

# Persistent Failure? International Interventions Since World War II

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August 25, 2020

## 1 Introduction

In an early survey of the literature on international intervention, James Rosenau (1969) rendered a bleak assessment:

The deeper one delves into the literature on intervention, the more incredulous one becomes. The discrepancy between the importance attached to the problem of intervention and the bases on which solutions to it are founded is so striking... The spirit of scientific explanation appears to have had no impact on it whatsoever.

Having just passed the fiftieth anniversary of Rosenau's initial survey, it is worth taking stock of how the accumulated scientific knowledge on the topic has developed in the last half century, and what are the prospects for its advancement going forward.

International intervention has been a pervasive feature of the post-World War II international order. From 1946-2005, twelve percent of country-years were the target of a foreign military intervention (Pearson and Baumann, 1993; Pickering and Kisangani, 2009). Three out of five civil wars from 1946-1999 experienced intervention by a third party (Regan, 2002). Twenty percent of country-years during the Cold War were led by governments that were installed or propped up by the CIA, with another ten percent similarly supported by the Soviet KGB (Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath, 2013). Foreign actors sought to influence eight percent of post-war national elections through threats of withholding aid or other things of value (Hyde and Marinov, 2012); accounting for other forms of intervention, in competitive elections from 1946-1999, the rate increases to eleven percent (Levin, 2019*a*). The rigorous scientific examination of the causes and consequences of foreign intervention is no less important now than it was at the time of Rosenau's writing.

The objectives of the present review are threefold. We first aim to summarize the findings of the existing literature on international interventions. The study of foreign intervention has no clear disciplinary home, with important contributions spread across subfield journals in comparative politics, international relations, development economics, and political economy, among others; we hope to better integrate these various streams of literature which exhibit a surprising degree of isolation given their substantive overlap. Our survey reveals a striking pattern: extant research tells us that foreign interventions overwhelmingly fail to achieve their purported objectives. The second goal of our analysis is to explain this puzzling but recurrent finding in the literature. We suggest that the results may be explained by three general phenomena: econometric issues of measurement, sample selection, and endogeneity; theoretical issues regarding assumptions made of the interveners' objectives; or alternatively, a persistent tendency of policy makers to pursue strategies that consistently fail to achieve their objectives. Finally, in light of these findings, we offer our assessment of some promising directions for the advancement of the study on foreign interventions. Future research faces both daunting challenges and exciting opportunities in the face of newly available data and empirical methods, as well as the changing nature of intervention itself.

Overall, our assessment is far more optimistic than Rosenau's. The present review highlights an active and exciting research program on foreign interventions which has developed rich theoretical insights, collected valuable data sources for empirical investigation, and progressed significantly in its methodological rigor and in the breadth of questions explored. The accumulated findings on the topic advance our understanding of the causes and consequences of interventions, while continually raising new questions of increasing intellectual interest and policy relevance.

Our contribution complements two other recent reviews of a similar body of literature. First, Krasner and Weinstein (2014) review a body of primarily political science research examining how foreign influence can shape domestic political institutions, with a particular interest in “whether, and under what conditions, tools of external pressure can promote improvements in governance, especially democratic governance”. The present review is somewhat broader in scope, examining a wider range of intervention outcomes and incorporating more literature from economics as well as political science journals (in addition to the several years of new contributions that have followed Krasner and Weinstein’s review). Second, Aidt, Albornoz and Hauk (2020) provide an extremely thorough review of literature from both economics and political science, covering a wide range of policy instruments and policy outcomes of interest. We differ from them in that our goal is to provide a critical assessment of the existing literature and illustrate the diversity of work in the field rather than place it within a single framework. Moreover, our review stands out from both of these other contributions in its focus on a central puzzle implied by the accumulated empirical findings in the literature— that there is limited empirical justification for interventions, yet they continue to be a persistent feature of international politics—and in its emphasis on analyzing the research design choices and theoretical assumptions that may account for this paradox. We hope that our approach will prove useful to future researchers in making sense of a diverse body of findings and in highlighting the pitfalls and promises of empirical research on this important topic.

## 2 Scope, Definitions, and Data Sources

A general challenge to the study of foreign intervention is the diversity of definitions and operationalizations of the concept used throughout the literature. In this section we propose a working definition of intervention, discuss the most common data sources used in quantitative analysis of the topic, and provide an overview of the topics that will and will not fall within the scope of our review.

### 2.1 Defining Intervention

We begin by discussing the definition of foreign intervention. An early attempt to pin down the concept in concrete terms comes from Rosenau (1968), who identifies two central characteristics of an action which classify it as an intervention: that it be “*convention-breaking*”, and “*authority-oriented*”. “[O]bservers from a wide variety of perspectives,” Rosenau writes, “seem inclined to describe the behavior of one international actor toward another as interventionary whenever the form of behavior constitutes a sharp break with then-existing forms *and* whenever it is directed at changing or preserving the structure of political authority in the target society.” Much of the social scientific literature on international intervention in the fifty years since Rosenau’s contribution seems to have adopted this definition, sometimes explicitly though much more often implicitly.

Identifying these two defining features of an international intervention proves useful for both the behaviors it encapsulates and the behaviors it excludes. On the one hand, it suggests the potential for quite a broad range of interventionary behavior. An intervention may involve the use of force, the threat to use force, or neither; it may be conducted publicly or privately, overtly or covertly; it may employ economic, military, diplomatic, or various other policy instruments. Yet this definition also serves an important delimiting function. Not every public threat, economic sanction, mobilization of troops, or withholding of aid or other material benefit constitutes a form of intervention. These behaviors are often meant to induce the leadership within the target state to revise a policy position or proffer a concession; but unless they are targeted at the structure of political authority itself, they would not be considered interventionary. In addition (and perhaps more controversially), Rosenau’s definition states that even behaviors explicitly seeking to alter or sustain the structure of political authority within a foreign polity are only interventionary insofar as they mark a break from convention. The provision of material assistance by the Cold War superpowers to their respective client states, for instance, was often intended to support the incumbent leadership in the face of domestic challengers; but such efforts were largely ongoing, conventional modes of international behavior—and thus not interventionary, according to Rosenau.

