***FISHBOWL ACTIVITY***

**Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**



**Fishbowl Articles & Discussion Instructions:**

*Topic: U.S. involvement in foreign affairs.*

You will work with your partner within your pre-assigned groups in order to complete the following tasks (so in a group of four, two people will work together to address one side of the argument while the other two people will collaborate on the other side):

**Articles** (approximately 2-3 class periods):

1. Closely read and annotate the texts on the United States involvement in foreign affairs and identify the central ideas for each. You should also identify within each article the pros and cons of each side of the argument. I would suggest using different colored highlighters or pencils to do this.
2. Using evidence from the texts, develop a claim/counterclaim regarding whether or not the U.S. should get involved in foreign affairs. Be sure that the claim and counterclaim are two sides of the same coin. This should be written as one sentence. Provide evidence and details from the texts in order to support your argument (on the “speaker” worksheet).

*Sample topic*: Humans vs. technology in the workplace.

Ex. “Although the increased use of technology in the workplace can cause unemployment (COUNTERCLAIM), studies show that it can increase wealth, productivity, and efficiency; therefore, humans should be replaced by machines (YOUR CLAIM).”

-OR-

Ex. “Machines may increase productivity in the workplace (COUNTERCLAIM), but they will never be an appropriate substitute for human intelligence and ability (YOUR CLAIM).”

**Fishbowl** (one or two class periods):

1. On the day of the fishbowl discussion, you will meet with your partners for a few minutes to go over the main points and details that you will use to defend your argument. These must come directly from the text.
2. You will separate into the inner and outer circles. Two of the four group members will be on the inside, and two will be on the outside. You will decide with your partner who will speak and who will observe. Bring your articles with you.
3. Those on the INSIDE of the circle – you will discuss your ideas with each other one point at a time. Please try to limit yourself to only using information from the articles, not your own personal opinions (we’ll get to those later). You must speak at least twice in order to receive full credit. The person who is speaking will call on the next person who wants to speak, and there is no talking out of turn. Your PURPOSE is to defend your own argument while poking holes/pointing out flaws in the other side of the argument. If one person reads information from an article and you want to add onto it, defend it, or argue against it, you must use the texts. \*This is not a random sharing of facts; it is the ability to defend your argument in a logical order. You must identify the title of the article, as well as the page/paragraph numbers you’re getting your info from so that everyone can follow along.
4. Those on the OUTSIDE of the circle – write both you and your partners’ names and claim/counterclaim at the top of your notes page. Your job is to observe and take notes on any main points discussed in the fishbowl, as well as any questions that you have about the information you heard.

**Evaluation**:

Inside circle – you will be assessed on the amount you participate as well as the specific content/details you use from the articles in order to defend your argument.

Outside circle – you will be assessed on the quality and number of notes that you take during the discussion.

Each student will also complete the reflection sheet once the fishbowl discussion has been completed.

For the Observer: Discussion Notes

Fishbowl thesis: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Point #1:

Evidence:

Point #2:

Evidence:

Point #3:

Evidence:

Point #4:

Evidence:

Point #5: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

For the Speaker: Main Points

Fishbowl thesis: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Point #1: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

Point #2: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

Point #3: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

Point #4: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

Point #5: Article title & page #\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence:

**Fishbowl Evaluation Form**

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Role:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*After the Discussion:*

1. Formulate your own opinion based on today’s discussion:

 2. What were your own personal strengths / the strengths of your partner throughout this process?

3. In what area(s) can you and your partner use some improvement?

4. Questions and/or topics for further investigation:

**Fishbowl Articles**



**Topic: U.S. Involvement in Foreign Affairs**

Text 1 - “Bigger U.S. Role Battling Genocide?”

# Text 2 - “Skepticism over U.S. Involvement in Foreign Conflicts”

# Text 3 - “A BRIEFING ON THE HISTORY OF U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS”

# Text 4 - “The Best Case Scenario in Syria”

# Text 5 - “The Futility of U.S. Intervention in Regional Conflicts”

# Text 6 - “American Interventionism and the Tragedy of Foreign Policy”

**“Bigger U.S. Role Battling Genocide?”**

*A task force's findings, urging US leadership, may dovetail with ideas of Obama administration.*

By [Howard LaFranchi](http://www.csmonitor.com/About/Staff/Howard-LaFranchi), *Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor* / December 9, 2008

A genocide prevention task force concludes that US leadership, early warnings, preventive diplomacy, and coordinated international action are crucial elements of any effort to prevent the kind of mass killings that have ravaged Sudan's Darfur and the Congo.

That may sound like another well-meaning Washington study destined to gather dust. But the fate of this task force – led by two Clinton administration foreign-policy heavyweights, Madeleine Albright and William Cohen – might be a little brighter. One reason: The conclusion of its year-long labor corresponds with President-elect Obama's naming to his national-security team a diplomat who has advocated swift action when genocide threatens.

