Abstract

The United States is undeniably the world leader in combat power projection and maintains growing military commitments worldwide. Previous research concluded the United States applies combat power internationally primarily in response to humanitarian crises. The majority of earlier intervention research consulted data sets extending to 2005, thus excluding the current operating environment and largely did not collect data on low-intensity conflict given the bloated threshold for conflict in older data-sets. The hypothesis presented here states the United States militarily intervenes in the North Africa and Middle East region primarily in response to growing terrorist activities since the Arab Spring of 2011, not in response to previous priorities such as increasing risk of human rights violations or decreasing levels of democracy. In reaction to the revelation that hard power in the region is primarily used by the United States to counter national security concerns, it is imperative to present specific case studies and a legal framework to garner a more holistic understanding of the transition in regional foreign policy priorities. The immediate goal of the statistical research and qualitative empirical analysis is to provide policy makers and the scholarly community with a contemporary understanding of U.S. military intervention priorities in North Africa and the Middle East. Similarly, but on a larger scale, this paper works to reinvigorate the academic requirement to provide more modern statistical analyses on drivers of third-party interventions to support foreign policy decision makers and the international community.
The Arab Spring in 2011 successfully created conditions for the rapid spread of organized terrorist groups across weakened security institutions and failing states in North Africa and the Middle East. Although the installation of legitimate, conservative Islamic governments was not established in any country for a significant amount of time, the unrest aided the destabilization of several governments in the region. Established extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and eventually the Islamic State briskly attracted newly radicalized masses from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic coast in Africa. The United States launched a wave of both small and large-scale military interventions and in some cases, reinforced existing military commitments around the same time period. Research presented will empirically demonstrate the U.S. military intervention strategy in North Africa and the Middle East shifted to directly combat growing extremist organizations rather than as a reaction to humanitarian crises or to promote democracy after 2011. In essence, the primary motivational factor for the United States to commit combat forces in the region is to counter perceived national security threats, owed largely to the proliferation in major transnational terrorist organizations throughout the region after Arab Spring uprisings weakened state security institutions. Previous empirical military intervention literature focused on historical data to identify trends. This paper provides statistically significant results in a small sample to urge research on military intervention in a contemporary time period by empirically showing the post-Arab Spring environment as a turning point for U.S. military intervention strategy, and likely for other global near-peer nations.

After acknowledging the causal factor for U.S. military intervention in the region changed, the research will work to present a qualitative assessment to better understand the transition over time. Specific attention will be placed on the evolution of U.S. rhetoric and actions in the name of self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and how the United States interpretations line up with common international norms on pre-emptive versus preventive military action in another sovereign state. Next, a closer examination of how the United States is able to lower the cost of intervention is in order, paying particular attention to combat power projection through the use of weaponized drones. Weaponized drones drastically lower the cost of combat for any nation who possesses them and can entice administrations to quietly use them to accomplish national security priorities that would otherwise be politically untenable to action on. Finally, a brief analysis on the domestic legal and financial avenues used by recent U.S. administrations to authorize lethal action for the military and intelligence agencies will be presented, shedding better light on the transparency obligations of the executive branch. The legal framework between the executive and legislative branches of U.S. government evolved greatly after 9/11 and play an important role in the proclivity of U.S. presidents to authorize military action.

Previous Research on Military Intervention Priorities

The deluge of written works on drivers of third-party intervention in conflict can be overwhelming, but narrowing down a focal point based off geographic location, time period, and types of intervention can often give a researcher ample “white space” to provide authentic scholarly contribution to the field. Shirkey’s 2017 “Unified Interpretation” of motivating factors compelling external states to intervene in civil and
interstate wars provides a holistic baseline to understand several prime driving causes of intervention, namely based on: geographic proximity, nature of alliances, former colonial or ethnic ties, and great power status. After identifying who is likely to intervene, the discussion shifts to why a third-party state would intervene. According to Shirkey, if a state is not compelled to intervene during the initial stages of a conflict, persuasive information about one of the belligerents is generally required to initiate intervention. This revealed information can take many forms: political, changes in a belligerent’s power, or fluctuations in what is at stake. Shirkey’s generalizations can be used as an overall baseline for understanding motivating factors for military intervention from a broad perspective.

After the end of the Cold War and subsequent explosion of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, significant research was conducted on trends in humanitarian interventions with military force, particularly when the intervening state is a developed nation. Choi and James studied drivers of U.S. military intervention from 1981-2005 and empirically discovered United States foreign policy priorities supported conducting military action to ebb humanitarian crises over promoting democracy or combatting terrorism based on 46 separate interventions. Spiers’s chapter in Utley’s 2006 book lends credit to this conclusion from a descriptive perspective while accounting for the evolving U.S. military priorities from 1990s conditional support to U.N humanitarian missions, and then on to defense related security threats in the 2000s. Almost immediately after 9/11, foreign policy and academic efforts turned to understand the capabilities and evolution of transnational terrorism. If Choi and James were not chronologically constrained to end their research in 2005, a more threat oriented conclusion may have been reached on drivers of U.S. military intervention.

Moravcova would disagree with Choi and James specifically based on the ambiguous description of humanitarian intervention which existed before the United Nations established the Right to Protect (R2P) in 2001. The study of armed humanitarian interventions is fraught with debate due to a lack of international agreement on what constitutes a humanitarian crisis at the interstate level and who, if anyone, has the right to act in defense of the persecuted people. In other words, it is not possible to ascertain the true intentions behind military interventions of the United States without doing independent case studies which consider potential ulterior motives, such as the presence of terrorist groups or the ability to instill a democratic process in the affected nation. Choi and James lend credit to Shirkey by using the United States as their primary case study to determine great power military intervention causal factors because its ability to project power is unmatched in the world and thus, has the ability to intervene in situations where other nations may want to from a foreign policy perspective, but cannot due to logistical issues.

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1 Shirkey’s 2017 research produced a series of thematic trends in general military intervention research, especially on the effects of intervention on the conflict. Only the most pronounced patterns are presented here.
2 Choi and James, 2016.
4 Moravcova, 2014 echoed many legal accounts of the inherent misnomers in assuming one nation’s criteria for armed humanitarian intervention is generalizable foreign policies of other states.
As Choi and James provide an understanding for military interventions by the United States, the generalizability to other states is questionable at best and the data does not consider the increase in international security concerns since 2011. The analysis of migration patterns on predicting military intervention provides a useful, albeit localized, template. Bove and Bohmelt’s 2017 work deduced third-party states are more likely to intervene in an interstate or civil war if the third-party nation is hosting a significant number of immigrants from the conflict, principally from the economic strain and security concerns of hosting the settlers. This is particularly timely given the political prevalence of the immigration crisis from North Africa and the Middle East in Europe. We do not see, however, large scale European military interventions to end conflicts producing immigrants and refugees by the millions. Instead, it appears the impact of immigrants on motivating third-party nations to militarily intervene is predominantly localized to the region where the conflict is taking place, lending additional credence to Shirkey’s analysis of geographic proximity being a prime motivator for intervention. In her 2010 work, Huibregtse concluded military intervention relies more upon the ethnic ties of the at risk population in a conflict, again having much more explanatory power in regional conflicts than a global war. Hibregtse’s findings are currently evidenced in the Middle East as a significant portion of the regional opposition to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is fighting to ensure the survival of Shi’a authority, particularly the Iranian contribution and its proxies both in Iraqi militias and Hezbollah. Similar to Choi and James’s work, Huibregtse found little tie between government types and military intervention. It is important to emphasize the Bove and Bohmelt theory and the Huibregtse theory apply predominantly regionally, not globally and thus struggle to be generalized to greater case studies.

