

Profit, People, and Politics: A comparative case study on United States and German interests motivating the intervention in Afghanistan and their subsequent effects

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ABSTRACT

International interventions have shaped the world in various ways. This article uses a qualitative research method to thematically analyze archival data and original sources to gain a better understanding of the motivations that drive international interventions, and their effects on the outcomes and justification for such interventions. The analysis is guided by the English School theoretical framework, which recognizes the importance of both power politics and international cooperation in international relations. Building on previous literature and using the Afghanistan War as a case study, this article argues that there are three primary fields of motivations: people, power, and politics. People-motivated interventions are most ethically sound, while Profit- and Politically-driven interventions are much more difficult to justify and often create further issues rather than solve them. In conclusion, this article argues that in order for successful, ethical interventions to ensure the best interests of the people of intervened nations in future, Profit and Political motivations behind interventions must be minimized.

INTRODUCTION

Interventions and their lasting effects have been a major factor in shaping the modern world. International interventions have reshaped power and political dynamics in every region of the world, from the Middle East to Europe. These interventions have strengthened and weakened states around the world, and in some situations have created further instability in their wake. The importance of interventions in shaping our world has been recognized by the international relations research community, who, throughout the course of their debate on the justifiability of interventions, have proposed that the motivations for an intervention are integral to how an intervention is conducted. This raises the question: do the motivations driving an intervention influence their outcome?

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I propose that a combination of national interests motivates interventions in a complex interplay, generally divided into three categories: profit, politics, and people. Profit motivates a government to intervene in its best interest, whether in finance, protection of its national security, or in other interests in another nation. The second motivation for a government to intervene internationally is politics, or perception thereof. A government's response to threats and challenges influences public perception of them, and therefore affects their power and tenure in power. A negative perception of an administration's response to an international situation can permanently negatively affect their ability to govern while in office and the legacy their administration leaves in its wake. The third motivation for a government to intervene is in the interest of the People of a nation, or for humanitarian reasons.

While research on the justifiability of international interventions or lack thereof, individual interventions as a whole, and the motivations for governments intervening internationally exists, there is little to no research covering the overlap between the topics. Specifically, existing studies rarely address how the presence of multiple competing motivations directly affects an intervention's practical success and ethical justifiability. By examining this overlap, this article demonstrates that strategic and political ambitions must be minimized for an intervention to accomplish its intended goals. Furthermore, bridging this gap reveals that even humanitarian motives require rigorous preparation to prevent missions from being misused or accidentally causing harm.

This article aims to build upon preexisting research by discussing the effects of differing motivations in international interventions by comparing the German and the United States' involvement in the Afghanistan conflict beginning in 2001, with the intent of answering the question, what national interests drove the United States and German intervention in Afghanistan, and how might they have affected the outcome? My method is qualitative discourse analysis, and I rely on previous research on motivations and interests in international relations to construct my analytical framework of Profit, Politics, and People. This is complemented by an English School theoretical framing of international relations.

The article is structured as follows: I will start with a literature review discussing previous academic work on international interventions, followed by an analysis section focused on President Bush's speech, Chancellor Schroeder's joint remarks with President Bush, the challenges faced by the coalition in the Afghanistan War, President Biden's speech, and press statements by Chancellor Merkel and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maas. The case study section is followed by a discussion section discussing the Afghanistan War and its wider lessons, followed by conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section introduces previous research on international interventions and the interests and motivations that drive them. Interventions are an integral part of international relations. Interventions have affected dozens of nations and regions, the effects of which last for decades afterward. International

interventions have historically been an intensely debated subject by academics and general populace alike. The practice of intervening in another nation's affairs while citing "humanitarian" reasoning can be traced as far back as 1827, when Great Britain, Russia, and France intervened in the Greek War of Independence, notably in the Battle of Navarino (Tyagi 1995).

Since then, nations have conducted interventions while citing humanitarian reasons such as the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine, particularly European nations and the United States in interventions such as the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022). More recently, the justification of such interventions has come into question. While there are many definitions of international intervention, this article draws from Young's (1968) interpretation: an organized national or international governmental activity intended to change an organization or nation's status quo.