To be sure, this definition of intervention is not without ambiguity. All conventional behaviors began as non-conventional, and all breaks from convention, if they persist long enough, eventually become conventional

in their own right; where the intervention ends and the convention begins (or vice-versa, for that matter) will rarely be an uncontroversial demarcation. Further, many international behaviors are (or claim to be) motivated by objectives other than the undermining or bolstering of the incumbent leader in the target state, but nonetheless carry major ramifications for that state’s domestic politics; whether the impact on the authority structure was intended or incidental may likewise be difficult to discern.

An alternative approach to the topic would follow the framework developed in a seminal contribution by Gourevitch (1978), titled “The second image reversed: the international sources of domestic politics”. As the title suggests, Gourevitch’s innovation was to reverse the causal logic underlying Waltz (1959)’s “second image” of war—that international conflict may be explained by the “internal structure of states”—and instead examine the role played by the international system writ large in shaping domestic politics. Given the vast expansion of literature fitting this characterization over the past few decades, such a comprehensive definition of intervention would inevitably entail a body of research far beyond what could be contained within a single review essay: it would reasonably include, for instance, studies of how domestic politics are shaped by various foreign-originating economic shocks (Ramsay, 2011; Arias, 2017; Dube and Vargas, 2013), by interstate conflict (Chiozza and Goemans, 2004), or by diffusion of political institutions (Gleditsch and Ward, 2006; Abramson and Montero, Forthcoming), to name just a few forms of foreign influence.

Given these considerations, our approach tracks more closely to the definition proposed by Rosenau. We focus on actions and policies undertaken by one state with the goal of influencing structures of political authority within another state. Thus we emphasize the “authority-oriented” nature of intervention, while downplaying the “convention-breaking” aspect that Rosenau requires; and we focus primarily on actions for which the intended (rather than incidental) outcome is to influence politics (rather than just policy) within the target state.

## 2.2 Data Sources

Demonstrating the diversity of activities that can be characterized as interventionary, Table 1 reports a list of common data sources used in the quantitative study of foreign interventions. Clearly none of these sources is (nor claims to be) all-encompassing, but rather each records a particular form of intervention. They also do not all comport precisely with the definition of intervention articulated above, nor with one another’s operational definitions. Each has its own virtues and limitations, and care should always be taken to employ the dataset that best fits the particular question at hand.

### 2.2.1 Data on military interventions

The International Military Intervention (IMI) dataset (Pickering and Kisangani, 2009) catalogs all instances of military forces being deployed to the territory of another sovereign state. Not all instances are intended to alter or revise the structure of political authority within the target state, but the data are coded to identify the motives behind the force deployment, including some authority-oriented motives. Importantly, these data also indicate the direction of the intervention, i.e. whether it is in support of, in opposition to, or neutral toward the government or anti-government forces.

A more recently developed dataset is the Militarized Intervention by Powerful States (MIPS) dataset (Sullivan and Koch, 2009). MIPS documents a similar kind of event as those recorded in IMI; where the two differ is that the MIPS trades off cross-sectional breadth—covering only the five post-World War II major powers (US, UK, France, China, and Russia)—in favor of substantive depth. The main contribution of the MIPS data is its focus on the political objectives of military interventions. Included in the data are a categorical classification of the primary political objective (PPO),<sup>1</sup> a brief narrative of that objective, an indicator for whether that PPO was attained by the end of the intervention, and if so, for how many months was the PPO maintained.

Some studies of international intervention rely on the popular Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset (Palmer et al., 2019). MIDs are more inclusive than IMI and MIPS in that they do not require the actual deployment of troops onto foreign territory (unlike IMI) or a 500-troop deployment threshold (unlike MIPS); but they are more restrictive in that they only include instances of conflict between states. Cases of

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<sup>1</sup>Note that IMI codes nine possible motives for intervention, and a given intervention can be coded with more than one motive; whereas MIPS identifies a single primary objective among six categories of motives.

Table 1: Sources of Data on Foreign Interventions

Source	Citation	Coverage and Observations	Definitions and Notes
International Military Intervention (IMI)	Pickering and Kisangani (2009)	1,111 incidents of IMI from 1946-2005; observations at level of directed dyad-intervention. Motivations of interventions are coded, including: taking sides in a domestic dispute (n=255); changing target political regime or its core policies (n=529); and others.	The dataset “catalogs episodes when national military personnel are purposefully dispatched into other sovereign states”. It is an extension of Pearson and Baumann (1993), which “documents all cases of military intervention across international boundaries by regular armed forces of independent states and by national armed forces operating under multinational command.” <sup>a</sup>
Military Interventions by Powerful States (MIPS)	Sullivan and Koch (2009)	126 military interventions, 1945-2003; coded as pursuing one of six primary political objectives, including: “maintain foreign regime authority” (n=36), and “remove foreign regime” (n=12)	“The MIPS project defines military intervention as a use of armed force that involves the official deployment of at least 500 regular military personnel (ground, air, or naval) to attain immediate-term political objectives through action against a foreign adversary.”
Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID)	Palmer et al. (2019)	2,315 unique MID, with 1,608 post-WWII; coding of “revision type” includes “government/ regime” (n=124 total, 90 post-WWII)	“Militarized interstate disputes are united historical cases of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state.” (Jones, Bremer and Singer, 1996)
Regan’s civil war data	Regan (2002)	150 episodes of intrastate conflicts from 1944-1999; observations at level of conflict-month (or intervener-conflict-month in the event of multiple interveners); variables denoting kind and degree of intervention (if any)	Intrastate conflict defined as “armed, sustained combat between groups within state boundaries in which there are at least 200 fatalities”. Military interventions include: troops; naval forces; equipment/aid; intelligence/advisors; air support; military sanctions. Economic interventions include: grants; loans; equipment/expertise; credits; relieving past obligations; economic sanctions.
Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) External Support Dataset	Högbladh, Pettersson and Themmer (2011)	6,519 supporter-recipient-opponent-triad-year observations, for 168 conflicts, 1975-2009; data include indicators for ten types of external support (but not their levels/intensities)	Armed conflict defined as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year.” Support types include: provide troops; military or intelligence infrastructure; access to territory; weapons; logistics support; training; economic support; intelligence material.
Correlates of War (COW) civil war data	Sarkees and Wayman (2010)	334 intrastate wars from 1818-2007; generally one observation per war, with multiple observations when there more than one participant per side; intervention coded as indicator for whether war was “internationalized”	Intrastate war defined as “any armed conflict that involved a) military action internal to the metropole of the state system member, b) the active participation of the national government, and c) effective resistance by both sides (as measured by the ratio of fatalities of the weaker to the stronger forces), and (d) a total of at least 1,000 battle deaths during each year of the war” (Sarkees and Schaefer, 2000). <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Note: data by Pearson and Baumann (1993) end in 1988; Pickering and Kisangani (2009) extend to 2005 using the same coding rules.

