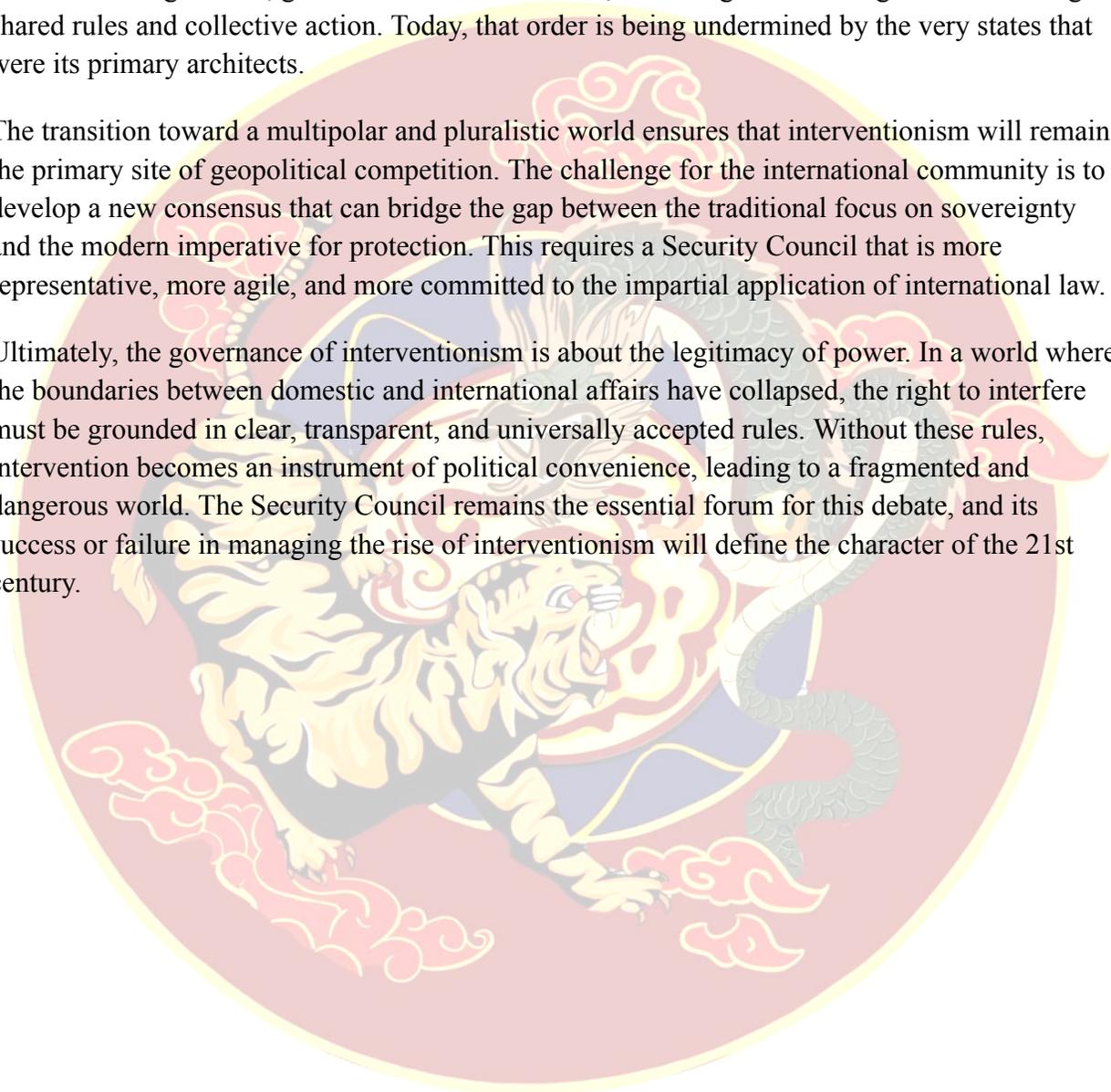
The interaction between jus cogens and state sovereignty is a site of intense legal debate. While traditional Westphalian law emphasizes the immunity of states from foreign jurisdiction, many scholars and judicial bodies now argue that sovereignty is qualified by the obligation to respect peremptory norms. This shift is often described as the humanization of international law, where the protection of individuals from the most heinous crimes takes precedence over the rights of states. However, the enforcement of jus cogens remains inconsistent. Because there is no centralized authority to implement these norms, their application often depends on the political consensus of the Security Council, leading to a gap between the theoretical hierarchy of laws and the practical reality of geopolitical competition.

## Conclusion: What Is Ultimately at Stake

The rise of interventionism represents more than just a change in international practice: it is a fundamental reordering of the global system. At stake is the survival of a rules-based order that can prevent a return to unchecked Great Power aggression and mass human suffering. The international legal order, grounded in the UN Charter, was designed to manage conflict through shared rules and collective action. Today, that order is being undermined by the very states that were its primary architects.

The transition toward a multipolar and pluralistic world ensures that interventionism will remain the primary site of geopolitical competition. The challenge for the international community is to develop a new consensus that can bridge the gap between the traditional focus on sovereignty and the modern imperative for protection. This requires a Security Council that is more representative, more agile, and more committed to the impartial application of international law.

Ultimately, the governance of interventionism is about the legitimacy of power. In a world where the boundaries between domestic and international affairs have collapsed, the right to interfere must be grounded in clear, transparent, and universally accepted rules. Without these rules, intervention becomes an instrument of political convenience, leading to a fragmented and dangerous world. The Security Council remains the essential forum for this debate, and its success or failure in managing the rise of interventionism will define the character of the 21st century.



# Questions to Consider

How does the doctrine of sovereignty as responsibility transform the traditional Westphalian system?

Why has the use of the P5 veto become a primary source of legal inaction in the international system?

Is the term rules-based international order a legitimate synonym for international law, or is it a political tool for selective intervention?

How do non-kinetic forms of intervention, such as cyber operations and economic sanctions, challenge the legal threshold of the use of force?

What were the long-term consequences of the 2011 Libya intervention for the credibility of the R2P doctrine?

Can the Security Council maintain its legitimacy without reform to its permanent membership and decision-making processes?

How does selective activism in the Security Council affect the willingness of states in the Global South to participate in multilateral security frameworks?

In what ways has the process of lawfare transformed international legal institutions into battlefields for strategic competition?

What are the primary ethical dilemmas involved in balancing humanitarian protection with the risk of creating long-term sovereign instability?

How should the international community govern intervention by invitation when the inviting regime is accused of mass atrocities?

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