Researchers fall into two groups informed by their understanding of the justification of international interventions. Some researchers share Anne Orford (2013)'s metaphysical interpretation of international law. She asserts that interventions are justified when a government fails to provide for its citizens, or where necessary to prevent the loss of human life. In this interpretation, prevention of loss of life is the ultimate goal. Scholars, such as Joshua Matthewman (2012) that take a metaphysical stance on law claim that interventions are justified by humanitarian reasonings and maintaining stability.

Many believe interventions are unjustifiable. Researchers sharing this stance often cite the conflict with national sovereignty, negative consequences, and the place of national interests in motivating them. Dorinda Dallmeyer (1995) argues that the violation of national sovereignty through international interventions has slowly eroded domestic jurisdiction, allowing misuse of intervention to harm the developing world. Stephen Krasner (2001) shares this opinion and argues strongly that international interventions are often unjustifiable affronts to national sovereignty.

Additionally, many researchers argue that the negative consequences of international interventions make justifying them impossible. Elena Ianchovichina (2018) claims that interventions with bias involved in their motivation worsen conflicts through polarization. Bezanis (2023), alongside a number of other authors, such as Jide Nzelibe (2008) cite civilian casualties and other unintended consequences such as exploitation of populace as reasonings as to why interventions are difficult to justify, claiming that the fight to save civilians from dictatorial regimes often results in civilian casualties, minimizing gains.

Both sides of the debate on the justification of international interventions take national interests into account, however. These reasons can be thematically organized into three categories: profit, politics, and people.

Profit

The first motivation that drives international interventions is profit. Profit motivates government actors to intervene in their best interests, whether the profit is financial, national security related, or in other interests, such as stability of a region. Noam Chomsky (1993) shares belief in and criticizes this motivation, citing it as a dangerous motivation. Ruairidh Wood (2025) asserts that the majority of the United States' interventions were motivated by its interest in growing its sphere of power, and particularly by its interest in the oil industry. One of the biggest pieces of the profit-motivation is the national security aspect. The United States and European nations have intervened in other nations' affairs in the name of security, notably in recent decades during the War on Terror. For example, Leanna Nichols (2019) asserts that the United States intervened in Afghanistan and Chile for national security reasons without taking into account the effects the intervention would have on the nations. National motivations are what drives international interventions, says Morgenthau (1948), ranging from security reasons to humanitarian reasons. Researchers who primarily attribute this motivation as a driver of international interventions view international politics through a realist theoretical approach.

Politics

The second motivation researchers attribute to driving international interventions is national politics, or the public and political perception of a nation. Government response to threats and challenges influences public perception and therefore affects their power and tenure in power. In democracies in the western world, for example, constituents generally determine a government's power and negative perception of an administration's response to an international situation can permanently negatively affect their ability to govern while in office and the legacy their administration leaves in its wake. Dr. K. Mallikarjuna (2017) attributes choices of international policy to public opinion, claiming that a favorable public opinion can influence nations to intervene in another nation's affairs, and vice versa. Johnathan Nickens (2020) asserts that in democratic societies, leadership consistently considers public opinion, political capital, and reelection chances into policy making, including in decisions such as whether or not to intervene internationally, and asserts that increased domestic pressure increases the likelihood of a nation becoming involved in an international intervention. If leadership believes a decision could sway public opinion to their favor, they may be predisposed to that decision, whether it be well considered and ethical or not. Benjamin Goldsmith and Yusaku Horiuchi (2014) explored this idea, asserting that public opinion and perception of the United States determined a nation's foreign policy with the United States-showcasing the connection between national politics and a nation's international policy.