<sup>b</sup>Note: for reasons we have not been able to discern, the COW data includes several civil wars not included in the Regan data (for the period in which they overlap), despite the higher threshold of battle deaths that the COW dataset uses to define civil wars.

Table 1, Continued

Source	Citation	Coverage and Observations	Definitions and Notes
CIA/KGB influence	Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath (2013)	60 episodes of CIA intervention, and 25 episodes of KGB intervention, from 1946-1989, with years of onset and offset	CIA interventions coded as either installing a foreign leader in power (and subsequently supporting that leader), or just supporting an existing leader
Foreign Imposed Regime Change (FIRC)	Downes and O'Rourke (2016)	95 successful overt FIRC's by any country from 1816-2000, and 25 successful and 32 failed covert FIRC's by the United States	Extension of Downes and Monten (2013), which defines FIRC as "the forcible or coerced removal of the effective leader of the state—which remains formally sovereign afterward—by the government of another state" <sup>a</sup>
Archigos	Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza (2009)	3,409 leadership spells for all sovereign states 1918-2015 (excluding microstates), with coding of leader means of entry and exit; 37 instances of foreign involvement in leader removal after 1946	Exit codes denoting foreign intervention include: "Removed by Military, with Foreign Support" (n=6); "Removed by Other Government Actors, with Foreign Support" (n=4); "Removed by Rebels, with Foreign Support" (n=8); "Removed through Threat of Foreign Force" (n=19)
Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES)	Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi (2014)	1,412 sanctions episodes from 1945-2005; observations are sanction-targets (each with one or more senders)	Economic sanctions defined as "actions that one or more countries take to limit or end their economic relations with a target country in an effort to persuade that country to change its policies." Each sanction episode is coded by the issues involved; 54 instances are coded as aiming to overthrow the regime in power
National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA)	Hyde and Marinov (2012)	3,748 direct national elections from 1945-2015	Variables include: NELDA45: Were international monitors present? (yes: n=1,375). NELDA47: Were there allegations by Western monitors of significant vote-fraud? (n=246). NELDA49: Did any monitors refuse to go to an election because they believed that it would not be free and fair? (n=72). NELDA58: Did an outside actor attempt to influence the outcome of the election by making threats to withhold, or by withholding, something of value to the country? (n=213).
Partisan Electoral Interventions by the Great Powers (PEIG)	Levin (2019a)	937 competitive national-level executive elections, with 117 partisan interventions by the US (n=81) or the USSR (n=36)	Partisan electoral intervention defined as "a situation in which one or more sovereign countries intentionally undertakes specific actions to influence an upcoming election in another sovereign country in an overt or covert manner which they believe will favor or hurt one of the sides contesting that election and which incurs, or may incur, significant costs to the intervener(s) or the intervened country."

<sup>a</sup>Note: data by Downes and Monten (2013) include only successful instances of FIRC, and their data extend to 2008.

intervention that occur on foreign soil but are not directed against the host state (ie. interventions against non-state actors) may appear in the IMI or MIPS data but cannot constitute MIDs.

Several data sources focus specifically on civil conflicts, with varying levels of specificity for different aspects of the conflicts and interventions. Patrick Regan (2002) has compiled a widely used dataset on third-party interventions into civil wars. While the data are restricted in scope to include only episodes of intrastate conflicts with at least 200 battle deaths, they are quite thorough in the information coded within that sample—recording, among other things, several different types of military and economic interventions and the amounts of each type. An extension of this dataset by Regan, Frank and Aydin (2009) also records various forms of diplomatic intervention, including mediation, arbitration, international forums, and recalling ambassadors, as well as whether a third party made an offer for a diplomatic intervention which was refused. The UCDP External Support data provide more detail on the identities of the combatants and recipients of external support, but less detail on the intensity of support and less temporal disaggregation. The Correlates of War project’s civil war dataset preceded both the Regan and UCDP datasets, but is considerably less detailed than either of the above in the information that is included regarding interventions.

### 2.2.2 Data on non-military interventions

Other datasets record instances of intervention outside the context of active militarized hostilities.<sup>2</sup> Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath (2013) rely on archival evidence, in large part from declassified government documents, to code covert interventions by the US and USSR, whether those interventions involved removal of an incumbent leader or ongoing support to prop up a leader in office. Downes and O’Rourke (2016) expand on this data by adding failed US attempts to covertly remove a foreign leader; they also include all successful instances of overt foreign-imposed regime change (FIRC) by any country, not only the US. (To our knowledge, data on covert interventions by countries other than the US and USSR/Russia have not been collected systematically.) The Archigos dataset of national political leaders records leaders’ means of exit from office, including whether there was any foreign involvement in a leader’s removal. The Archigos data seems to impose a higher threshold for determining which leaders are removed by foreign intervention; for instance, while the US- and UK-backed ouster of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeg in 1953 is considered by Downes and O’Rourke to be a foreign-imposed covert regime change, Archigos codes Mossadeg’s exit from office as “Removed by Other Government Actors, without Foreign Support”.

Finally, another form of typically non-violent intervention which has been measured and analyzed systematically is intervention into foreign elections. The NELDA dataset by Hyde and Marinov (2012) was not collected specifically for the purpose of examining foreign intervention, but it does include variables that indicate foreign efforts to influence elections. These include indicators of whether an election was monitored and/or criticized by international monitors, as well as whether foreign actors issued threats or inducements in the hopes of shaping the electoral outcome.<sup>3</sup> More specifically tailored to present purposes is Levin (2019a)’s Partisan Electoral Intervention by the Great Powers (PEIG) dataset. Just recently released, the PEIG data include detailed information on various forms of electoral intervention, as well as whether the intervention was intended to support an incumbent or challenger.