Susan Rice, Mr. Obama's pick to be the US ambassador to the United Nations, had experience with the Rwanda genocide of the 1990s during her years as a chief Africa diplomat under the Clinton administration. Since then – most recently as chief foreign-policy adviser to candidate Obama – Ms. Rice has advocated a tough response, including US military intervention if necessary, to prevent mass killings of unprotected populations.

In unveiling their report Monday, the task-force co-chairs emphasized that they anticipate a favorable response from the new administration on placing a high priority on genocide prevention. "Obama has made very clear he is concerned about Darfur and Congo ... and various places where we are seeing genocide take place or mass atrocities potentially" occurring, former Clinton Secretary of State Albright said.

Mr. Cohen, who served as President Clinton's secretary of Defense, cited the intervention experience of Obama appointees Robert Gates, who will stay on as secretary of Defense, and retired Gen. Jim Jones, who is to be the new president's national-security adviser. "We'll find a very responsive administration," Cohen said at a task-force press conference in Washington.

The report focuses on the role of leadership, from the president on down, in preventing genocide and the need for policy revisions and updates to fit the task to today's world. But the report – noting that President Bush declared "not on my watch" after reviewing the mass killings in Rwanda, only to see Darfur unfold during his tenure – concludes that preventive diplomacy and early action must complement leadership.

"There is a broad range of options between standing aside and ordering in the Marines," Albright said.

Among the specific recommendations of the task force is a new interagency effort – drawing on the experience of the military in past interventions and of the State Department in nation-building and stabilization – to sniff out potential trouble spots. The task force calls for creation of a $250 million fund to be used in prevention work.

The report, timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary Tuesday of the international Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, calls military intervention an option of "last resort."

While the task-force co-chairs say they expect keen interest from the incoming administration, it is not clear how the report's conclusions align with the more forceful views of Obama appointees like Rice.

She became a harsh critic of the Bush administration's deliberative diplomatic approach to the Sudanese government and the mass killings in its Darfur region. Favoring "dramatic action," she went to Capitol Hill last year to press for either a naval blockade of Sudan or even a US bombing campaign.

Obama says he intends to raise the UN ambassador's post to the cabinet rank it held in the Clinton administration.

That step, along with Rice's appointment, are convincing foreign-policy experts that the issue of genocide prevention will figure prominently for the new administration. "Rice has been a forceful advocate in the past, so I would expect she'll take the opportunity to show leadership on this, as will the president-elect," says Richard Solomon, president of the US Institute of Peace in Washington.

But a key part of getting genocide prevention beyond a worthy goal, Ambassador Solomon says, will be stepped-up international diplomacy and more capacity for multilateral organizations like the UN to stop mass atrocities before they occur.

In naming Rice earlier this month, Obama said she shares his view that the world today "demands global institutions that work." He called the UN an "imperfect" but "indispensable" body and said Rice would be charged with both representing US interests and working to make the UN a more effective and responsive organization.

Solomon says it's hard to argue with human rights advocates who underscore how, a decade after Rwanda and mass atrocities in the Balkans, the world remains subject to genocide as in Darfur. But as an example of global progress, he points to the UN General Assembly's passage in 2005 of a "responsibility to protect" doctrine aimed at governments that fail in the duty of protecting their own citizens.

"That [2005 passage] was an extremely important conceptual breakthrough," he says, even though the doctrine continues to "run up against" the national-sovereignty objections of governments coming under the international microscope because of human rights violations.

It will take time before a concept like "the responsibility to protect" becomes the international norm, he adds, but in the meantime, such policy advances will assist US diplomats and others in broad goals like genocide prevention.

# “Skepticism Over U.S. Involvement in Foreign Conflicts”

###### By [MARK LANDLER](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/mark_landler/index.html) and ALLISON KOPICKI of NYTimes.com

###### Published: June 6, 2013

WASHINGTON — Americans are increasingly skeptical about whether the United States should thrust itself into conflicts overseas, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News Poll, but that reluctance does not extend to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

After 12 years of war and amid signs of a sustainable economic recovery, nearly six in 10 people said the United States should not take a leading role among all other countries in trying to solve conflicts, the poll found, while only about a third said it should remain at the forefront.

On Iran, however, the same proportion of people — 58 percent — favored the United States taking military action to stop Iran from manufacturing a bomb, an action that President Obama has repeatedly warned the Iranian government is a “red line” for the United States.

The support for a more restrained American role has grown markedly since the question was last asked, in April 2003, a month after the invasion of Iraq. And it suggests Mr. Obama is in tune with the public mood in his refusal to be drawn into the bloody civil war in Syria.

