

WHEN THINKING ABOUT INTERVENTION

1. In this course, intervention is the military involvement in the domestic affairs of another state. All use of military force and all wars are not military intervention. Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War were wars, not interventions. Kosovo, Panama, Afghanistan were interventions.

2. **The first consideration must be why?** Why intervene? Why get involved? A state's national interests are a why. Genocide is a why. Why is the rationale or justification for the action. It legitimizes the possible intervention. It gives a focus for further thought.

3. A consideration of why must provide a focus on the conditions that give meaning to the noun -- not just human rights, but a massive violation of human rights; not just national interest or national security, but, for instance, a direct threat to the existence of a state or to the well-being of a state's people. A consideration is not an answer, but it must provide the focus for the answer. To say I would consider human rights is not enough. You are begging the questions -- what are human rights and which ones and what degree of violation are appropriate to military intervention.

Remember: if there is no good reason why, then there is no need to think about intervention.

4. **The second consideration should be how?** How to intervene? This is not a full-blown discussion of implementation. It is not a full answer to the question of the how, but a development of the course of actions sufficient to see if the desired goals of why are feasible in the existing situation. Implementation, the full how, is too tough an issue to be raised early. Implementation is the realm of experts, who must be guided by the reasons why, otherwise their how may not be suitable to the goal.

Prudence is particularly useful as a guide of how if you use its two standards. Cost-benefit is also a useful guide, especially to avoid considering only the gains (such as interests and ethical gains) or only the cost (such as deaths). Remember power is relative and situational.

Remember: even if the reason why is good, if the feasibility is low or the consequences are not likely to be good, then there is no reason to think about the intervention.

5. An additional consideration should be national sovereignty. The basic rule of international behavior remains no intervention, although the rule is adjusting to suit a growing concern about extreme violations of human rights inside of states. Nevertheless, in today's world sovereignty limits legitimate intervention.

6. In evaluating why and how to intervene one should ask: does the public support the intervention and do our allies and the world in general support us? If the answer is no in any of these cases, the likelihood of success is low. Sustainable power requires support at home (Vietnam) and often not going alone (Persian Gulf). Moreover, support is an indicator of the quality of our thinking, especially about justification. Limited support is a reason to think again. However, after reconsideration intervention may still be a valid action.

7. Issues that should arise further along the process of considering military intervention are **of secondary importance compared to the above**. Among these are issues of implementation – what forces to use, how much force, when to intervene, extent of possible collateral damage, what is our exit strategy, etc. These are the complex issues of the how that may force revised thinking later, because the how may be not feasible or the consequences may be bad.

NOTE: Although the above is aimed at military intervention, the thought process is valid for any type of involvement in the domestic affairs of another state.