### 2.2.3 Implications for empirical research

At first glance, this multiplicity of data sources presents some clear complications to the study of foreign intervention: a loosely defined notion of intervention may be operationalized by a variety of different measures, using subtly divergent coding rules or case selection criteria. It would thus be unsurprising if empirical tests of nominally similar research questions reached starkly different conclusions, depending on the data set used in the analyses (even setting aside questions of model specification). Beyond the comparability

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<sup>2</sup>Note that both here and in the review of empirical findings, we separate the literature into “military” and “non-military” interventions. However, some of the interventions under consideration in the latter group, particularly in studies of foreign-imposed regime change, may involve the threat or use of force by the intervener.

<sup>3</sup>Another data source for election monitoring is Kelley (2012)’s Data on International Election Monitoring (DIEM). Kelley’s DIEM dataset does not provide the same breadth of coverage as does NELDA, covering only monitored elections in 108 countries from 1980–2004. But NELDA provides somewhat coarser measures of monitoring activity, whereas DIEM provides the identity of each monitor that observed a given election and the assessments issued by each one. This is a non-trivial distinction, as over half of elections in the DIEM data were observed by multiple international monitors, and nearly half of those multiply-monitored elections received divergent assessments from the different monitoring organizations present.

across datasets, there are other issues of particular concern to the present subject matter. The data on various forms of covert intervention, for instance, rely largely on previously classified information which has either been declassified or leaked; in either case it is difficult for researchers to cross-validate their coding across multiple primary sources, and further, calls into question whether the cases identified in any given dataset are truly the universe of cases of the phenomenon of interest. Even for data on overt interventions, which are presumably easier to observe and verify, serious disagreements may arise over coding decisions: a recent exchange between Gibler, Miller and Little (2016) and Palmer et al. (2019), for instance, resulted in a re-coding of a substantial portion of disputes recorded in the widely used MID dataset. This was most certainly not a consequence of any particular weakness of the MID dataset, but rather of the inherent difficulty of systematically quantifying the subject matter under examination; were researchers to re-examine any of the other datasets mentioned above with the same attention and thoroughness exhibited by Gibler and colleagues, it seems quite likely that similar disagreements would arise. One final issue is that even declassified sources are often redacted, with sections of documents whitened out to protect confidentiality of participants. This requires the coder to sometimes make judgement calls on what exactly happened. These coding difficulties make it all the more important to provide detailed codebooks where the exact source and judgement that justifies a particular coding decision is clearly listed, so that readers can conduct their own robustness checks.

The discussion in Section 4 provides a critical analysis of various aspects of the research designs employed in empirical studies of intervention, setting aside concerns over the quality of data; researchers should keep in mind, however, that all of the concerns discussed below are further complicated by the presence of these sorts of issues in the underlying data sources themselves.

### 2.3 Topics omitted from this review

While we aim to provide a broad overview of the academic literature on foreign interventions, the scope of our review is delimited in some important respects. Methodologically, our focus is on either game-theoretic or quantitative (statistical) approaches to the study of foreign intervention. These are certainly not the only approaches to the topic; for a range of constructivist and social-practice perspectives, for instance, readers may consider a recent special issue of the *Review of International Studies* titled “Intervention and the Ordering of the Modern World” (MacMillan, 2013). Given that the target audience of this review are economists and other social scientists interested in empirical or theoretical work, qualitative and historical accounts of intervention are likewise omitted.

There are also a number of substantive topics omitted from consideration. Voluntary agreements between states to alter policies for mutual benefit—“contracting”, in Krasner and Weinstein (2014)’s classification, or “agreement interventions” in Aidt, Albornoz and Hauk (2020)’s—will generally fall outside the scope of this review. Thus we will not be covering international trade and investment agreements, which may have considerable implications for the political survival of the contracting leaders (Arias, Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2018; Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2012), nor international military alliances, which have been theorized as an exchange of sovereignty for security (Morrow, 1991; Lake, 2009). Foreign influence exerted primarily through normative or social pressure, for instance through “naming and shaming” mechanisms often cited in the human rights literature (Lebovic and Voeten, 2006; Kelley and Simmons, 2015), will also be omitted.<sup>4</sup> And as mentioned above, our review will exclude studies of various international forces or behaviors which may influence domestic politics but which are not primarily intended to do so.

Finally, we will note that while our review includes both military and non-military interventions, we will be giving relatively greater attention to those involving the use of force (“imposition”, according to Krasner and Weinstein (2014), or “institution interventions”, according to Aidt, Albornoz and Hauk (2020)). The reasoning for this choice is that military interventions are generally the most costly—in human and economic terms, for target and intervener alike—and thus pose the greatest need for policy-relevant scientific analysis.

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<sup>4</sup>We should note, however, that normative pressure is sometimes cited as an operative mechanism in the election monitoring literature, which we do review here.

### 3 Summary of Findings

In this section, we provide an overview of the accumulated empirical findings on foreign intervention. The goal of this section is to summarize rather than analyze the literature under consideration; in Section 4 we turn to a critical analysis of the research reviewed here in Section 3.

The study of international interventions has largely been oriented around two central questions: what are the causes of international interventions, and what are their consequences. These two questions are of course intrinsically linked, as decisions to intervene are made by strategic actors anticipating the consequences of their actions. Most studies often assume that the specified outcome variable (eg: civil war duration, democracy promotion, etc) is the variable that was meant to be affected by the intervention, a point also made by Regan (2010). Our summary of the literature will thus focus primarily on consequences of interventions, rather than treating their causes as a separate object of inquiry.

The top-line finding that emerges from our survey of the intervention literature is that interventions generally fail to achieve their stated objective (or the one purported or assumed by the researchers). This finding is certainly not unanimous, and there are important exceptions which we review as well. The focus of our review, however, is on the failure of foreign interventions, as this is both the predominant pattern that we observe, and the more puzzling one which begs further explanation.

We first review the literature on the consequences of military interventions, assessed according to both conflict and non-conflict outcomes. We then turn to a review of various non-military interventions, organized by means of intervention: economic aid, election monitoring, sanctions, and covert intervention and electoral interference.

#### 3.1 Military interventions

In analyzing military interventions into ongoing conflicts, a natural starting point is to consider the impacts of interventions on conflict outcomes. We begin with studies of this variety, and then turn to studies examining other social, political, and economic consequences of military interventions.