“We don’t have the finances for it, we have problems of our own, and we have to solve our own issues before we take on everyone else’s problems,” Michael Burt, 54, of Creedmoor, N.C., who worked in hotel security but is now on disability leave, said in a follow-up interview.

Even as Americans signal a desire to draw inward, however, they appear sensitive to the nation’s growing vulnerability to attacks on its computer systems. An overwhelming majority said cyberattacks were a very serious or somewhat serious threat, with nearly six in 10 saying the United States is not adequately prepared for them.

More than half of Americans said the United States should never conduct cyberattacks against another country, while about a third said such attacks should be carried out. The Bush and Obama administrations, working with the Israelis, have made covert attacks against Iran’s nuclear program.

For Mr. Obama, who shuffled his national-security ranks this week by naming Susan E. Rice as national security adviser, the poll brought a mixed verdict on foreign policy. Forty-five percent approved of his stewardship and 39 percent disapproved.

The administration’s handling of the attack on the mission in Benghazi, Libya, continues to cast a shadow. Fifty-three percent of people said it was “mostly hiding something” about the attack, while 34 percent said it was “mostly telling the truth.”

At the same time, people were cynical about the motives of Republicans in denouncing administration officials, including Ms. Rice, over Benghazi. Nearly six in 10 said the criticisms were mainly for political reasons, as opposed to a search for the truth.

When people were quizzed about the level of American engagement in April 2003, 48 percent said the United States should take the lead, while 43 percent said it should not. In the latest poll, only 35 percent said it should take the lead; 58 percent said it should not.

The evolution of those attitudes is in line with some of the ideas that Mr. Obama laid out last month for how the United States should handle counterterrorism in the post-9/11 era — a strategy that continues to rely on the use of drones. Seventy-two percent of people supported using drones to kill terrorism suspects, though there was significant concern that they kill innocent people and are not subject to adequate oversight.

Mr. Obama’s renewed promise to close the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and transfer the inmates found little support, however. Fifty-eight percent of people said it should remain open, while only 34 percent said it should be closed.

The telephone poll was conducted on both landlines and cellphones from May 31 to June 4 with 1,022 adults nationwide and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus three percentage points.

**“A BRIEFING ON THE HISTORY**

**OF U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS”**

**Excerpt by Zoltán Grossman, October 2001**

Published in [*Z Magazine*](http://www.zmag.org/grossmanciv.htm). Translations in [Italian](http://www.zmag.org/italy/grossmanciv.htm) [Polish](http://www.iwkip.org/lewanoga/14/index.php)

Some common themes can be seen in many U.S. military interventions.

First, they were explained to the U.S. public as defending the lives and rights of civilian populations. Yet the military tactics employed often left behind massive civilian "collateral damage." War planners made little distinction between rebels and the civilians who lived in rebel zones of control, or between military assets and civilian infrastructure, such as train lines, water plants, agricultural factories, medicine supplies, etc. The U.S. public always believes that in the next war, new military technologies will avoid civilian casualties on the other side. Yet when the inevitable civilian deaths occur, they are always explained away as "accidental" or "unavoidable."

Second, although nearly all the post-World War II interventions were carried out in the name of "freedom" and "democracy," nearly all of them in fact defended dictatorships controlled by pro-U.S. elites. Whether in Vietnam, Central America, or the Persian Gulf, the U.S. was not defending "freedom" but an ideological agenda (such as defending capitalism) or an economic agenda (such as protecting oil company investments). In the few cases when U.S. military forces toppled a dictatorship--such as in Grenada or Panama--they did so in a way that prevented the country's people from overthrowing their own dictator first, and installing a new democratic government more to their liking.

Third, the U.S. always attacked violence by its opponents as "terrorism," "atrocities against civilians," or "ethnic cleansing," but minimized or defended the same actions by the U.S. or its allies. If a country has the right to "end" a state that trains or harbors terrorists, would Cuba or Nicaragua have had the right to launch defensive bombing raids on U.S. targets to take out exile terrorists? Washington's double standard maintains that an U.S. ally's action by definition "defensive," but that an enemy's retaliation is by definition "offensive."

Fourth, the U.S. often portrays itself as a neutral peacekeeper, with nothing but the purest humanitarian motives. After deploying forces in a country, however, it quickly divides the country or region into "friends" and "foes," and takes one side against another. This strategy tends to enflame rather than dampen a war or civil conflict, as shown in the cases of Somalia and Bosnia, and deepens resentment of the U.S. role.

Fifth, U.S. military intervention is often counterproductive even if one accepts U.S. goals and rationales. Rather than solving the root political or economic roots of the conflict, it tends to polarize factions and further destabilize the country. The same countries tend to reappear again and again on the list of 20th century interventions.