People

The third motivation attributed to driving the international intervention process is people- the moral obligation to help others in need, or the humanitarian aspect of international interventions. Generally, this research stems from a liberalist theoretical perspective, and is most commonly used as reasoning for

intervention. This motivation generally falls under the R2P doctrine-the idea that a nation must protect its citizens, and, if it fails at this duty, other nations have the right to step in to protect the citizens of said nation. This motivation is commonly cited by governments publicly as their reasoning for intervention, and researchers such as Rebecca Hamilton (2006) attribute this motivation as to why nations intervene internationally. Taylor Seybolt (2007) asserts that lives saved is a measurement of success for international interventions, and asserts that the genuine effort to save lives has been the motivation for a number of past interventions. However, the mixing of this motivation with other motivations, such as profit and politics, has hurt the justifiability of international interventions under the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine. Richard Illingworth (2023) addresses the existing issues with the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine and asserts that reforming the system will improve humanitarian interventions by increasing accountability in the system.

ANALYSIS

Theory and Method

Before analysing four statements given by the United States and German leaders in the context of the Afghanistan War, I will briefly present my theoretical and methodological framework. This article is written using the English School theoretical framework. The English School framework, first ideated by Hedley Bull in *The Anarchical Society* (1977), recognizes the role of national interests in international relations while simultaneously recognizing that it is possible for states to act out of interest in international peace and the wellbeing of non-citizens. Rather than taking a strictly realist or liberal position, I thus view international relations as a nuanced and situational field, with influence from both the power politics of realism and the cooperation and interdependence of liberalism. Therefore, interventions are also motivated by different, contextual factors and combinations of them.

This article uses a qualitative research approach based on archival data collection and thematic discourse analysis to get a better understanding of the justification and motivations behind the Afghanistan War case study. In the following sections I will analyze the United States and German involvement and interests as identified by both previous literature and thematic analysis of four pieces of original data, President Bush's speech on October 9, 2001, the October 9, 2001 interview between President Bush and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany, President Biden's speech on August 16, 2021, and Chancellor Merkel and Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas' statements to the press, on July 15 and August 26 of 2021, respectively.

Case Study

The Afghanistan War began in October of 2001, marking the beginning of the War on Terror, an ongoing international campaign to combat terrorism through military, financial, and political methods. Throughout the course of the Afghanistan War United States and German troops led a global coalition with the intent

of targeting the terrorist group Al-Qaeda. They sought to bring an end to the ruling Taliban regime in the country, which ruled over the majority of Afghanistan, notably its capital, Kabul. The Western coalition is estimated to have incurred a total of around 7,500 casualties, while it is estimated that around 70,000 Afghan soldiers and police perished, along with additional injuries. A conservative estimation of civilian deaths of the conflict is around 45,000, and an estimation of additional deaths in Pakistan related to the conflict is around 67,000, staggering numbers that reflect the brutality of the conflict. Additionally, it is estimated that the United States government spent nearly \$2.3 trillion on the conflict (Bateman 2022).

President Bush's Remarks

In United States President George Bush's remarks on September 20, 2001 he focused primarily on the recovery from the attack, but also spoke on the anticipated Afghanistan intervention. He said, "But the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows". He follows with: "Afghanistan's people have been brutalized-many are starving and many have fled", clearly identifying the motivations driving the coming Afghanistan intervention. He identifies the national security aspect of Profit as a leading motivation, declaring Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as a threat, along with the People motivation visible in his concern for the Afghan people. He continued on, delivering an address that may be considered the beginning of the War on Terror. He offered an ultimatum: "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen". Evident in this speech and its surrounding context are the Profit and People motivations that drive interventions. (Bush).

The Political motivation, however, for the United States' entry into the Afghanistan War is more difficult to directly ascertain. However, following the 9/11 attacks, the American public entered a period of panic and fear, and looked to the United States government, expecting a response. Virginia Chanley (2013) asserts that in the days following the 9/11 attacks, the American public responded with an increase in patriotism and trust, and demanded a decisive government response, something that contributed to the United States involvement in the Afghanistan intervention. Additionally, Kallapurackal Thomas (2007) asserts that the United States also had financial reasons to enter the Afghanistan War, notably its major interest in Middle Eastern oil.

President Bush and Chancellor Schroeder's Remarks

On October 9, 2001, President Bush and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany held an exchange on the Afghanistan War and affirmed the commitment of German troops to the conflict. Chancellor Schroeder cites the same reasons as President Bush for entering into the conflict: national security and humanitarian reasons. In his statements the chancellor states that "We very much are in agreement about the fact that this fight against terrorism", and, "We have also very strongly emphasized how important we find it that we do provide relief for the refugees", emphasizing national security-a Profit motivation, and the need to assist the Afghan people-a People motivation (Schroeder).