##### 3.1.1 Military interventions and security outcomes

According to Regan (2010), one of the (often implicit) assumptions “shap[ing] almost all of the systematic studies of interventions [into civil conflicts]...is that interventions reflect some form of conflict management...designed to make conflicts less likely, shorter, or less violent.” By this metric, the accumulated record of foreign interventions is abysmal. A set of early cross-national studies of civil war duration and termination reach similarly pessimistic conclusions: Considering post-WWII civil wars from the COW data, Mason and Fett (1996) find no effect of foreign intervention on a binary outcome of settlement versus non-settlement as the mode of war termination; a subsequent analysis finds that interventions actually reduce the probability of a settlement (Mason, Weingarten Jr and Fett, 1999). Using the full COW sample dating back to the early 19th century, Balch-Lindsay and Enterline (2000) and Balch-Lindsay, Enterline and Joyce (2008), respectively, find that third-party interventions extend the duration of civil wars, and decrease the hazard of civil wars ending by way of negotiated settlement. Regan (2002) reaches the same general conclusion regarding conflict duration from analyzing his original dataset of post-WWII civil wars, with its more fine-grained coding of various features of interventions. The results are consistent for military and economic interventions alike, and for interventions in support of either the government or the opposition: “Overwhelmingly, the conclusion is that regardless of the target or the type, an intervention tends to decrease the likelihood that a conflict will end in the next month.”

Beyond the duration and outcome of civil wars, interventions may impact how combatants conduct themselves in the course of fighting. Wood, Kathman and Gent (2012) analyze the UCDP civil conflict data and find that foreign interventions in support of one side of a civil conflict increase the opposing side’s propensity to perpetrate attacks against civilians. The authors explain this relationship as resulting from the disadvantaged group’s decreased capacity to maintain control over the civilian population and obtain necessary resources through voluntary and non-violent means. In a similar vein, Choi and Piazza (2017) and Piazza and Choi (2018) document positive relationships between international military interventions and suicide terrorism conducted both in the target country and in the territory of the intervening state.



The cross-national evidence of the failure of civil war interventions to bring about an end of hostilities has been reinforced by more recent micro-level analyses. Separate studies by Kocher, Pepinsky and Kalyvas (2011) and by Dell and Querubin (2018) restrict attention to the case of US intervention in the Vietnam War, and consider within-conflict variation in the intensity of intervention—specifically the intensity of US bombing, disaggregated at the hamlet-month level. The primary outcome in Kocher et al. is the relative degree of insurgent versus government control, while Dell and Querubin examine a broader range of outcomes, including measures of Viet Cong guerrilla presence, attacks and extortion; local government capacity and public goods provision; and public opinion towards the United States and the South Vietnamese government. Kocher et al. theorize that the indiscriminate nature of the US bombing campaign led civilians to rationally participate in the insurgency as a strategic response. Dell and Querubin point to the accumulation of civilian grievances as a primary operative mechanism. In both cases the authors convincingly demonstrate that increased intensity of force in the US intervention in Vietnam undermined the US’s objective of defeating the Viet Cong insurgency. A separate analysis of US intervention in the Colombian civil war Dube and Naidu (2015) finds similar evidence of the counter-productivity of US efforts: Colombian municipalities which housed a military base experienced a differential increase in paramilitary violence as a result of inflows of US military and counternarcotics assistance. The authors attribute this effect to the military’s sharing resources with paramilitary groups, and interpret it as evidence of a weakening of state authority due to foreign intervention.

### 3.1.2 Military interventions and governance and development outcomes

A separate set of studies focuses on another common justification employed by policy makers in support of foreign intervention: the promotion of democracy and political liberalization in the target state. Again, the results paint a grim picture. Pickering and Peceny (2006) find that international military interventions by the US, UK, and France—the most common interveners among liberal democracies—fail to democratize target states. With a separate operationalization of intervention, which combines MIDs, Fortna (2004)’s data on UN peacekeeping, and Regan (2002)’s civil war intervention data, Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006) likewise conclude that military intervention does not systematically improve democratic governance in target countries. Similarly, Peksen (2012) finds that foreign military interventions harm human rights conditions within the target state—a finding that holds across interventions in support of, against, or neutral to the target government, and even when the intervention is conducted by a liberal democracy or intergovernmental organization.

Given the wide-ranging societal consequences of political violence, it is perhaps surprising that only a few studies have examined the relationship between foreign military intervention and various social and economic outcomes other than post-intervention governance (as well as direct conflict outcomes, as discussed above). One such study is by Kim (2017), who finds that unilateral interventions into civil wars are cross-nationally associated with a deterioration in civilians’ post-war quality of life, as measured by life expectancy and infant mortality rates. Miguel and Roland (2011) also conduct a within-case analysis of the economic impact of military intervention, focusing on the US bombing of Vietnam. The authors show that the most heavily-bombed areas exhibited lower levels of economic consumption for up to two decades after the end of the US campaign, but saw faster growth rates from 1993-2002, likely as a result of increased state investment to spur recovery in those hardest-hit regions. Similar findings for the Vietnam War are documented by Dell and Querubin (2018) who show that more heavily bombed hamlets experience worse economic outcomes in the short run, but not in the long run. Davis and Weinstein (2002) find similar evidence of a long-term economic recovery following the US bombing of Japan in WWII. Examining a less conventional outcome, but one clearly motivated by a close familiarity with the real-world context of analysis, Beber et al. (2017) use individual-level geolocated survey data to show that the presence of international peacekeepers in Monrovia, Liberia dramatically increased female civilians’ entry into the transactional sex market.

## 3.2 Non-military interventions

We now review a body of empirical findings regarding consequences of various other forms of foreign intervention. As noted above, while we group these studies under the classification of “non-military interventions”, this is not a perfectly clean distinction: some of the contributions reviewed here (particularly those on

foreign-imposed regime change) examine intervention tactics which may involve military force on the part of the intervener, depending on the particular data source and operationalization of intervention employed in each study.