Sixth, U.S. demonization of an enemy leader, or military action against him, tends to strengthen rather than weaken his hold on power. Take the list of current regimes most singled out for U.S. attack, and put it alongside of the list of regimes that have had the longest hold on power, and you will find they have the same names. Qaddafi, Castro, Saddam, Kim, and others may have faced greater internal criticism if they could not portray themselves as Davids standing up to the American Goliath, and (accurately) blaming many of their countries' internal problems on U.S. economic sanctions.

One of the most dangerous ideas of the 20th century was that "people like us" could not commit atrocities against civilians.

* German and Japanese citizens believed it, but their militaries slaughtered millions of people.
* British and French citizens believed it, but their militaries fought brutal colonial wars in Africa and Asia.
* Russian citizens believed it, but their armies murdered civilians in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and elsewhere.
* Israeli citizens believed it, but their army mowed down Palestinians and Lebanese.
* Arabs believed it, but suicide bombers and hijackers targeted U.S. and Israeli civilians.
* U.S. citizens believed it, but their military killed hundreds of thousands in Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Every country, every ethnicity, every religion, contains within it the capability for extreme violence. Every group contains a faction that is intolerant of other groups, and actively seeks to exclude or even kill them. War fever tends to encourage the intolerant faction, but the faction only succeeds in its goals if the rest of the group acquiesces or remains silent. The attacks of September 11 were not only a test for U.S. citizens’ attitudes' toward minority ethnic/racial groups in their own country, but a test for our relationship with the rest of the world. We must begin not by lashing out at civilians in Muslim countries, but by taking responsibility for our own history and our own actions, and how they have fed the cycle of violence.

**“The Best Case Scenario in Syria”**

*The Obama Administration Should Use Strikes to Get Talks*

*By*[*Gayle Tzemach Lemmon*](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/author/gayle-tzemach-lemmon)AUGUST 26, 2013

foreignaffairs.com

It has been one year since U.S. President Barack Obama commented that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would constitute the crossing of a red line, one that would “change my calculus; that would change my equation.” His resolve was first tested this spring, when, after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad allegedly unleashed chemical weapons on his opponents, the White House announced that it would provide small arms to the rebels. A reluctant Congress held up the weapons’ delivery, which seemed to put an end to the matter. But now, the Obama administration is being tested once more. As evidence mounts that the Assad regime launched a massive chemical weapons attack last week, Obama can either make a full commitment to get involved in the bloody conflict or decide to stay out of it once and for all. By all appearances, the second option is off the table. Just how far the United States might venture, though, is still up in the air.

Over the last few days, the president’s national security team has huddled to consider possible military responses to the chemical attack. On Friday, the Pentagon confirmed that U.S. Navy forces are already moving nearer to Syria’s shores should the White House decide to strike at the Assad regime with Tomahawk cruise missiles. And on Monday, Secretary of State John Kerry called the “indiscriminate slaughter of civilians” a “moral obscenity” and cautioned that “Obama believes there must be accountability for those who would use the world’s most heinous weapons against the world’s most vulnerable people.” Moments later, White House spokesman Jay Carney noted that the administration is “considering responses” to the chemical attack, which is a “distinct problem that requires a response.”

At this point, of course, the pros and cons of military intervention are already well known: On the one hand, as the State Department and others have argued, U.S. involvement could prevent the rebels’ defeat, support moderate allies, avert the collapse of the state, and help stem a refugee crisis. On the other, as U.S. military leaders have hinted in letters to Congress, intervention would be costly, potentially bloody, and likely futile -- a replay, some might say, of Iraq and Afghanistan, which to date have yielded neither victory for the United States nor stability for the region.

Up until now, of course, the Pentagon’s view -- that getting too involved in the conflict would spell trouble for the United States -- has won out. But the balance started to shift for Obama when chemical weapons came in to play. In March, allegations surfaced that the Syrian government had used such weapons in an attack near the Syrian city of Aleppo. In April, the White House wrote a letter to Congress stating that “our intelligence community does assess with varying degrees of confidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale in Syria.” The White House waited a bit longer, citing a need for greater proof, but eventually approved sending weapons to the rebels. This piece of policy triangulation satisfied neither side. For those supporting greater intervention, or at least a more muscular U.S. response, it was another sign that America was taking a leisurely dip in the policy water against an Assad regime and its Iranian allies that are in at all costs.

This time around, the scale of the alleged attack and the reported attacks on the UN inspections team in Syria seem to have prompted Obama to act quicker and more decisively. It is telling that White House calls for an investigation into the attacks have been followed within days by a publicly acknowledged discussion of military options and the movement of Navy ships.