In contrast to the United States, there is no evidence of overwhelming support for intervention following the 9/11 attacks, but rather a state of shock. However, there was a different kind of Political motivation in the German government-taking the side of their ally, the United States, ensured that they remained close allies, an important component of international politics. This could also be considered a Profit motivation, as Germany acted to maintain its best interests through its alliance with the United States. Additionally, it seems that Germany had far less Profit motivation in the economic arena than the United States may have had. The combination of Profit, People, and Political motivations drove the German government to become the second greatest contributor of troops to the Afghanistan coalition.

United States Statements on the Afghanistan Withdrawal

After 20 years of fighting, the motivations driving the intervention changed drastically. In particular, public support for the Afghanistan War had waned considerably in the twenty years since the attack, and the public had begun advocating for a withdrawal from the unsuccessful, costly conflict. In a poll conducted with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2020, 65% of American respondents believed that the Afghanistan War was not worth it, reflecting a large-scale change in public belief on the matter (Posner).

Additionally, in President Biden's remarks on August 16, 2021, he cites several motivations for the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan. He says that the United States' "vital national interest in Afghanistan remains today what it has always been: preventing a terrorist attack on American homeland" and "Today, the terrorist threat has metastasized well beyond Afghanistan ... These threats warrant our attention and our resources.", clearly communicating a change in the national security Profit motivator that had driven the United States to join the Afghanistan War in the first place.

President Joe Biden then goes on to say that "I have been clear that human rights must be the center of our foreign policy, not the periphery. But the way to do it is not through endless military deployments; it's with our diplomacy, our economic tools, and rallying the world to join us", clearly showing that while the People motivation driving the United States' to intervene in Afghanistan remained, the Political and Profit motivations had changed, and that the People motivation was not compelling enough to stay in the face of further conflict. He goes on to claim that the path forward is through other methods of accomplishing humanitarian goals (Biden). The ability of changes in other motivations to counteract the People motivation raises the question as to whether the People motivation was truly a driving motivation in the matter in the first place. While it could be simply because the changing situation counteracted the People motivation, it could also be that the People motivation was a political discourse to justify their other interests.

German Statements on the Afghanistan Withdrawal

A Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2009 shows that in as early as the 2000s, public support for the Afghanistan War had waned in Germany, with 63% of German respondents believing that further troops

should not be committed to the conflict (Auxier), similar to the shift in public opinion in the United States. In a statement to the press on July 15, 2021, Chancellor Merkel said of the Afghanistan War, "Over many, many years, we've served together in Afghanistan. We've been able to contain, to a certain degree, terrorist dangers, but unfortunately we have not been able to build a nation as we would like it to look". She clearly communicated that the German government felt that the national security Profit motivation was resolved (Merkel). Additionally, on August 26, 2021, Heiko Maas, the German Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, said, "The military evacuation is now over. But our work continues and will continue until all those for whom we have responsibility in Afghanistan are safe", communicating that while the People motivation for Germany's intervention in Afghanistan was not fully resolved, the change in Political and Profit motivations made it so that, similar to the United States, the People motivation driving the intervention became less compelling, and other methods of accomplishing their humanitarian goals had to be pursued (Maas).

Coalition Challenges of the Afghanistan Intervention

Throughout the course of the Afghanistan War, the conflict shifted from direct confrontation with the Taliban to fight against consistent insurgency. The rough terrain and caves of Afghanistan's environment, alongside the limitations of Afghan infrastructure complicated coalition efforts to fight the Taliban directly, and made coalition logistics and efforts particularly difficult (Army n.d.).

Fighting a war against an insurgency has historically been a difficult feat. The flexibility and adaptability of an insurgency favors the insurgents rather than the coalition attempting to protect and govern a large swath of territory while fighting a conflict against their adaptable foe, who had Pakistani support and a refuge in Pakistan. Additionally, the Afghan population was divided, and the unpopular Afghan government was ill-equipped to fight, with poor resources, logistics, and support compared to their opponents (Azizian 2021).