### 3.2.1 Economic aid

Economic assistance is often viewed as a means of improving not only economic development within the recipient country, but also political development as well.<sup>5</sup> As Knack (2004) suggests, this may occur either through aid that directly supports democratic institution-building, through conditioning aid on political liberalization and other good-governance policies, or indirectly through aid’s impact on economic development which may in turn spur democratization. Knack tests these propositions with cross-national data on government receipts of development assistance, and finds no support for them. Djankov, Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2008) investigate a similar question, with some modifications to the research design (notably using a panel structure instead of a cross-sectional design, and using different outcome measures) and reach an even more damning conclusion: not only does aid fail to democratize recipient governments, but it has a significantly negative impact on democratization. The authors theorize that aid functions analogously to the “resource curse” for economic growth, in that it provides a sudden windfall of revenues which lessens incumbents’ reliance on tax revenues—and in turn their accountability to the tax-paying citizenry—and they estimate that aid’s negative impact on democracy is even greater in magnitude than that of oil revenues. A different take on the question comes from Wright (2009), who argues and demonstrates empirically that the potential for aid to democratize autocratic governments is conditional on the breadth of the incumbent regime’s support base: only autocrats with sufficiently broad coalitions of support anticipate being able to survive in office after liberalization, and are thus willing to implement liberalizing reforms in return for aid; leaders in smaller-coalition systems, however, cannot survive liberalization, and if they do receive aid, will simply use it to maintain power within the current institutional structure.

In addition to its effect on political institutions, another concern for the study of foreign aid is its impact on conflict. On this score we find similarly dispiriting results. World Bank development aid in the Philippines (Croft, Felter and Johnston, 2014) and US counterinsurgency aid in Afghanistan (Sexton, 2016) are both found to increase insurgent violence; in both cases, the authors argue, insurgents respond strategically to the opportunities presented to undermine the implementation of aid programs and thus weaken the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the public. Nunn and Qian (2014) find that US food aid increases the incidence of civil conflict, a finding they attribute to combatants seizing the aid shipments and using them to subsidize the costs of fighting.

### 3.2.2 Election monitoring

An increasingly common form of foreign involvement in domestic politics is international election monitoring: three out of five post-Cold War national elections have been observed by international monitors, compared to less than one of ten during the Cold War (Hyde and Marinov, 2012). It may seem somewhat unintuitive to refer to nominally unbiased efforts to promote the transparency and credibility of elections as interventionary; non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations that conduct monitoring activities are even reluctant to use the term “monitoring” because of the heavy-handedness it suggests, generally preferring the term “election observation”. Yet the practice is explicitly directed toward altering the structure of political authority within the target country, in that it is intended (at least purportedly) to ensure that political authority is determined according to the results of free and fair elections.<sup>6</sup>

An early contribution to the topic by Hyde (2007) gave some cause for optimism. Examining polling station-level results from the 2003 Armenian presidential election, the author found that the presence of international monitors reduced vote shares for the incumbent (who is widely believed to have manipulated the overall vote count) by about six percent, relative to polling stations that were not monitored. Subsequent

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<sup>5</sup>We focus on the impact of aid on political outcomes, since this most closely fits our definition of foreign intervention. We do not review here the literature on the impact of economic aid on economic outcomes such as GDP growth – see Easterly, Levine and Roodman (2004) and Easterly (2006) for an excellent overview and critical assessment of this literature.

<sup>6</sup>Though see recent work by Bubeck and Marinov (2017) that seeks to theoretically integrate strategies of election monitoring and biased electoral interference, examining the extent to which third-party interventions are intended to support the electoral process versus supporting a particular candidate.

research has complicated this finding, pointing out that while monitoring may have the desirable effect of reducing election-day fraud at monitored polling locations, there are a number of pernicious second-order and spillover effects at play. Focusing on pre-election manipulation, Ichino and Schündeln (2012) leverage random assignment of observers to voter registration centers in the lead-up to the 2008 Ghanaian general election.<sup>7</sup> They show that while observation decreases (presumably fraudulent) registration at the observed locations, it also has the effect of displacing irregularities to nearby, unobserved locations. This logic of displacing rather than deterring electoral manipulation has also been supported in cross-national analyses. Simpser and Donno (2012) show that incumbents respond to election monitoring by shifting strategies away from election-day fraud and toward broader institutional manipulation, as measured by indices of administrative performance, rule of law, and freedom of the press. Beaulieu and Hyde (2009) show that opposition parties, cognizant of these strategic responses on the incumbents' part, become more likely to boycott monitored elections, wanting to deprive incumbents of the international stamp of approval they would receive for having substituted one form of manipulation for another.

Spillovers aside, there is also evidence that the presence of election monitors causes some domestic unrest which would not occur in their absence. The effectiveness of monitoring, as Hyde and Marinov (2014) argue, rests on a basic logic of deterrence: by providing credible information on election quality, monitors can facilitate coordination of opposition protests in the event of electoral fraud, thus raising the incumbent's cost of perpetrating fraud. Furthermore, recent research has called into question the basic mechanisms through which election monitoring is believed to help coordinate opposition efforts. In a survey experiment conducted following Tunisia's 2014 presidential election, neither positive nor negative aspects of monitor reports highlighted in separate experimental treatments significantly shifted respondents' views of the credibility of the election, relative to a no-information control group (Bush and Prather, 2017). Other survey experimental evidence indicates that voters and activists do not give more credence to reports issued by more objective or credible monitoring organizations, as intuition would suggest they might (Bush and Prather, 2018; Nielson, Hyde and Kelley, 2019).

### 3.2.3 Sanctions

Another frequently used tactic for bringing about political change in a target country is the imposition of economic sanctions. Sanctions are typically employed with the stated purpose of bringing about a change in policy in the target state, though in practice—and particularly in autocratic systems—it is often understood that the only way such policy change can actually occur is through a change in leadership (McGillivray and Stam, 2004).

On the specific question of whether sanctions spur leadership change, the record is mixed: Marinov (2005) finds that sanctions do destabilize target leaders, and that the effect is larger for democratic targets. Escribà-Folch and Wright (2010) focus specifically on sanctions imposed on autocratic targets and find substantial variation by regime type, with personalist regimes being the most destabilized by sanctions but single-party and militarist regimes being largely unaffected. Yet on the broader question of whether sanctions can achieve the more normatively appealing aims that justify their imposition, there is more consistent evidence of failure. Both Wood (2008) and Peksen (2009) find that sanctions lead to worsened human rights conditions in the target states, as target leaders turn to repression as a means of compensating for the destabilizing economic costs of sanctions. Escribà-Folch (2012) examines the same question and finds heterogeneous responses to sanctions across authoritarian regime types, as some increase repression and some instead increase spending that benefits groups whose support they rely on for political survival. Along similar lines, Peksen and Drury (2010) show that target leaders respond to sanctions by curtailing civil and political liberties. Considering sanctions in conflict settings in particular, Hultman and Peksen (2017) show that economic sanctions—either threatened or imposed—increase the intensity of violence in recent African civil conflicts; threats of arms embargoes are found to increase violence, while the actual imposition of arms embargoes decreases it.