The other factor that comes into play is Iran, which is no doubt tilting the scales toward action even further. As several former U.S. diplomats have argued to me for months, Iran is listening very closely to the deliberations in Washington. If Assad seems to cross a red line with impunity, the Iranian regime will decide that such lines are irrelevant -- even when it comes to nuclear weapons. If alleged attacks are permitted to go unchecked on an ever-greater scale, U.S. credibility will suffer. And given that new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is still settling in in Tehran, all sides are watching even more closely to see what the other is made of.

All in all, for the first time in more than two years, it seems like urgency is felt not just in Syria but on the ground in Washington, London, and Paris. Climbing death tolls and growing concerns about Syria’s unchecked use of chemical weapons mean that the world’s attention, limited though it may be, is unlikely to shift to Egypt or anyplace else as quickly as it did last time.   Congress remains as divided as ever on Syria -- at least on all points except that ground troops will and should not go into Syria -- but chemical weapons and Iran are likely game-changers there as well, particularly if the White House can argue that surgical strikes, which risk few American lives and entanglements, are possible.

Even if Obama decides to intervene, the next question is whether there is anything the United States or the international community can do to change the dynamics on the ground in Syria. All along, U.S. efforts -- including its announcement of arms assistance to the rebels this spring -- have paled in comparison to Iran’s. Indeed, it is hard to see how U.S. efforts could change the balance of power in Syria or alter the bloody trajectory of this conflict unless they are of sufficient strength to flatten the regime and are accompanied by a robust diplomatic push toward a transition of power to an inclusive authority as outlined in the June 2012 Geneva discussion. American wariness of another military intervention in the Middle East, means that the likeliest option is the deployment, instead, of American missiles. Whether those will be sufficient to change the balance of power remains to be seen.

On the brighter side, one byproduct of the alleged chemical weapons attack may be a renewal of diplomatic efforts to end the war. Syria’s backers in Russia, devoted as they are to their ally, do not want to see chemical weapons volleyed about, nor are they keen for power to fall to extremists. They also are more convinced than ever that a U.S. military intervention is on the table -- one that could spell the end of the Assad regime or at least cause it great pain. If Russia believes a power vacuum can be avoided, it will thus show more interest in peace talks. Earlier this summer, the Russians agreed with the United States to make a renewed push for long-delayed Geneva 2 talks.

In addition, this week, the United States had already planned to speak with the famously fractured Syrian rebel leadership to try to get it to the table as early as October. The specter of American military intervention should make those conversations far more focused. Similarly, the United States has long pushed for the Assad regime to take part in peace talks. A political transition to an inclusive transitional government as [**outlined in Geneva**](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf) last June remains the country’s best hope as the number of refugees climbs toward two million -- with a million of those under the age of 18.  Some argue that even the threat of strikes may be enough to bring the Syrian regime and its Russian supporters to the table. This is indeed possible, although it is difficult to see how an Assad, who as recently as Saturday argued that his side is ascendant will bend under the possibility of surgical strikes. He, too, knows America’s appetite for a long and large-scale intervention is limited.

Now, with military action looming, the question is not whether Obama’s calculations have changed but whether Assad’s have and whether the warring parties can be brought to the table. For the Assad regime, this war has long been seen as an existential battle to the finish, a last stand for which it has been preparing since 1982. It is hard to see how U.S. military strikes would change that reality. But it is nearly impossible to imagine the status quo in Syria changing without them. As the White House repeated this Monday, the conflict in Syria will only end with a political solution. In other words, the United States should use the leverage it has, in the form of continued pressure and looming military strikes, to help get all sides to the table. That could involve striking key Assad regime assets related to its chemical weapons program even while dangling offers of negotiations, in the hopes that a bargain can be struck between all the players and the war will end with a transfer of power -- no matter how unlikely that may look at the moment.

## “The Futility of U.S. Intervention in Regional Conflicts”

by Barbara Conry

Barbara Conry is a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

**Executive Summary**

Regional conflicts have greatly increased since the end of the Cold War, a trend that promises to continue. As Washington gropes for a policy toward regional wars, military intervention frequently emerges as an option. Except in the rare cases in which regional conflicts threaten American national security, however, military intervention in regional conflicts is ill-advised.

As tragic as many of the regional wars are, most cannot be resolved by American military intervention. In fact, military involvement often aggravates the situation. Furthermore, intervention can create a number of problems for the United States, including a rise in anti-American sentiment, diminished American credibility if the mission fails, domestic skepticism about future military operations even when legitimate U.S. interests might be involved, and threats to vital interests where none previously existed.

Proponents of intervention cite a number of interests, both security related and humanitarian, as justifications for U.S. military involvement in regional wars. The most common, and fallacious, argument for intervention is that global instability is a threat to U.S. security. That argument relies heavily on the discredited domino theory and the notion of deterrence by example. Global instability does not, per se, threaten vital American interests and is the normal state of affairs. A policy that views disorder or instability as a security threat would force the United States to expend vast resources in pursuit of an unattainable objective.

