Inter-Organizational Complexities in Humanitarian Interventions in World Politics

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The sequencing of international military interventions into civil and international conflicts has long been a matter of interest for scholarship and policy-making; yet at this point we know relatively little about the patterns one might expect in going from one intervention to the next. Increasingly since the end of the cold war such interventions have entailed joint multilateral efforts by one or more international coalition or organization often for the expressed purpose of humanitarian protection or relief, e.g., Libya in 2012. It has been clear as well that incidents of intervention in many cases are highly political in nature and not entirely independent of each other, as seen in subsequent debates about what to do in Syria. We propose that learning processes may be taking place to iron out the inevitable inter-organizational conflicts in humanitarian operations, but that the spread or pattern of going from one intervention to the next is dependent on both “push” and “pull” factors attracting and retarding multilateral collaboration. Previous impediments to collaboration in intervention have been lessened by the removal of superpower competition that often threatened to result in vetoes of action. Yet as the Syrian crisis has shown, the threat of major power (Russian or Chinese) veto and the persistence of sovereignty norms still hangs over the prospect of institutional response to local emergencies. The likely outcomes of these complex contradictions are analyzed in this research based on both aggregate data patterns and case studies.

Frederic S. Pearson is Director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, Professor of Political Science, and Gershenson Distinguished Faculty Fellow at WSU. He was previously professor and research fellow at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a Fulbright scholar in the Netherlands and U.K. His dissertation was on Middle East conflict systems, and his numerous books include: Civil War: Internal Struggles, Global Consequences (University of Toronto Press, 2009) with Marie Olson Lounsbery; Arms and Ethnic Conflict (2001 with John Sislin) and Arms and Warfare, Negotiation (1994). An authority on international military intervention, arms transfers and conflict resolution, Dr. Pearson was editor of the 2001 special issue of the Journal of Peace Research on Identity-based Disputes and Conflict Management, and governmental consultant in 2000 on US National Security, 21st Century, in Washington, DC. Other relevant recent articles have included studies of post-hostilities stability in civil wars, as well as military intervention and the prospects for democratization and exit strategies. He is currently working on two books, one on inter-organizational relations in humanitarian interventions, and the other on Arab styles of conflict resolution.