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<sup>7</sup>The observers in this study are operating under the auspices of domestic rather than international civil society organizations, but the findings and causal mechanisms should largely carry over to our understanding of international monitoring.

### 3.2.4 FIRC, covert, and electoral intervention

Finally, we can consider a set of studies that examine consequences of efforts by intervening states to directly remove or prop up an incumbent leader in a target state, through overt or covert means. One notable consequence of these efforts identified in the literature is the instigation of violent conflict. Peic and Reiter (2011) show that foreign imposed regime change (FIRC), as coded in the Archigos data, corresponds to an increased probability of subsequent civil war onset, when the FIRC follows an interstate war. Downes and O'Rourke (2016) consider international rather than civil conflict as an outcome of interest, relying on their original dataset which employs a more expansive definition of FIRC. Their findings overall indicate a positive relationship between FIRC and subsequent onset of militarized disputes (MIDs) between the target and the intervener. Levin (2018) also observes that non-violent but overt electoral interventions are followed by increased incidence of domestic terrorism within the target state.

In addition to the risk of conflict brought about by these intervention efforts, we also observe detrimental consequences for governance within the target states. Downes and Monten (2013) likewise find that the targets of overt regime changes imposed by foreign democracies do not become more democratic as a result. Considering covert interventions, either to install a leader or prop up an existing leader, Berger, Corvalan, Easterly and Satyanath (2013) find that such interventions by both the US and the USSR tend to harm democratization in the target state in the short- to medium-term (though the effect dissipates over time). Using yet another measure of foreign electoral intervention, Levin (2019*b*) finds that covert interventions lead to an increased risk of subsequent democratic breakdown.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, a fairly consistent pattern emerges from our survey of international interventions. These findings hold across various measures of intervention, various outcomes of interest, and a diversity of research designs and empirical specifications. For the more normatively appealing outcomes that we might hope to follow from foreign interventions, the historical record disappoints.

## 3.3 Some bright spots

The failure of foreign interventions is not a unanimous finding throughout the literature. For instance, Krain (2005) finds that interventions specifically to prevent genocide or politicide have generally succeeded in that goal; Regan and Aydin (2006) find that, unlike more conventionally studied military and economic interventions, diplomatic interventions are effective in shortening conflict duration. Some earlier studies, including Hermann and Kegley Jr (1998) and Peceny (1999), find that US interventions do succeed in promoting democracy.

Here we briefly review two general patterns of intervention success that emerge from the broader literature: multilateral interventions tend to be more effective than unilateral interventions, and interventions targeted at winning “hearts and minds” in the target country tend to be more successful than those operating through force and coercion.

### 3.3.1 Multilateral intervention

Some of the aforementioned studies with a top-line finding of intervention failure do find some evidence of multilateral success: while both Pickering and Peceny (2006) and Kim (2017), for instance, find negative consequences of unilateral military interventions on democracy and development respectively, those studies also find positive impacts on the same outcomes for interventions conducted by the United Nations. In fact, the tendency of multilateral interventions to succeed where unilateral interventions fail is a more general pattern throughout the literature. Gilligan, Sergenti et al. (2008) find that while UN interventions into ongoing conflicts do not affect the hazard of termination, post-conflict peacekeeping operations (PKOs) do decrease the risk of war recurrence; the latter of these findings confirms earlier results by Fortna (2004). With UN peacekeeping data disaggregated to the level of government/rebel group-dyad-month, and with separate measures of peacekeeping troops, police, and observers deployed, Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2013, 2014) find that higher numbers of UN peacekeeping troops correspond to decreases in both battlefield deaths

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<sup>8</sup>Levin (2019*b*) also provides some suggestive evidence that only Soviet/Russian interventions have a negative impact on the Polity IV democracy score. However, this differential impact of Soviet/Russian interventions (relative to those conducted by the U.S.) does not extend to other outcomes such as democratic breakdowns or transitions to democracy.

and civilian casualties. This finding is partly confirmed in more recent work by Carnegie and Mikulaschek (2017), which shows that peacekeeping deployments reduce the number of civilians killed by rebel forces, but not by government forces.

Beyond the deployment of peacekeeping troops, other aspects of interventions by multilateral institutions into post-conflict settings have shown a track record of some success. Avdeenko and Gilligan (2015) study the effectiveness of a World Bank-funded Community Driven Development (CDD) program—an increasingly popular policy instrument for supporting social and economic development, with approximately 1.3 billion USD of World Bank loans allocated to CDD programming per year—implemented in randomly-assigned villages in post-conflict Sudan from 2008 to 2011. The authors use household surveys and behavioral lab-in-the-field experiments to construct a novel measure of social capital. They find that while the CDD program failed to increase participants’ social capital as intended, it did increase the inclusiveness of local governance and consequently citizens’ civic participation. Considering a separate aspect of multilateral efforts in post-conflict reconstruction, Blair (2019*a,b*) examines the effects of UN peacekeeping operations on post-conflict rule of law. Using both micro-level survey evidence from Liberia, and macro-level rule-of-law indices for a cross-national panel of UN missions, the author finds that UN presence improves government performance along those measures.

While the aforementioned studies of foreign aid find overall detrimental effects on democratization, there is a notable exception in recent work by Carnegie and Marinov (2017) focusing specifically on development aid from the European Union.<sup>9</sup> The authors show that EU aid causes a significant but short-lived improvement in measures of both democracy and human rights protections, an effect the authors attribute to minor political reforms implemented by recipient governments in response to the conditionalities attached to the aid. Finally, we observe similar patterns in multilateral versus unilateral sanctions, though to opposite effect: in assessing the consequences of sanctions for human rights in the target states, both Peksen (2009) and Wood (2008) find multilaterally-imposed sanctions be more detrimental—precisely because those sanctions are more effective at destabilizing the target regimes, which in turn provokes even more aggressive compensatory responses by the incumbents.