Rather than attempt to stifle regional conflicts through military intervention, the United States should encourage regional initiatives. Washington must, however, recognize that many regional conflicts are so deeply rooted that no outside party, from within or outside the region, will succeed in ending the fighting.

**Introduction**

The threat of tensions' escalating into superpower confrontations helped stifle regional conflicts for many years, but age-old disputes across the globe have exploded since the end of the Cold War, and regional conflicts are on the rise. The "World Military and Social Expenditures" report counted an unprecedented 29 "major" wars in 1992. ("Major" meant a war that involved one or more governments and killed at least 1,000 people in the year.)(1) Time has also identified an ominous proliferation trend. An informal study a number of years ago revealed that approximately 20 wars were likely to be under way at any given time, but a 1993 Time study identified 48 wars in progress (defined as two organized sides fighting and causing casualties).(2) Although such precise numbers are not often cited, there is widespread agreement that regional conflicts, driven by religion, nationalism, and political and economic disputes, are rising dramatically and will continue to do so.

"Regional conflict" is difficult to define precisely, and experts use the term in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this analysis, the term will mean an armed up- heaval, either cross-border or internecine, that affects a limited area but has little direct impact on the security of the rest of the world. The definition is necessarily broad, applicable to wars between established sovereign states, such as the Iran-Iraq conflict in the 1980s; internal strife in the absence of a functioning government, as in Somalia; a dispute between a sovereign government and an armed group within its borders, as in Sudan; or a conflict that involves both sovereign states and external nonstate parties, as in the former Yugoslavia.

In the age of mass communication, the entire world often witnesses the human tragedy associated with regional wars. Americans who are accustomed to basic human rights, relative stability, and freedom are often moved by distressing media images of remote war-torn regions. Those tragedies inspire in many Americans a sincere desire--even a sense that it is the duty of the United States--to alleviate the suffering. There is also widespread conviction that we have the means to do so. Since the American triumph in the Cold War and the successful expulsion of the world's fourth largest army from Kuwait with so few allied casualties, Americans and foreigners alike have tended to assume that the U.S. military is capable of managing regional conflagrations whenever it chooses to do so.

In reality, U.S. military intervention is generally not a viable solution to regional conflicts and should not be undertaken except in the rare instances in which American national security is at stake. In most cases regional conflicts cannot be helped--and may well be exacerbated--by the intervention of outside parties. U.S. intervention can be especially counterproductive, since it often intensifies smaller, less powerful countries' (the very nations most likely to be involved in regional conflicts) fears of America's hegemonic intentions. Militarily, too, the United States is ill-suited to suppress regional conflicts, in which warring forces frequently rely on guerrilla warfare, street fighting, and other tactics that are not easily met by America's high-tech war machine.(3) Retired British diplomat Jonathan Clarke has pointed out that

America's adversaries know full well that they are uncompetitive on a "First World" battlefield. Their response, like that of the Massachusetts Minuteman confronting that British Redcoat, is to lower the threshold of war to prevent the full range of American advanced weaponry and electronic wizardry from operating. The result is that Americans enter today's messy Third World battles not as odds-on favorites but on level terms.(4)

Indeed, it was precisely that type of warfare that prevented the United States from achieving its objectives in both Vietnam and Somalia--proving that the most powerful military in the world is far from invincible.

Not only does inappropriate military intervention fail to reconcile regional conflicts, it also has negative consequences for the United States. There can be significant political costs, ranging from diminished American credibility, as the result of an unsuccessful mission, to resentment on the part of foreign governments and populations of Washington's meddling in their affairs. More serious, injudicious military intervention can create threats to national security where none previously existed, stoking the fires of anti-Americanism, jeopardizing the lives of U.S. troops, and ultimately undermining our ability to protect vital national interests in the event of a direct threat.

**Regional Conflicts: A Security Threat?**

There is widespread acknowledgement that most regional conflicts do not represent an intrinsic threat to America's national security. Even the interventionist-minded Clinton administration does not claim that regional wars are a direct threat to American vital interests, and officials have been quick to point out that foreign policy failures in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia should not be viewed as jeopardizing the nation's security. As Secretary of State Warren Christopher has cautioned, regional conflicts should not "detract from our ability to concentrate on the strategic priorities."(5)

Indeed, that thinking prevailed even during the Cold War, when Soviet expansionism was a factor and one faction in a conflict might be an ally or surrogate of the Soviet Union. Referring to Vietnam, America's most ambitious intervention since World War II, one of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's top aides conceded that "it takes some sophistication to see how Vietnam automatically involves [our vital interests]."(6) Since the end of the Cold War, with no viable and aggressive major expansionist power, even more "sophistication" is required to connect remote regional conflicts with American security.