Little research exists discussing the proliferated drivers of U.S. military intervention since 2005, a gap in knowledge made more acute by the increase in international security concerns emanating from North Africa and the Middle East after the Arab Spring spread out of Tunisia in 2011. From certain legal perspectives, the three-fold increase in U.S. military interventions using drone strikes alone are illegitimate at the international level and violate common held norms of Just War and the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines. From a United States standpoint, according to Ruys, Article 51 of the U.N Charter self-defense must be more clearly defined to fit the contemporary security situation, particularly in regards to non-state actors. According to the Obama administration, even if the Authorization for the Use of Military Force agreement is removed domestically, U.S. drone strikes in non-war zones on suspected terrorists still fall under the current interpretation of “self-defense” in accordance with Article 51.

5 Bove and Böhmelt, 2017.
6 Huibregtse hypothesized states dominated by a fractionalized large ethnic majority had the highest likelihood of intervening in a cross-border ethnic conflict by analyzing dyads from 1946-2001.
7 Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015
8 Fisk and Ramos, 2016 supplement the Spies contribution to Utley, 2006 (pg. 15-19) by adding in the proliferation of drone attacks as being incongruent with US foreign policy “doctrine” and international norms.
9 Ruys, 2013 presents an updated version of Article 51 outlining a unified interpretation of an “armed attack” paying particular attention to the recent tactics of non-state actors.
Tesón’s 2016 article arguing for military intervention against ISIS provides a powerful perspective on the current state of determining the contemporary legality of military interventions. According to Tesón, citing Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, military interventions will be deemed legal and necessary if they meet one of three criteria: national self-defense (defending state or citizens from external aggression), collective defense (supporting a population unable to resist an invasion), or humanitarian intervention. Critical here is Tesón’s liberal logic of self-defense, where any attack against a state’s citizens at any location becomes an attack against the state.

Lahneman’s legal argument on the proliferation of U.S. military action without international consent is most timely. He posits the United States entered a new era with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 where international legitimization of military action took a backseat to addressing perceived security threats worldwide.¹⁰ Thus, the definitions of preemptive versus preventive military interventions become imperative from both legal and political perspectives. As Doyle and Fisk aptly discuss, preemptive military action is generally held to be internationally legitimate, whereas preventive military action is not. In 2016, Fisk and Ramos outlined the recent (post 9/11) shift in the United States’ stance towards favoring looser interpretations of preemptive strikes in ways most of the international community may still view as preventive and thus, illegal. According to the authors, the most concerning aspect of how the United States manipulates international security norms is the possibility of the same mindset spreading across the world in conjunction with the proliferation of cost-lowering offensive military technologies.¹¹ This line of thinking contributes to the chaotic, apocalyptic view on future warfare presented by Johnson in 2014.¹² While many contemporary legal arguments justify why France, Britain, and the United States must legally intervene in the fight against global terrorism; Johnson provides the text to demonstrate how military interventions can escalate through the use of proxy forces or non-state actors into global conflicts.¹² Brands and Feaver operationalize this legal viewpoint as they analyze the best military intervention options for the United States to use against ISIS to ensure its definite destruction; ultimately advocating for a slightly more robust military strategy than is in place currently, noting it is unlikely policy makers will ever crawl back into a U.S. isolationism mindset against terrorism, inviting another 9/11.¹³

The breadth and depth of knowledge on predicting drivers of military intervention can be intimidating, but it is far from exhaustive. There is minimal quantitative research to validate previous data-based theories on why the United States conducts military interventions in the contemporary era. The Global War on Terror will be old enough to vote in the next presidential election and the region most targeted by U.S. interventions since 2001 underwent a massive political and security upheaval starting in 2011. Previous empirical research used conflict and intervention datasets ending in 2005, making it all the more important to discern if the United States primarily conducts military interventions on behalf of humanitarian crises or if other variables are more

¹¹ Tesón, 2016
¹² Johnson, 2014
¹³ Brands and Feaver, 2017
strongly at play after the events of the Arab Spring. Previous definitions of conflict and intervention may no longer be suitable to properly capture the essence of low-intensity warfare in the 21st century. Legal experts are discussing the U.S. proclivity for bending the distinction between what is internationally acceptable in terms of preemptive intervention and what is considered illegal with preventive action and the security studies community must follow suite.

**Gap in Knowledge**

The answer to anticipating military intervention in the post-Arab Spring North Africa and Middle East must marry together a pragmatic understanding of intervention patterns with an understanding of the legal evolution in self-defense norms. Military intervention theories during the Cold War were adjusted to meet security threats in eastern Europe and the Balkans after the fall of the Soviet Union and theories evolved again as the world grappled with the role of global terrorism after 9/11. There is a similar crossroads present today in North Africa and the Middle East. Johnson noted high intensity conflicts between great powers are in the historical rear-view mirror, but the Middle East and North Africa region is mired in a series of low-boiling conflicts invariably pulling in regional and global actors. The Arab Spring in 2011 ushered in a violent wave of Islamists vying for political, non-secular, and military control from Algeria to Asia, highlighted by the substantial increase in conflict fatalities as shown in Figure 1, specifically in the Middle East and North Africa. As the *Economist* noted, groups born in the shadow of Egypt’s failed Muslim Brotherhood are actively working to install Islamic governments ruling under Sharia Law in Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Indonesia just to name a few. Adding to the political turmoil, extremist groups like al-Qaeda are increasing in size and positioning themselves to consolidate power and absorb weakening organizations like ISIS. In light of this social, political, and humanitarian havoc, military intervention theories are not prepared to answer the question: when is it likely a third-party nation will intervene?

**Figure 1 - Conflict Fatalities by Region**

![Global Armed Conflict Fatalities (1997-2016)](chart)

Source: IISS Armed Conflict Database

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14 *Economist*, 2017
15 The chart was made for this research project, but fatality data was collected from the IISS Armed Conflict Database.
Work done by notable authors such as Choi, James, Bove, and Bohmelt accurately consider all quantifiable data available, but the data sets only include information up to 2005 and do not portray the decaying political and military structure in North Africa and the Middle East since 2011. It is possible to apply similar principles provided by Shirkey to theories offered by previous military intervention theorists to redefine contemporary hypotheses, qualitatively considering emerging regional variables. Using ISIS as an example, Clarke discusses the increasing role of decentralized command and control used by extremist groups to promote attacks in the West.\textsuperscript{16} Terrorist attacks originating from North Africa and the Middle East reached double digits in Europe in the summer of 2016. By Teson’s and other legal perspectives, the right for countries to militarily intervene in those states responsible for hosting terrorist groups is also increasing. By applying existing theories to the current operating environment, an adjustment of current perceptions of triggers for military intervention is warranted. Applying Choi and James’s hypothesis to the post-2011 era in North Africa and the Middle East may yield different priorities for U.S. military intervention than they did between 1981-2005. For the United States, it is highly likely that combatting terrorism in places like Libya and Yemen will receive more military intervention devotion than the humanitarian crises elsewhere in the region given the sharp increase in conflict fatalities in the region after 2011 as depicted in Figure 1. The United States case study may also be generalizable to similar U.N. contributing nations on an individual basis, particularly since many U.N. members face a similar model of terrorism activities domestically. Comparing various military intervention strategies used by similar countries experiencing domestic terrorism can help researchers identify trends and work to apply more acute causality. Put simply, previous empirical military intervention theories are outdated due to the recent spread of organized extremism in many parts of the world.

Military intervention theories must be applied and revised as necessary to accommodate the current environment in the Middle East and North Africa. Similar to how military intervention strategy changed drastically during the post-colonial era of the 1950s and 1960s, altered again following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, and again after 9/11, current theories accounting for conditions that meet the criteria for military intervention must be assessed and revised regularly. The best way to address this deficiency is to determine if the causes for military interventions in the recent past are still applicable in the most volatile regions in the world today: North Africa and the Middle East. It is vital for policy-makers to know if the previous conditions warranting military intervention are still relevant. It is entirely likely that conditions meriting the use of military force evolve from a legal perspective as perceived threats evolve and the academic community must catch up to properly advise governments around the world. Failure to account for emerging threats and the evolution of adversary tactics can lead to a lawlessness and unpredictable swell of international military commitments that are not globally coordinated, leading to further atrophy of international partnerships and security organizations.