The operational challenges were made worse by a lack of consistent organized strategy, as each individual member of the coalition had differing goals in the conflict. The coalition entered the war to fight a War on Terror, intending simply to destroy the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but changed their goal mid-conflict to building a stable democratic Afghan government. In addition to this overall change of mission for the coalition, the complex mix of differing goals and motivations prevented an organized fight against the Taliban (Hassan 2023).

The differing motivations of member countries contributed to this mix of differing goals and strategies and helped create the chaos the coalition experienced throughout the Afghanistan War. For example, the Profit, Political, and People motivations driving the United States' to lead the coalition in the conflict made it more willing to directly engage in combat operations against the Taliban, in contrast to other members of the coalition, who had "caveats" about the use of their forces. This could be due to the greater amount of Political motivation for the United States' involvement, which may have allowed the United States greater freedom of action with less speculation and negative public impact than the other less

Politically motivated nations, such as Germany. In contrast, the lesser Political motivation drove the European coalition members to use "caveats" for their forces to ensure that their forces would not be used in ways that would negatively impact public and political perception of their nations. The varying strategies and motivations prevented an organized fight against the Taliban, which, in tandem with other factors, ensured that the war would continue for far longer than the coalition anticipated (Hilde 2022).

DISCUSSION

The Political motivation driving the coalition's intervention in Afghanistan drastically changed between 2001 and 2021, changing the United States' and Germany's commitment to the conflict. As public opinion on the Afghanistan War changed to be much more unfavorable than it initially was, the Political motivation driving the German and United States' involvement in the Afghanistan War reversed to instead be a compelling motivation to end the conflict. Thus, the Political motivation became a very compelling reason for them to withdraw. Additionally, if a deal could be made with the Taliban, national security Profit motivations would no longer be as compelling as motivations as they were at the beginning of the war.

Thus, due to the change in motivations driving the German and United States' involvement in the Afghanistan War, the coalition negotiated with the Taliban to reach a withdrawal deal with conditions to protect human rights under the Taliban regime and to prevent the use of Afghanistan as a staging point for terrorist activities. Once the deal was struck, the United States and coalition forces withdrew, finishing their chaotic withdrawal and airlift from their intervention in Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. With the coalition's withdrawal, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan. The Taliban government of Afghanistan is currently not internationally recognized, but the United Nations has offered recognition should the Taliban government follow the terms of their withdrawal agreement to reverse repressive practices and adhere to human rights laws (World Bank Organization 2024).

The Afghanistan War is a clear indicator that the motivations driving interventions affect how an intervention is implemented, its outcomes and its consequences. The varying motivations of the coalition in the Afghanistan War, for example, prevented an organized strategy due to their inherently different goals of unique balances of motivations. The United States was far more predisposed to violence in the Afghanistan War than Germany, due to its particularly strong national security aspect of Profit motivation and strong public support in its Political motivation. Meanwhile Germany was far more reserved due to their less public support, a weaker Political motivation.

The Afghanistan War shows that each motivation carries its own particular dangers and effects in interventions. Primarily Profit and Politically-motivated interventions like the Afghanistan War can lead to major consequences for the citizens of an intervened nation, as citizens are then not the priority of Profit-motivated interventions. Often, Profit-motivated interventions can cause unethical behavior, as the

motivation is focused more on the outcome of the intervention for the intervener rather than the people the intervention is "for". In these interventions civilian casualties can be quite high, and individual goals of battles and protection campaigns tend to be less related to civilian protection and more related to keeping infrastructure, secure facilities and equipment safe, similar to the activities and outcomes of the Afghanistan War. Additionally Profit-motivated interventions can end badly, as governments tend to focus on objectives rather than the people they are "fighting for", which can lead to misunderstanding and the resentment and resistance of the populace of the intervened nation, something that can easily cause an intervention to fail, just like the United States' and Germany's loss in the Afghanistan War.