**Global Stability: The New Holy Grail**

The primary post-Cold War national security rationale that has emerged to justify U.S. intervention in regional conflicts is that global stability is essential to American prosperity and security. George Bush articulated that policy in 1991: "The enemy is unpredictability. The friend is stability."(7) Regional conflicts, because they supposedly weaken global stability, put the security of all states at risk, according to that school of thought. Robert G. Neumann of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has put it in more precise terms.

At the end of the twentieth century, even weak and underdeveloped states are arming themselves with weapons of mass destruction. Their conflicts will be very destabilizing and will touch directly the interests and the security of the United States. . . . A serious attempt must be made at creating order, or at least growing "zones of order."(8)

The world economy and America's place in it are one of the main reasons that global stability is said to be a national security concern. Because a healthy American economy depends on a functioning international marketplace-- which relies on a degree of stability--some people have argued that we must intervene to ensure stability. Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), for example, contends, "Full participation in the international market place requires a degree of stability and security in the international environment that only American power and leadership can provide."(9) Former secretary of defense Dick Cheney has made a similar point: "The worldwide market that we're part of cannot thrive where regional violence, instability, and aggression put it at peril. Our economic well-being and security depend on a stable world."(10)

Both the strategic and the economic arguments that maintain that global stability is essential to American security are seriously flawed. Neumann's suggestion that order or "zones of order" be created, for instance, highlights one of the flaws--the fact that global stability is an extremely nebulous concept. Some regions are more important to U.S. security than others. Western Europe, East Asia, and neighboring North American states are more relevant both economically and strategically than are, say, Central Asia or sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, stability itself is relative. Even those who contend that global stability is important to U.S. security cannot literally mean that all conflicts everywhere must be suppressed. That objective is manifestly beyond the ability of any nation or group of nations.

**The Myth of Global Stability**

There is no compelling evidence that global instability per se is or ever has been a threat to American national security.(11) "Peace is not the normal state of affairs. Equilibrium in the international system is not a natural or automatically realized phenomenon," concedes former assistant secretary of state Elliott Abrams.(12) Indeed, an international system of sovereign states is by its very nature unstable. That has always been true--even during the relatively quiescent, bipolar Cold War era.

The Cold War was more stable than the periods that immediately preceded and followed it. However, regional conflicts could and did occur. In Jonathan Clarke's words, "The history books burgeon with the records of major conflagrations" that occurred during the Cold War.(13) The conflicts in Ethiopia, Angola, Chad, India-Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, and El Salvador were only a few of the regional wars that raged. Global instability is not unique to the post-Cold War era, although it has become more pronounced.

Clearly, the most fundamental objective of foreign policy must be to protect U.S. vital interests and national security. But a policy that erroneously views global stability as essential to American security would force the United States to expend enormous resources in pursuit of an unattainable objective. Unless Washington chooses to intervene, thereby incurring risks, there is no regional upheaval that would seriously imperil American interests in the foreseeable future. The United States has always survived the disorder and instability that are endemic to the state system without serious economic or strategic repercussions. The militarized pursuit of global stability would exact costs that greatly outweighed any benefits it might confer.(14)

**“American Interventionism and the Tragedy of Foreign Policy”**

By Noah Remnick

Via *The Politic* – The Yale Undergraduate Journal of Politics

Since World War I, every American president has had to confront the potential agonies, moral uncertainties, and quagmires of military intervention abroad. Certainly, the price of intervention weighs on Barack Obama even as he pulls out troops from Iraq and vows to do the same from Afghanistan. He has already spent American energy and resources on a seemingly successful intervention in Libya. But what will he do if the situation in Syria gets out of hand and Bashir al-Assad begins slaughtering people at an even more horrifying rate? What actions will he take if Iran, defying the sanctions and warnings of the world community, builds a nuclear weapon? What is his responsibility in the Congo, where countless people have been murdered and rape has become a primary weapon of war? The West has yet to intervene.

Throughout the history of American foreign policy, particularly after World War II, essential strategic and moral questions have circulated concerning the use of American power. Rarely is there a strong oppositional voice when the United States is under imminent threat —self-defense is the prerogative of any state—but beyond such attacks as Pearl Harbor, the rightness of intervention is in the eye of the beholder. Some protested the Korean War in the 1950s and an even larger number protested the Vietnam War, particularly after 1967. Ronald Reagan’s raid on Grenada, George H.W. Bush’s invasions of Panama and Iraq, Bill Clinton’s belated intervention in the Balkans, Clinton’s failure to quell the Rwandan genocide, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya in the past decade. In each case, a question presented itself of whether or not to send American forces abroad to accomplish a certain announced (or unannounced) goal relating to national security, economic interests, humanitarian purposes, or terrorism, and in each case the debate between realists and idealists was revived.