\textsuperscript{16} Clarke, 2017
Research Design

The trailblazing work of Choi and James is used as the basis for this research design. In order to statistically analyze contemporary drivers of U.S. military intervention within the confines of this research, previous research methodologies are employed, but with more current data, specifically from 2011 to the present. In order to replicate previous research designs with modern data, new datasets must be created to analyze variables in every country in the sample, in this case North Africa and the Middle East. Specifically, the hypothesis of this research is U.S. military intervention in the Middle East and North Africa after the Arab Spring in 2011 shifted from military involvement on behalf of humanitarian emergencies and democracy promotion as originally posited by Choi and James and transitioned to ebb violent extremism. The research will annotate where empirical gaps cannot be filled given the contemporary nature of the research question, but will supplement with qualitative data when applicable. To alleviate selection bias presented by analyzing specific case studies, all 18 countries in North Africa and the Middle East will be examined for the independent variables (levels of terrorism, risk of human rights violations, and levels of democracy), regardless if the dependent variable, U.S. military intervention, was present. By using a holistic approach of interpreting independent variables, the research is afforded the opportunity to evaluate deviant cases in both dependent and independent variable reaction.

The first and most critical step is defining the dependent variable: U.S. military intervention. This research strays from its predecessors principally in the definition of intervention. For the purposes of this research, intervention is defined as any air to ground attack, surface to surface attack, or physical involvement of ground troops in combat operations. Interventions can be understood as both large-scale military operations such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as well as individual drone strikes or clandestine operations in areas U.S. forces are not already conducting combat operations. Another way to understand the dependent variable is through presidential authority. Where local military commanders may have the power to authorize lethal strikes in support of ongoing military operations, the Commander in Chief reserves the right to authorize interventions outside areas where US forces are engaged. For example, President Bush authorized the U.S. invasion of Iraq (which is considered an independent intervention), but subsequent military action in Iraq was authorized under subordinate military commanders (not meeting the criteria of a separate intervention). Intelligence sharing, troops in a purely advisory role, and combined planning are excluded. Although these actions are generally executed through military channels with political motivations, they are commonly understood to happen under an innumerable amount of circumstances and are not necessarily tied to the strategic interests of the United States. My definition of military intervention is unique compared to previous studies on intervention and is specifically a product of the contemporary time period given the proliferation of lethal drone capabilities. Previous research generally used number of battle deaths per dyad, usually 25 annually, as a measure of military action, however, the use of modern technology often results in one sided casualty rates which would not meet the threshold of previous datasets even if they extended to the current time period. As a practical example, utilizing the thresholds of pre-made conflict
datasets used by previous empirical research, it would be deduced the United States has not had any military intervention in the region since 2011 in Iraq. This academic oversight in defining conflict must be addressed.

Identifying if the United States intervened militarily in each country after 2011 can be problematic, but is vital to measure as accurately as possible. The contemporary aspect of this research means some military operations being analyzed are ongoing and are executed with small numbers of special operations forces (SOF) or lethally armed drones operated by a U.S. intelligence agency without public acknowledgement from the Department of Defense (DoD) or the media. To compensate for a lack of open source public records, careful effort is made to cross-reference DoD personnel deployment records with verifiable reports that include governmental acknowledgements of combat involvement. While the DoD reports troop deployments to every country in the studied region, it is impossible to know if those forces are used in any offensive capability unless verified through another source, certainly leaving plenty of room for classified cases of U.S. military involvement that are not accounted for in this research. A dichotomous 0 or 1 was assigned to each country. A 0 means the United States did not militarily intervene and a 1 means the United States did militarily intervene in the country from 2011-2017. Dependent variable coding was intentionally kept simplistic in order to compensate for the inability to accurately represent the nature of contemporary military interventions. While it may be known through open-source reporting and U.S. government acknowledgement if an intervention occurred in a given place at a given time, the specific data on how the intervention was executed is largely classified. For this reason, no attempt was made to classify individual interventions beyond recognizing their presence geographically and chronologically. Each year for each country in the sample between 2011 and 2017 also has a dichotomous variable to denote known military intervention more acutely for further analysis.

To analyze the independent variables of domestic extremist attacks, levels of risk to human rights, and levels of democracy, various sources were consulted due to the need for recent data and compiled in a custom-made dataset. The START Global Terrorism Database (GTD) shows all of the possible instances of terrorism or extremism in a given country. Since the research pertains to the post-Arab Spring environment, all potential acts of terrorism were considered from 2011 through the end of 2016 in every country in North Africa and the Middle East. The following countries were considered on all variables throughout the research: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The START GTD provides the most comprehensive list of individual attacks in each country regardless of the number of casualties while including the group responsible, denoting if a group is only suspected of an attack. This is an important deviation from previous intervention research which consulted pre-made conflict data-sets such as the Peace Research

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17 DoD DMDC Manpower Data, 2018
18 For example, a SOF raid in Yemen may have support from a CIA weaponized drone. Due to classification levels, only certain portions of the operation may be accessible to the public, but it can still be deduced that an intervention occurred.
19 START Global Terrorism Database, 2018
Institute of Oslo’s UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset which only considered conflicts where each dyad experienced 25 battle deaths per year.\textsuperscript{20} Given the low-cost U.S. interventions using principally SOF and air power, it is unlikely any U.S. intervention in the region would be represented in the data-set since the United States has not suffered the requisite amount of casualties since 2011 in Iraq. Primarily for this reason, the data-set for this study was constructed by pulling applicable information from multiple sources instead of relying solely on pre-constructed data with inclusion thresholds that do not fit the criteria of this research.

It is important to identify countries facing terrorist attacks by groups the United States is actively targeting internationally because it should make that country more susceptible than others to U.S. military intervention due to a shared counter-terrorism interest. There is a wide range of data on terrorist or suspected terrorist attacks across the sample. Qatar experienced one attack attributed to terrorism between 2011 and 2016 while there are almost 16,000 attacks reported in Iraq during the same time frame.\textsuperscript{5} Five ordinal-level codes were established to encompass the range of attacks in each country: 1= 1-99 attacks, 2= 100-499 attacks, 3= 500-1499 attacks, 4= 1500-2500 attacks, and 5= 2500+ attacks.

The data for the second independent variable analyzed, risks of human rights violations, was extrapolated from the ReliefWeb Human Rights Index using Maplecroft which gives each country a rating of Low Risk, Medium Risk, High Risk, and Extreme Risk. The Human Rights Index levels from ReliefWeb are gathered through collecting information on a myriad of themes, including: spread of communicable diseases, food crisis prevalence, displaced persons, refugees/asylum seekers, and people killed/injured per capita through violence.\textsuperscript{21,22} In order to encompass changes in each country’s Human Rights Index, an average was taken for each country from 2012-2016 based off available data. Similar to the first independent variable, the Human Rights Index for each country was assigned a code from 1 to 5. Since no country in the region was assessed as having a low level of human rights risks, a code of 1 represents a medium risk while 5 equates to extreme risks for human rights violations. In previous research, it was presumed the United States is most likely to militarily intervene internationally in defense of human rights so if that hypothesis is true in this sample, a stronger correlation should be seen between higher levels of human rights risks and increasing levels of U.S. intervention.

The last major independent variable, levels of democracy, was gathered through The Center for Systemic Peace’s Polity IV data, which provides a range of -10 to 10 for levels of democracy where -10 is autocratic and 10 is fully democratic.\textsuperscript{23} Although the Polity IV data is outdated and Polity V is not published, projections were maintained through 2015 for each country. Needless to say, certain political circumstances did not

\textsuperscript{20} Peace Pesearch Institute Oslo. “UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset,” 2009

\textsuperscript{21} Maplecroft. "Human Rights Index 2012." Most of Maplecroft’s data must be paid for, but their 2012 and 2016 Human Rights Indices were published for open-source consumption.