Prioritizing perception and politics over people can cause unethical behavior in interventions and related scandals and situations. Politically motivated interventions can often include coverups to maintain positive public perception, and often tend to be unprepared, as they are response for response's sake to placate a nation's populace. These unprepared interventions, as in the Afghanistan War, cause further violence and create conflicts rather than solve them. They tend to be goalless, or fail to account for important aspects of a situation. The Afghanistan War is a prime example of the downfalls of Profit and Politically-motivated interventions, as the goals of the intervention didn't account for the outcome for the Afghanistan government and people, but rather accounted for a simple battle with a terrorist group, ensuring that the intervention would be unsuccessful, as they did not take the time to understand the cultural context they were intervening into. Political motivation can cause interventions when intervention isn't necessary, and fails to take into account other potential, more peaceful solutions. Solely Politically-motivated interventions carry consequences that could be avoided by more careful consideration. Often, while this goes hand in hand with other motivations, a desire for vengeance or a fast solution to a dangerous issue from the public can push nations to make rushed decisions that can have unforeseen consequences, like in the aftermath of the Afghanistan War.

When discussing the Political motivations of these nations gleaned by governmental statements, it must be recognized, however, that a primary limitation of this method lies in its reliance on official state discourse and public speeches, where rhetoric invoking humanitarian concerns, "People" motivations, frequently functions as an instrument to manage Political optics rather than reflect genuine policy drivers. Nevertheless, analyzing public discourse remains uniquely valuable, as official rhetoric directly captures how state leaders legitimize foreign policy decisions to create domestic support and maintain foreign policy commitments. Consequently, while public statements may not reveal covert or unstated motives, examining state messaging provides essential insight into the public Political constraints that actively dictate an intervention's strategic lifecycle. Ultimately, incorporating internal diplomatic communications in future research would complement this framework to offer a more complete assessment of unstated state motives.

While intervening for the safety of human life is the best motivation possible, the downfall of this kind of interest in intervention is that governments must be sure that there truly is due cause and that the intervention is the best option available. Nations must consider the situation fully before rushing into a conflict, have a clear, legitimate goal of the intervention, and must prepare for their departure. Otherwise

an intervention, even motivated by the best ideals, can create an ongoing cycle of violence and instability in the intervened country-perfectly illustrated by the chaos following the Afghanistan withdrawal.

The motivations driving an international intervention can be factored into debates on the justifiability of interventions. There are many who believe that due to the self-interest of nations inherent in such interventions that interventions are unjustifiable as a whole. However, there are others who recognize that interventions can be useful.

Profit and Political motivations, while not inherently evil, should be avoided in order to carry out an effective, ethically justifiable intervention. While difficult to accomplish, there are methods of ensuring the accountability of nations in interventions while maintaining the intervention as a tool useful for extreme circumstances. Potential improvements to the intervention process include international regulation and monitoring, careful consideration of the situation and potential solutions, and a contextually prepared goal and plan to implement it.

Interventions conducted by individual nations must cease and be replaced with multinational groups to ensure accountability, with careful regulation and monitoring to ensure ethical behavior throughout interventions. This monitoring by international organizations such as the United Nations must include advocacy for those the intervention is for, not just the interests of the nations involved. Additionally, direct interventions must be last ditch efforts to stop an affront to humanity, or they will begin to erode the sovereignty of independent nations, with other viable options being considered and attempted before a direct international intervention. Finally, these international organizations must carefully prepare a plan to accomplish a well thought out goal, anticipating difficulties and preparing solutions for them. The People motivation should always be the first priority and must be the driving force behind an intervention, or interventions will continue to be misused as tools for Profit and Political success, rather than the carefully implemented emergency effort that it must be.

CONCLUSION

The motivations that drive interventions can affect the outcome of interventions, the way they are carried out, and whether they can be justified ethically. Profit, Politics, and People motivate interventions, but the Profit and Political motivations must be minimized in order for an intervention to be successful, both ethically and realistically in accomplishing its intended goals. The People motivation must also be carefully considered to ensure that interventions are not misused or conducted without proper preparation. By safeguarding the motivations that drive interventions, the malicious and accidental dangers posed by interventions can be minimized.

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