American foreign policy realists such as Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft believe that the only genuine motivation for the use of force abroad lies in the defense of an essential national interest, while idealists in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson believe that America’s great power gives it enormous responsibility to stop genocide or other atrocities whenever possible. One indication of the complexity of this debate is that these categories frequently cross party lines, a rarity in American politics. Many consider Woodrow Wilson the quintessential idealist, but the same title could also be given to George W. Bush. Much more often, modern presidents do not fall under one category or the other, but somewhere along the continuum. President Obama exemplifies just that. As an Illinois state legislator with ambitions to run for the U.S. Senate, Obama famously said at an anti-war rally in Chicago in 2002, “I don’t oppose all wars. What I am opposed to is a dumb war.” Neither a complete idealist nor realist, he protested the Iraq War not on moral or ideological grounds, but on practical considerations. In making that argument, Obama was agreeing with people like Scowcroft, national security advisor to George H.W. Bush. In 2002, Scowcroft famously published an editorial in the Wall Street Journal titled “Don’t Attack Saddam,” which many saw as a tacit message from father to son—a message that enraged the son, and one that he, of course, ignored.

When Obama entered office in January 2009, his foreign policy priorities included get out of Iraq as quickly and responsibly as possible and ratchet down troop levels in Afghanistan without setting off a civil war. The president preferred to see those resources being used domestically and in developing nations like China. But of course he could not have anticipated everything that would take place in Libya, and that presented Obama with a dilemma: the United States faced a deep recession at home, an overextended military in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the harsh fact that Libya is not an important strategic interest for the United States. It is, after all, a lightly populated, isolated country in northeast Africa that we no longer label a terrorist state. Gaddafi had stopped giving oil money to terrorist states and developing a nuclear weapons program, but in the midst of the Arab Spring uprising he remained a brutal dictator on the verge of slaughtering countless Libyan citizens in Benghazi and elsewhere.

The United States did not anticipate any of the uprisings of the Arab Spring. For generations, we had adjusted to the idea that the most stagnant part of the political world was the Arab world, and we were very accustomed to dealing with, and even supporting, autocrats in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Then, suddenly, the world turned upside down, and America had to deal with the consequences. The rebel armies that had sprouted up in Libya were disorganized and weak. They didn’t have tanks, nor did they have planes—they had whatever they could get their hands on. Meanwhile, Gaddafi was prepared to lay down the law and kill his own people. Obama, consumed with so many problems, both foreign and domestic, allowed France and Britain to take the lead in building support for a NATO operation in Libya. When an advisor to Obama was quoted anonymously as calling this strategy “leading from behind,” detractors were quick to criticize the President. Another way to describe Obama’s strategy in this particular case could have been “tempered idealism.” In the debate over Libya, realists begged America to stay home, fearing unintended consequences and the possibility of a prolonged entrenchment there, while idealists asked how we could allow this massive slaughter to occur. Obama did indeed side with the idealists, but he refused to allow the war to reach of the scale of Iraq. In the post-Vietnam era, all foreign policy decisions were seen through the lens of Vietnam, which served as an example of what not to do. In a way, Iraq has become Obama’s Vietnam.

In foreign policy, however, the fact that American efforts in Libya have been deemed a success is no guarantee of the capacity to engineer a success in a place like Syria, which, is in an entirely different circumstance. Syrians want their freedom too, but they face a dictator who is prepared to kill his own people and a country that is a client state of Iran, sits on a border with Israel, and has a tacit alliance with the Hezbollah faction in Lebanon. It is hard to see what even an ideal international military coalition would look like. And yet, if we don’t intervene, we could witness the slaughter of thousands of Syrians. Meanwhile, the war in Congo has led to millions of deaths, rapes, and displacements, yet it is unclear what exactly the United States could do about it. This inaction is not uncommon, as we often allow for mass killings in far-away countries with which we have no direct interest.

In the study of intervention, the legacy of the Holocaust looms over all, serving as a constant reminder of the folly of inaction in the face of horror. Occasionally, leaders have apologized in retrospect for their failures to intervene in conflicts around the world. Bill Clinton has called his inaction in Rwanda “one of the two or three greatest regrets of [his] presidency.” Presidents will continue to be forced to make these great decisions, and they will undoubtedly continue to have great regrets. The looming question now seems to be what, if anything, President Obama will regret when he looks back on his foreign policy initiatives. Will he wish he had been more realistic, or more idealistic? Will he be remembered for intervening too much, too little, or for navigating the margins in a manner that met our country’s needs and moral responsibilities? Given the tragic state of global civil war, factionalism, terrorism, poverty, and despotism, it seems virtually impossible for any president to succeed entirely at all times. And that is the great tragedy of foreign policy.