\textsuperscript{22} Maplecroft, “Human Rights Index 2016.”

\textsuperscript{23} Marshall and Gurr. "Polity IV Project: Country Reports 2013." This dataset is widely used as a quick and easy standard for analyzing levels of democracy, but the data concludes in 2013, limiting its use to future research.
transpire the way political scientists expected in 2013, such as progress towards democratization in Syria and Libya, but many of the inferences remain generally valid. The most important democratic indicators for this research come from 2011 and 2012 when the Arab Spring was taking hold across the region. These numbers are the most heavily used levels of democracy in the research and are altered from a 20-point coding system to a 1-5 scale where 1 equals full democracy and 5 is fully autocratic. The coding scheme is reversed from the one provided through Polity IV to ensure homogeneity with the other coding mechanisms in use to depict levels of terrorism and risks to human rights.

Additional variables can be controlled for using the research presented. Information was gathered on state fragility through the State Fragility Index from Funds for Peace which is coded with a 1-5 system where 1 is low fragility and 5 is extreme fragility.\(^\text{24}\) The coding used is either the year a military intervention occurred or the country’s highest score from 2011-2017 if no intervention occurred. It may also be important to understand the relationship between each country in the region and the United States. To compensate for this, each country is assigned either a 0 for little to no relationship with the United States or a 1 for a prevalent relationship. While some nations have longstanding alliances with the U.S., such as Algeria, other countries cooperated specifically with the United States in the War on Terror and in this research design, both countries would receive a 1. It is important to control for these variables to create an understanding of the nature of U.S. military interventions. As the research will show with Jordan and Lebanon, not all military interventions can be classified the same, regardless of what the statistics say.

**Data Analysis**

To establish levels of correlation, Figures 2-5 provide general trends across the entire sample for levels of terrorism, human rights, and democracy each country experienced since the Arab Spring. U.S. military interventions are identified in red in Figures 2-4 to provide a broad glimpse into priorities for the U.S. deployment of military forces. Figure 2 shows the decoded totals of terrorist or extremist attacks in each country from 2011-2016. Through the red bars, indicating U.S. military involvement, it is easy to see the overall likelihood of U.S. military intervention increasing with the level of terrorist attacks each country experiences. It is worth noting, every country that experienced a U.S. military intervention also experienced domestic terrorist attacks by either an Islamic State (IS) affiliate or an al-Qaeda affiliate, demonstrating the perennial interest of the United States in those organizations specifically. Table 1 is a cross-tabulation of the level of domestic terrorist attacks and military incursion to provide additional insight into a potential relationship. Table 1 shows all countries coded with a five, representing 2,500+ attacks, experienced U.S. military intervention after 2011 and none of the ten countries with the two lowest categories of domestic extremism hosted any direct U.S. intervention. Additionally, when there is a 1 representing the dependent variable (U.S. military intervention took place), each incremental increase in level of

\(^{24}\) Funds for Peace, 2017
terrorism represent a 33% increase in likelihood of U.S. intervention, culminating in a 100% chance of intervention in cases of 2,500+ extremist attacks in the sample.

While a relationship can be inferred between the increasing level of terrorist attacks and a higher likelihood of U.S. military response, there are causal gaps. Although the United States militarily intervened in the four countries with the uppermost extremist threats, higher levels of terrorist activity do not account for the lack of military involvement in Israel, Turkey, and Egypt security threats. In the cases of Israel and Egypt, the presence of long-standing alliances with the United States may indicate a lack of direct combat assistance from Washington, presumably in favor financial contribution and provides additional support through training and military aid. A positive relationship with the United States could also indicate a shared trust that the sampled countries have strong enough state security institutions to quell domestic terrorism concerns before they become international security issues. Additionally, U.S. military incursions in Lebanon25 appear to be deviant cases due to the relatively low amount of terrorist attacks compared to other Middle Eastern countries. A closer examination of the security relationship between the United States and Lebanon revealed Lebanese request for U.S. military support in 2017 in a counter-terrorism operation. While logistical packages and intelligence sharing do not fit the criteria for military intervention, the DoD’s admission of the presence of U.S. SOF embedded with Lebanese military combat units conducting counter-terrorism operations in 2017 formally meets the criteria for U.S. military intervention according to this research, no matter how small. In Tunisia, there are limited reports of U.S. military involvement in combat operations outside of purely support and advising, but official sources decline to comment.26 Similarly, in Jordan, a robust package of up to 2,800 U.S. troops are present to support the Jordanian counter-terror effort, but it is unclear if there is a direct combat capacity forward deployed.27, 28

### Table 1 - Terrorist Attacks and U.S. Military Intervention

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<tr>
<th>Terrorist Attacks</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1: 1-99</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: 100-499</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3: 500-1499</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4: 1500-2500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5: 2500+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 Toi, 2017
26 Mekhennet and Ryan, 2016
27 Sharp, 2008
28 In both cases, the dependent variable is coded as 0, for U.S. military intervention having not occurred due to a lack of confirmed reporting which highlights a validity risk of this research.
Figure 2 - Number of Terrorist/Extremist Attacks per Country from 2011-2016

Figure 3 depicts the Human Rights Index averages between 2011 and 2015 for each country in the sample and each bar highlighted in red notes U.S. military intervention between 2011 and 2017. Quantitative information is coded between Medium and Extreme probability for human rights violations since no country is assessed to have a low probability of human rights violations based off ReliefWeb’s data. It is evident there are trends between more instances of human rights abuses and U.S. military intervention, but as seen in Figure 3, other variables may be present. From the vantage point of Figures 2 and 3, it cannot immediately be discerned if increased levels of terrorism or increased risk of human rights abuses are causal factors for U.S. military intervention since both show positive correlation. It might appear a more in-depth analysis of U.S. contribution between military funding and humanitarian commitments may be warranted.

Table 2 - Risk of Human Rights Violations and U.S. Military Intervention

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Human Rights Risks</th>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1: Med</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Med/High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: High</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4: High/VH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Very High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2, however, combined with Figure 3 shows similarities that must not be overlooked. All of the four countries with the highest risks of domestic terrorism experienced U.S. military intervention. Not all of the countries with the highest risk of human rights violations experienced intervention. This subtle difference indicates a preference for the United States to deploy combat units to combat terrorism over defending human rights. Countries where there are higher instances of extremist attacks also exhibit higher tendencies for human rights violations and both tendencies lean towards U.S. military intervention. Figures 2 and 5, however, more clearly depict the U.S. priority of combating extremism versus overlooking potential human rights violations. Table 2 is a cross-tabulation depicting risks of human rights crises and U.S. military intervention. By analyzing the numbers, it is apparent there is a weaker relationship between risks to human rights and military intervention as only four of the six highest risk countries experienced a direct intervention. Table 2 demonstrates a 22% incremental increase in levels of the dependent variable per increase in risk to human rights, whereas each increase in levels of terrorism indicated a 33% increased likelihood of U.S. military intervention. Based off a single variable, the probability of human rights violations is inconclusive as a causal factor for U.S. military intervention as terrorist activity is.

The third independent variable is level of democracy. Table 3 is a cross-tabulation of U.S. intervention and levels of democracy. A significantly weaker relationship between the dependent variable, U.S. military intervention, and the independent variable of democracy is indicated. Increasingly undemocratic countries only risk a 5% increase in U.S. military intervention, versus the 22% for increasing risk to human rights, and 33% for increasing levels of domestic terrorism according to the
coding in this research. As shown in Table 3, only two out of the nine autocracies in the region coded as a 5 experienced a U.S. intervention, while half of 2 and 3 coded countries did, clearly highlighting the incongruencies of the argument for a U.S. strategy of democracy promotion in the region. Figure 4 depicts the levels of democracy for each country in North Africa and the Middle East as described in Polity IV. An initial glance at Figure 4 and Table 3 will not indicate a pattern associated with U.S. military intervention and levels of democracy across the region. If put in a chronological context, Figure 4 and Table 3 sustain the notion of Washington’s wish to preserve democracy, but there does not seem to be a strong enough relationship to assess causality. Table 3 shows a wide distribution of interventions across many forms of government and is further supported by the negative relationship between levels of democracy and U.S. intervention as shown in Figure 5.

**Table 3 - Levels of Democracy and U.S. Military Intervention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democracy Levels</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Full Democracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Democracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Open Anocracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Clos. Anocracy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Autocracy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not impossible to see military intervention from the United States coinciding with illiberal transitions in Syria and Libya, regardless of the political connotations of the time. Along this line of thinking, it would be an oversight to not recognize the increasing inability of weakened state security institutions to control local violent extremist organizations before they have a significant global reach. This reality must be accounted for as a driver of U.S. military intervention. Similarly, the United States maintained a constant presence in Yemen through 2014, even as the domestic government apparatus in the state dissipated. The U.S. military intervention in Iraq and Lebanon stand out as deviants from the norm of this research. In the case of Iraq, the U.S. has been very clear their interests are solely in the destruction of ISIS, but it is not a stretch to interpret Washington’s second vested interest in the nearly failed government left after the 2003-2011 U.S. intervention. As mentioned before, the United States and Lebanon maintain a unique counter-terrorism relationship in 2017, culminating in a small-scale U.S. military contribution to combat operations in the country. Severe threats to validity are present if it is assumed the U.S. militarily intervenes in North Africa and the Middle East to purely promote democracy without analyzing other potential intervening variables.

29 Gibbons-Neff, 2017
30 Myre, 2014
As evidenced in Figure 2, Table 1, and Figure 5, military intervention as a response to terrorism in North Africa and the Middle East holds stronger relationships than the other independent variables. Figure 5 lends additional credibility by demonstrating the rapid rise in cases of military intervention as a result of increased terrorism compared to the other two independent variables. Although there is a positive relationship between increasing risks of human rights violations and U.S. intervention, it is significantly weaker than increasing levels of extremism. The adjustment to intervention around the “High” risk of human rights violations highlights the divergent case of Lebanon. While the intervention in Lebanon accounts for only 10% of the level three nations for the second independent variable, this categorical variation is enough to assist the conclusion validity of this research’s hypothesis. Table 4 depicts a positive relationship between intervention and terrorist attacks to a .01 statistical significance and a relationship between intervention and human rights violations with a .05 level of significance. The similar levels of terrorism and risks to human rights in the countries where intervention has taken place indicates a shared relationship between the independent variables of terrorism, human rights violations, and the dependent variable of U.S. military intervention. It is worth noting, however, that the positive correlation between increased risks of human rights violations and likelihood of U.S. intervention is strong with a .55 correlation coefficient, but not as strong as increased terrorism and U.S. intervention which has a .75 correlation coefficient. The results of various interaction effects between independent variables will be discussed later.
Although a rise in domestic terrorism often indicates a rise in risks to human rights, this research posits case studies in the sample will indicate a specific proclivity for the United States to provide direct military intervention in countries with higher levels of domestic terrorism versus countries with exclusively higher risks of human rights violations. While levels of terrorism corresponding to U.S. intervention have fewer deviant cases than risks to human rights, a closer analysis of the interaction effects is necessary to truly accept the presented alternative hypothesis.

Linear regression analysis of each independent variable individually and paired with each other is needed to more accurately depict their relationship on the dependent variable, military intervention. Table 5 shows the results of regression analysis of each independent variable singularly and combined with all other independent variables to show their effect on triggering U.S. military intervention. The cell values in Table 5 portray the corresponding t-values with statistical significance represented by either one asterisk (.05) or two asterisks (.01) and adjusted R-square (effect size) values for each independent variable combination. It is critical to acknowledge that increasing levels of terrorism receive .01 statistical significance when solely contributing to U.S. military intervention and when combined with the presence of risks to human rights and with lower levels of democracy separately. Interestingly, no combination of independent
variables has a greater effect size than .59 on military intervention, indicating other control variables to motivate the United States to militarily intervene must exist. A higher risk of human rights violations is statistically significant to .05 when analyzed individually and when combined with decreasing levels of democracy, but it cannot challenge the statistical significance or positive correlation coefficient of terrorism as the primary motivating factor for U.S. military intervention. Ultimately, the level of terrorism remains a greater indicator of U.S. military intervention in North Africa and the Middle East as depicted through descriptive statistics and linear regression.

**Table 5 - Linear Regression of All Independent Variable Combinations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Terr.</th>
<th>Terr+HR</th>
<th>Terr+Dem</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>HR+Dem</th>
<th>Dem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>4.7**</td>
<td>3.7**</td>
<td>4.88**</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR.</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>2.6*</td>
<td>3.7*</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem.</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-2.2*</td>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**.01 significance  *.05 significance**

**Discussion of Statistical Results**

The descriptive statistics and linear regression data collaboratively validate the alternate hypothesis by demonstrating the importance of terrorism for the United States to commit combat forces in third-party countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Previous research on this topic considered data through 2005 and found human rights violations were primary causal factors for U.S. military intervention from a global perspective. The research presented here, however, clearly indicates a U.S. foreign policy deviation in the sample after the Arab Spring of 2011. The levels of statistical significance in the linear regression indicate the findings of previous research on humanitarian intervention are still important for U.S. foreign policy in the region but increasing levels of terrorism are primary causal mechanisms for U.S. military
intervention. The destabilization of governments that enabled the rapid spread of organized extremist groups across the sample are most likely the root cause of the shift in U.S. military priorities. In the Middle East, al-Qaeda and ISIS established themselves as the headlining jihad groups for all Muslims, nearly causing the ineffectual Iraqi government to fail in a matter of months in 2014. Similarly, al-Qaeda’s popular spread across inter-regional borders between the Middle East and Africa was enabled by the struggling security apparatus throughout a multitude of nations. As outlined in the research, all countries in the sample that experienced a U.S. military intervention since 2011, also experienced domestic terrorism at the hands of either an Islamic State affiliate or an al-Qaeda affiliate. Given the proclivity of the United States to target these groups globally, it should come as little surprise that military priority for Washington in North Africa and the Middle East is the destruction of these groups.

As Figure 5 presents the most pronounced visual depiction of interaction effects between the variables, Table 5 provides the best statistical evidence for the acceptance of the hypothesis. The presence of domestic terrorism from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda alone equates to a .55 effect size for U.S. military intervention in the region with .01 significance. Table 1 gives additional credence by showing all five U.S. military interventions in the sample after 2011 in countries that experienced 500+ domestic extremist attacks. Potential human rights violations seem almost as important given that four interventions took place in countries with the highest categorized index of risk to human rights as evidenced in Figure 3. No variable analyzed, however, accounts for why the United States did not militarily intervene in Saudi Arabia or Iran, who also display the highest possible risk for human rights abuses. From a pragmatic political perspective, however, both deviant cases can be easily explained. The United States is hardly likely to conduct an independent military operation against the Saudi government whom is a multi-generational ally and can represent U.S. interests in OPEC. As a key member of President Bush’s “Axis of Evil”, Iran presents a more viable target, but the United States certainly does not have the political capital in the Middle East or domestically to launch another large-scale conventional war. Figure 5 provides a graphical depiction of the relationship between the three independent variables and U.S. military intervention. The highest effect size of any independent variable combination was .59, as Table 5 shows with a combination of increasing terrorism with increasing risks to human rights. While the low overall effect value is surprising, a relationship is clearly evident between the two independent variables. This should not be surprising as an increase in levels of terrorism generally equates to an increase risk of human rights violations from either the powerful terrorist group or an overreaction from the government. From a statistical perspective, it is important to acknowledge how Table 4 shows the positive relationship between increasing terrorism and an increasing risk of human rights violations. Interestingly, the relationship between the two independent variables is strong at .45, but that is not statistically significant and well below the .76 correlation between intervention and terrorism which does provide a degree of separation between terrorism and human rights issues. Worth noting, is the presence of U.S. forces conducting combat operations with the Lebanese military to counter ISIS, perhaps epitomizing the U.S. foreign policy distinction between risks to human rights and reducing the spread of international terrorism.
The only independent variable analyzed that consistently highlights U.S. intervention in a predictable pattern is the presence of large-scale domestic terrorism. The fact that all nations experiencing U.S. military interventions in North Africa and the Middle East are also combatting an Islamic State or al-Qaeda affiliate lends additional credit to the presented hypothesis since both of these groups attacked U.S. citizens and have historically taken responsibility for attacks on U.S. soil. It can be supposed Washington delivers other forms of support for nations fighting extremist organizations, but limits its commitment of lethal warfighting to defeat those two organizations specifically. From the viewpoint of the United States, both of these groups present national security threats because of their independent capabilities to conduct international attacks, but also due to the charismatic leaders who enable rapid combatant recruitment and support base expansion around the region.31 As the Islamic State cedes territory and mass base support in Iraq and Syria from 2015-2018, it is becoming clear the group is prioritizing efforts further west by increasing attacks in North Africa, particularly on the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and Libya. Similarly, al-Qaeda’s mass base flourished in recent years, with satellite organizations such as al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb attacking African and western interests throughout the region.32

Interestingly, the introduction of state fragility and the dichotomous variable of alliance with the United States did not yield significant changes. Neither control variable provided significant statistical assistance to the credibility of any independent variable and generally only increased the effect sizes between .02-.03. Instead of using a dichotomous response for each country’s relationship with the United States, a coded system to determine the level or type of relationship may be more insightful. Although not specifically in the scope of this research, increasing state fragility is generally in a positive relationship with increasing risk of human rights violations and number of terrorist attacks per country. It can be safely deduced the United States commits combat forces in countries experiencing declining stability because of the increase in terrorism at each location, not solely in support of the failing government. There is not a consistent level of democracy in failing states which received U.S. military intervention either, so no pattern can be assessed to support a causal relationship.

Although the statistical research indicates a recent transition in contemporary drivers of U.S. military interventions, threats to validity must be addressed. From an internal validity perspective, perhaps the most glaring issue is the new way of measuring military intervention which relies on partially declassified data. This was compensated for by keeping a simple dependent variable coding to answer only “if” a military intervention occurred, instead of addressing the means used to conduct it. External validity and the ability to generalize this research can also be questioned due to the small sample size. Admittedly, the 18-country sample is far from a random sample of countries around the world and it is unlikely other global regions experience similar levels of terrorism risks or human rights, but the research methodology itself is intended to be generalized to other constructs. It would be difficult to argue, however,

31 Gupta, 2007
32 Filiu, 2015
that the research is not measuring what it intends to measure and the results clearly validate the hypothesis, even if future government transparency might subtly alter the results.

Ultimately, this research allows the academic community to begin understanding the differences in military intervention causal mechanisms ten years after the Global War on Terror was initiated and after the Arab Spring enabled a wider spread of extremist groups. The lack of contemporary data-sets which encapsulate the subtle nuances of military intervention since 2011 make it easy for researchers to only focus on previous decades or miscategorize the state of current conflicts. While the study conducted to create the data-set used in this research is complex, requiring intensive cross-referencing, the variables themselves are not. This research should be used to influence the scholastic community to re-analyze motivating factors for military intervention on a holistic scale, specifically for great powers who can independently project combat power globally. Previous examination in U.S. military intervention deduced the primary causal factor for U.S. intervention was to ebb humanitarian emergencies. The research presented here, however, clearly demonstrates the increasing importance of terrorism as a priority for the allocation of U.S. combat power, demonstrating previous research obsolete. Given the continued lapses in government security apparatuses in North Africa and the Middle East, this research suggests U.S. military interventions will continue as a matter of national security to counter evolving extremist threats that loom over U.S. interests globally and domestically.

What Changed from Previous Research?

The purpose of this study is not to merely demonstrate that U.S. intervention causal mechanisms suddenly changed, but to highlight how and why they changed over time. This analysis will consist of two main portions. First, it is appropriate to highlight how the United States perception of self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the U.N Charter evolved from the end of the Cold War to the present. Significant global events translated into domestic executive authorizations which led to the United States finding itself being regularly criticized by the international community for its liberal use of military force in sovereign states, toeing the line between preemptive and preventive action. Within this framework, successive U.S. presidential administrations carefully balanced different authority structures and reporting requirements of different U.S. legal codes to enable more aggressive targeting of national security threats while minimizing oversight. Next, the role of technology and the various ways the United States can project combat power dramatically lowered the cost of military intervention for the U.S. military and became enticing “easy buttons” for successive U.S. presidents trying to protect the homeland.

Article 51 of the U.N Charter justifies self-defense “if an armed attack occurs”, but with this vague wording, one is left to wonder: what constitutes an armed attack, when is it considered to have taken place, who are the legitimate attackers, and who can carry out a retaliatory attack?33 Before even reaching this point, there is a scholarly doctrinal divide between those who believe Article 51 supports anticipatory self-defense

33 Ruys, 2013, pg. 1-8
and those against it, called “restrictionists”. The fundamental disagreement surrounds the rights of states to act in between interception of an attack (preemptively) about to commence, which is generally agreed to be acceptable and the right to act in anticipation of a future attack of which the immediacy is unknown (preventively). This schism in international norms of what is deemed to be the spirit of self-defense according to the U.N Charter is highlighted most acutely in the last decade in the Middle East and North Africa through the U.S. proliferation of armed interventions. While this debate has brewed since the 1945 establishment of the U.N, it was more or less contained until the end of the Cold War and subsequent transition of U.S. policy towards international peacekeeping.

As Spiers notes, the U.S. stance towards international peacekeeping evolved during the 1990s to a policy of providing military support with a general condition of U.S. military overall command for the operation. The administrations of George H. Bush and Clinton were willing to commit U.S. forces to international efforts such as Haiti and the former Yugoslavia although public and congressional support was at times questionable. Case in point of this policy was the U.S. responsibility for and commitment of over 25,000 of the 38,000 United Taskforce in Somalia conducting humanitarian operations which led to a subsequent U.S. “mission creep” resulting in the deadly October 3, 1993 operation that killed 17 U.S. servicemembers. After this, Clinton Presidential Decision Directive 25 essentially formalized the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines and officially curtailed U.S. popular support to large scale military operations in support of international peacekeeping missions. Public and political support waned in the mid to late 1990s, even if U.S. military support did not until 1998. Clinton used “constitutional prerogatives” while asking for congressional support to commit to the international peacekeeping operation in Bosnia in 1995. Collective global power contribution decreases to peacekeeping missions led to a total decrease in deployed peacekeepers from 78,000 in 1993 to 12,000 in 1999.

As the new Bush administration set its sights on the White House, plans were put in place to further reduce U.S. support in the Balkans and Kosovo to a total of around 6,500 troops of what Clinton once planned to be 20,000. Bush listened to senior military leaders who felt U.S. forces operating in a peacekeeping fashion would degrade the combat effectiveness of the units involved and the U.S. military would devolve, eventually being unable to protect the United States from significant threats. The initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, created a new focus for U.S. defense policy, essentially further removing direct U.S. military commitments to international peacekeeping forces and focusing principally on U.S. interests. This sentiment is exemplified in Bush’s decision not to provide direct support

34 Ruys, 2013, pg. 258-262
35 Mission creep is a gradual shift in operational focus, normally made in reference to a benign military strategy which evolves into a combat focused purpose with a subsequent long-term commitment of forces.
36 Weinberger and Powell Doctrines are collectively known to be the guiding light for US foreign policy in regards to military action after the Vietnam War and are similar to the Just War criteria.
37 Castle, 2015, pg. 516
38 Utley, 2006, pg. 1-5
to the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) which provided a militarized policing function around major cities like Kabul and Kandahar, opting to keep its 7,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan hunting al-Qaeda and Taliban targets and firmly under U.S. operational control.

Significant research is already dedicated to the role of 9/11 in transitioning foreign policy agendas to counter violent non-state actors, but it is worth mentioning the sustained rise in military interventions coincided with the rise in global terrorism's reach. While international legitimization is still vitally important from a political perspective, the United States, and some other permanent members of the U.N Security Council, are demonstrating how willing they are to intervene quickly and decisively without international consent when perceived national security interests are threatened. Intervention in Afghanistan was largely internationally condoned as a reactionary military intervention after al-Qaeda proved its threat to international security through the global reach of its terrorism. Even if Article 51 of the U.N Charter does not specify the threat of non-state actors, international consensus on the magnitude and threat posed by al-Qaeda made the intervention just. In contrast, the 2003 invasion of Iraq was largely viewed by the international community, including three permanent members of the U.N Security Council, as an illegitimate preventive intervention because of a lack of viable intelligence on the threat Saddam’s Iraq posed in both weapons of mass destruction capability or intent to use them, an argument made more acute following a decade of crippling sanctions.

It can be argued the United States awareness of itself in the world transitioned from an institutional liberal perspective under Bush Sr. and Clinton to a neo-realist stance with Bush Jr. which was exacerbated greatly, but not created by 9/11. Although the effects of the Bush Doctrine will continue to reverberate around the North Africa and Middle East region for generations, the interventions under his administrations in the region were fairly limited from a military perspective, almost exclusively focusing on Iraq. Most interestingly, however, is the transition from the Republican Bush to the Democrat Obama in 2008. One would expect a transition back to a conservative military approach in the region, but the Obama administration maintained the same national security threat focus on violent non-state actors hidden behind the drive to exit the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Furthermore, for all of the economic and political work in promoting international institutions, from a military intervention perspective, the Obama administration was more willing to act militarily without international consent than the Bush administration.

Intervention was made much easier through technological innovations in the late 1990s and 2000s, notably through unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones. Although reconnaissance drones in their current form had been used for years previous, in February 2001, the CIA and defense contractors successfully used a version of the MQ-1 Predator to launch a missile and destroy a truck for the first time. It was a mock-up for a mission to target Osama bin Laden that was never carried out. As if a tale of

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39 Spiers contribution to Utley, 2006, pg. 15-29  
40 Lahneman, 2004, pg. 173-182  
41 Mazzetti, 2014, pg. 319
two counter-terror programs, when Obama took office he inherited Bush’s enhanced interrogation and drone target killing programs. Two days after taking office, Obama repealed the CIA’s enhanced interrogation program, but the next day authorized two separate drone strikes. During Bush’s presidency, he authorized 50 total covert drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. Obama approved 542 non-battlefield drone strikes, killing around 3,900 suspected terrorists with the last one being two-weeks before the end of his presidency. During the 2012 presidential election, both Romney and Obama held the same opinion on continuing the armed drone program and polling suggested 69% of Americans felt similarly, preferring targeted drone strikes over risking American lives overseas although the international community is less supportive. As of 2014, only Kenya and Israel approved of U.S. drone strikes and only four other countries have an approval of U.S. drones above 40%.

Although he greatly increased the use of drone warfare to target national security threats in non-combat areas, Obama also greatly increased transparency in the CIA’s drone program. Obama both acknowledged it and instituted a series of reforms to ensure accountability, although it is unclear if these efforts bore any fruit; most notably, the failed initiative to transfer drone strikes from the CIA to the DoD, or transferring between Title 50 and Title 10 authorities. Under Title 50 for covert action, only the National Security Council and very select members of the Senate and House Intelligence Committees are alerted, but by law, they can also be notified after the action has taken place and approval is not mandatory via Presidential Findings. Transitioning the CIA’s drone program to Title 10 under the DoD would normalize them as “traditional military activities” which would allow more transparency into the Senate and House Committees on Foreign Relations and Intelligence oversight. While more transparency could be afforded, it would not inherently be offered because under “traditional military activities” (assuming DoD drone strikes outside ongoing battlefields meet the criteria), additional appraisal would not have to be given to policymakers for drone strikes. Ultimately, with Obama’s more transparent dimension of the drone program, little would be gained by transferring the program from Title 50 to Title 10 authorities.

With new drone bases being established in Saudi Arabia for strikes in Yemen and Niger for strikes in Libya, time will tell if the Trump administration adds to Obama’s legacy of military intervention in non-combat zones, although some sources are reporting a steady increase.

42 Zenko, 2016
43 Zenko, 2017
44 Mazzetti, 2014, pg. 315 discussed Gallup Poll results leading up to the election.
45 Fuller, 2014. As a potential explanation of Kenyan and Israeli approvals: Kenya used drones domestically to reduce poaching by 96% and Israel is the biggest drone exporter in the world and frequently uses them against Palestinian militants.
46 Voluntary presidential acknowledgement of a covert program, regardless of how attributable it really is, is almost unheard of and it appears Obama took great care to coordinate with the Director of National Intelligence ahead of time to minimize real and political damage to the program.
47 50 U.S.C. 413b articulates the notification methods for Presidential approval of covert action and the individuals who must be alerted.
48 Lowenthal, 2016, Ch. 8 and 10
49 The National Security Law Brief, 2016
Given the checks and balances system in the United States, the President maintains an amazing degree of decision-making when it comes to military intervention as a result of the powers vested unto it after 9/11, especially the open-ended Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). Three presidential administrations over 17 years have used the AUMF’s broad guidance of being authorized to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determined planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September, 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States.”50 As time wore on and al-Qaeda diffused across the region into the Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and various other factions while Obama expanded the intelligence community and DoD’s role to lethally target them, political pressure mounted for a revision of the AUMF to limit the President’s individual authorization of force. In 2013 regarding Syria, President Obama addressed any ambiguity when he said “I have the authority to address the threat from ISIL… but I welcome congressional support for this effort….”, thus reminding congress of the powers bestowed on him as constitutional War Powers but also from the 2001 AUMF. It is likely the future will bring more defined calls for limiting AUMF powers or perhaps, arguing for AUMF authorities on a case-by-case basis rather than a blank check mentality.51

From an international perspective, answering whether U.S. military interventions targeting terrorist networks in North Africa and the Middle East are legitimate or illegitimate under Article 51 of the U.N Charter cannot be done here. The evolution of thought processes on how successive U.S. administrations view their right to intervene, however, are clearly defined for analysis. George W. Bush’s willingness to “go it alone” was a break from the international partnership model of his predecessors and further exemplified by Obama. Obama, however, witnessed a diffusion of terror networks across the region aided by the weakened security institutions created by the Arab Spring and also a means to engage them with minimal real or political costs. Those in favor of the most recent U.S. targeting methodology argue a new, more liberal interpretation of Article 51 is needed which clearly articulates the threat of non-state actors and the rights to self-defense associated with them considering intelligence collection in the 21st century increases states’ abilities to act preemptively and proportionately with lower cost and without notification across the international community.52 Many opponents however, prioritize the need for multi-lateral coalitions to make intervention decisions,53 create efficiencies in the international decision-making arena that will provide states an easier outlet54 to address perceived threats which concentrate on: the likelihood of the threat being realized, the danger it presents to the

50 Public Law 107-40 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, Section 2
51 Castle, 2015 argues for a more clear AUMF which reduces ambiguity and gives the President clear powers to militarily intervene against IS and further indicates AUMF’s may replace congressional declarations of war in the modern era of violent non-state actors.
52 Ruys, 2013, pg. 535-545
53 Lahneman, 2004, pg. 184
54 The argument refers to streamlining Article 39 of the UN Charter
state, form of state response, and level of response proportionality. As the debate lingers, it is clear (up until the Trump administration at least), the U.S. policy favors the former perspective by using an increased liberalization of Article 51, capitalizing on weaponized technology that lowers the cost of pursuing national security goals, and exploiting loopholes in domestic law to enable U.S. military interventions with minimal public acknowledgement or political debate.

**Future Research**

The research presented provides a relatively narrow perspective on U.S. military intervention since 2011, focusing on the volatile North Africa and Middle East region. To most accurately identify holistic causal mechanisms for intervention, additional global research on contemporary case studies must be presented. It is entirely possible the U.S. military intervention strategy transitioned to combat terrorism in the sampled region because independent variables are more prevalent in North Africa and the Middle East than anywhere else in the world. In depth generalization of the presented hypothesis is warranted to increase external validity of the overall U.S. approach to intervention since 2011. Additional research on other U.S. support priorities compared to direct combat support may help fill in gaps in this research. Applying a similar research methodology to intervention priorities for U.S. near-peer states such as Russia and China may yield interesting results on their military related foreign policy priorities. For the scholarly community, this research should present the need to update data-sets on conflict with parameters for inclusion that are large enough to encapsulate the way contemporary wars are fought. Great powers have the technology to intervene in countries containing weak security institutions with very lopsided casualty rates and in the case of the United States, no intervention since 2001 except Iraq and Afghanistan would register on most conflict databases because of a lack of U.S. military casualties. New data-sets should also include state sponsor of proxy forces for researchers to garner a better understanding of regional power dynamics and which states are progressing their foreign policy agenda at what times.

The sample of North Africa and the Middle East is not a random sample and was specifically chosen due to the persistent conflict in the region in the twenty-first century. Critical to generalizing this research on a more complete, world-wide scale, is to remain focused on the use of direct U.S. military intervention. It is easy to violate construct or internal validity by analyzing forms of U.S. aid or intervention that do not involve the covert or overt use of military force, but these results would not accurately portray U.S. military intervention priorities. Researchers studying contemporary security issues are particularly susceptible to this violation due to the lack of data sets presenting quantifiable information in one place.

Research orienting on the financial and political priorities for U.S. military intervention may yield additional insight into the topic presented. It would not be surprising to discover robust financial commitments by the United States in North Africa and the Middle East may explain why countries with high levels of domestic terrorism do not experience direct U.S. intervention. For instance, the United States may resort to

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55 Doyle and Macedo, 2011.
monetary instead of military contributions to countries that it perceives as inherently capable of self-defense, such as the robust defense packages sent to Israel. Using the model presented in this research, but exchanging the dichotomous U.S. military intervention dependent variable for a nominal variable of U.S. financial aid may present a difference between cash priorities and military priorities for Washington. To increase effect size, an analysis of U.S. presidential timelines could generate patterns to predict when the Executive Branch may authorize use of military force versus focusing on indirect assistance as the primary means to achieve foreign policy goals. Election timelines are historically wrought with controversial topics as administrations rush to progress policy objectives to a point of no return, forcing future governments to execute their aims. Certainly, the international commitment of U.S. combat power episodically falls into that category. Similarly, newly elected administrations are often quick to authorize lethal strikes to consolidate political power, which constitute military intervention that may not occur during normal political circumstances. It may be possible to identify patterns of U.S. intervention based off political timelines in Washington, providing researchers with additional predictive powers to help educate policy makers.

A third prudent adjustment to future case study research on modern military intervention is to compare the U.S. military intervention strategies with those of similar near-peer states. This form of generalization is exceptionally useful to defense analysts predicting global responses to security threats, but caution must be used. A skew will always be present when applying this research design to other countries because no country in the world is close to matching the combat power projection of the United States. In other words, researchers may not be able to identify the true military intervention priorities of other countries because they cannot effectively project or maintain a military presence where they want. The United States does not need to request international assistance for logistical support to provide lethal power when most other countries do. While controlling for differences in military capability for other intervening nations, future research modeled off the one presented here may yield interesting results. For instance, do other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, such as England and France, maintain the same priorities as the United States overseas? Where do these countries deviate from the path of the United States and is the deviation due to differing capability or differing priorities? After all, both France and the U.K. experienced significant domestic terrorism events over the last 17 years. Is contemporary military intervention by Russia and China hinging on the same anxiety of global terrorism as the United States given the violent extremist situations in Chechnya and western China or are there regional geo-political motivations present? If near-peer nations like Russia and China prioritized anti-terrorism operations internationally then cooperation with NATO and other western coalitions should be feasible, but there are clearly differences in international priorities. At the time of this research, President Trump’s first term is nearing its halfway mark and although figures on his proclivity to authorize strikes is quite varied, most indications suggest he is on an even more aggressive path than President Obama. This realization alone validates the need to provide a deeper understanding of contemporary drivers of U.S. military intervention.
The research presented is designed to shed light on a chronological gap in knowledge on modern U.S. military intervention strategy and presents a simple, accurate methodology to re-examine U.S. military priorities on a holistic scale that can be applied to other constructs. The academic community has a responsibility to fill contemporary gaps with data to enable future quantitatively based research to identify trends and provide prescriptive recommendations to policymakers. The world is too fast paced to rely on 12-year-old warfare data that does not take into consideration how contemporary unconventional conflicts are fought and what political situations changed them. This research should, other than identify a single gap in research, shed light on a missing responsibility of the academic community to inform decisionmakers.

**Conclusion**

There is certainly no dearth of qualitative or quantitative research on drivers of military interventions, but gaps in knowledge are always present in the ever-changing world. In this case, drivers of U.S. military intervention in North Africa and the Middle East since the Arab Spring in 2011 were empirically tested against previously held theories. The hypothesis that the United States intervenes in the sample primarily to ebb violent extremists which are considered a national security threat over any other variable proved valid. Understanding the change that made this transition to counter-terrorism possible required a deep-dive into the evolution of legal debates on liberalizing the notion of self-defense and subsequently the notion of preemptive strikes. Even with this, there are still avenues unexplored and foreign policy predictive capabilities left unattended to.

The measurable portion of this research compared the dependent variable of U.S. military interventions to three independent variables across an 18-country sample in the Middle East and North Africa region: levels of terrorism, risk of human rights violations, and levels of democracy. By applying a more contemporary definition of intervention based off lethal intentions as opposed to number of casualties inflicted or received given the proclivity of low-intensity conflicts over conventional war, it was deduced the United States primarily intervenes as a reaction to violent extremist groups, principally those who have targeted U.S. activities or interests. This is not to say previous research was incorrect, only that the conditions changed from a political and military perspective.

As the global geopolitical landscape evolved from the dissolution of the Soviet Union through the 17-year anniversary of the Global War on Terror, political, legal, and international attitudes towards intervention evolved too. In the case of the United States with a gung-ho president early in his term, 9/11 unified the nation and the AUMF gave him the authority to act decisively. As the War on Terror dragged on, new military capabilities made the task of intervening in non-warring states less costly and thus more appealing for future administrations and U.S. interventions in the region proliferated as the line between lethal military and intelligence authorities blurred.

As mentioned before, this research is designed to answer a small question while bringing to light much bigger ones. Given the actions of the United States with more structured control on the Executive Branch, what are the tendencies of rising great powers with similar technology, but fewer presidential restrictions? How can their
military related foreign policy goals be more accurately assessed if the scholarly community does not rely on archaic databases to identify trends? As Operation Desert Storm and the Global War on Terror both demonstrated an evolved form of conflict, conventional and unconventional technology proliferation in the last decade are producing another progression in warfare that is recognized in the U.S. defense industry complex, but the scholarly community must follow suite. There is a lot to know and the information exists, however it must be tediously compiled and academically analyzed to enable exploitation by U.S. foreign policy decision makers.
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References


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