### 3.3.2 Hearts and minds

A separate aspect of foreign interventions that has proven to be predictive of success is a focus on winning popular support among the citizens in the target state. Formalizing the logic underlying the U.S. Army’s counterinsurgency doctrine, Berman, Shapiro and Felter (2011) model an interaction among a (foreign-backed) government and a rebel group competing for control over territory, and a community that can strategically assist the government’s counterinsurgency efforts by sharing information about rebel activities. They hypothesize that increased government service provision, the enjoyment of which is conditional on government control over territory, will incentivize citizens to support the government through information-sharing. Empirically the authors show that increased reconstruction spending by the US-led coalition in Iraq from 2004 to 2008, analyzed at the level of district-half year, led to a decrease in insurgent violence against coalition and government forces.

Lyall, Blair and Imai (2013) conduct a survey experiment in the midst of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan in 2011, results of which are somewhat ambiguous but broadly consistent with the “hearts and minds” hypothesis. The study reveals that victimization by the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) reduced citizens’ support for the ISAF and increased support for the Taliban; subsequent ISAF efforts at harm mitigation (in the form of a condolence payment to the victim or their family) did not improve support for the ISAF, but did substantially reduce support for the Taliban. In relative terms, at least, intervention tactics that avoid civilian victimization, and that provide compensation when victimization occurs, appear more conducive to achieving interveners’ objectives. A similar conclusion is reached in an analysis by Dell and Querubin (2018) comparing counterinsurgency outcomes in neighboring regions of Vietnam under the respective commands of the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Army. The Marine Corps’ overall strategy emphasized winning popular support through development programs and minimal use of force, whereas the Army adopted an “overwhelming firepower” approach; and again, comparatively

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<sup>9</sup>Note that in the three studies of aid and democratization mentioned above, the main independent variables are total aid receipts (usually per capita, or as a share of national income or government revenues). These measures will thus include both unilateral and multilateral aid. Carnegie and Marinov (2017) isolate multilateral aid, specifically from the EU.

speaking, the former approach proved more effective in undermining the insurgency and supporting the South Vietnamese government.

### **3.3.3 Bottom line**

To summarize, we find some evidence in the accumulated empirical literature of foreign interventions achieving their purported or assumed objectives. The findings of intervention success, however, appear to be more the exception than the rule. Multilateral interventions appear to have a better record of success than unilateral interventions, yet unilateral interventions proliferate. It should also be noted that the successes of “hearts and minds” strategies documented above are all estimated relative to other intervention strategies, rather than relative to a non-intervention baseline.

From a social scientific perspective, it is the failures of intervention that warrant further investigation and explanation; the tendency of political actors to repeatedly pursue policies that fail to achieve their purported objectives is a far more puzzling phenomenon than the instances in which those policies succeed. For this reason, the remainder of our review focuses on the general pattern of intervention failure. In addition, the studies that find evidence of success are generally subject to the same theoretical and methodological concerns as those finding evidence of failure, as we discuss in depth below.

## **4 Explaining Intervention Failure**

Given the predominant finding of failure of foreign interventions, our next task is to seek to explain this pattern of results. Our first two explanations are not mutually exclusive, and either would be a sufficient condition to generate a given study’s finding of intervention failure. The first highlights a set of econometric issues which may give rise to misleading estimates of intervention effectiveness. The second relates to the outcomes under consideration, and whether interventions are being assessed as succeeding or failing according to the appropriate criteria.

### **4.1 Econometric issues**

Here we consider three separate methodological concerns which may help explain the predominant finding of intervention failure: first, selection on unobservables or omitted variable bias; second, the challenges of drawing inferences from the cases of observed interventions; and third, issues surrounding the measurement of the independent variables of interest and the substitutability of intervention strategies.

#### **4.1.1 Selection on unobservables**

A fundamental challenge faced by the majority of studies reviewed thus far is bias due to selection on unobservables. The basic subject matter at hand makes this a difficult if not impossible problem to overcome: interventions are conducted by strategic actors who make intervention decisions in anticipation of the consequences of their actions. Most of the theoretical claims discussed above do not lend themselves to any sort of randomized controlled trial (RCT), and natural experiments are hard to come by. Thus the predominant identification strategy in the papers reviewed above is controlling for observable covariates. The papers discussed above vary in the exhaustiveness of the covariates they condition on, in the precision of those covariate measurements, and in the sophistication of their conditioning strategies (multivariate regression, more flexible controls, matching, etc.). But regardless of the particular approach to conditioning on observables, the threat of omitted variable bias and reverse causality looms large. Thus it remains possible that some of the above findings of intervention failure are the result of biased estimation due to non-random assignment.

##### **4.1.1.1 Approaches to causal identification**

There are some notable exceptions to this general pattern. As mentioned above, some specific research questions surrounding foreign intervention are amenable to randomization, which in practice often involves researchers collaborating with better-resourced IGOs or NGOs (as exemplified by Ichino and Schündeln

(2012) and Avdeenko and Gilligan (2015)). Survey experiments have also been employed to study various aspects of foreign interventions (Bush and Prather, 2017, 2018; Nielson, Hyde and Kelley, 2019; Lyall, Blair and Imai, 2013), though these designs are naturally limited in the types of substantive questions they are able to address.

Other studies have found compelling natural experiments that support causal interpretations of the effects of interventions. The routinized procedures of decision-making and power-sharing within international organizations gives rise to exogenous variation that can be exploited in observational studies, as demonstrated by Carnegie and Mikulaschek (2017) and Carnegie and Marinov (2017). The former leverages a natural experiment of UN peacekeeper allocations: the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council creates short-term exogenous shifts in UNSC members’ influence over UN peacekeeping operations, which the temporarily empowered members use to increase peacekeeper deployments in their own geographic regions. The authors use this as-if random variation to show that peacekeeping reduces civilian victimization in civil wars. The latter leverages the rotating presidency of the European Council as an exogenous source of variation in foreign aid allocation, as the country holding the presidency during the EU budgeting period will use its temporarily heightened influence to allocate more EU aid to its former colonies; with this design, the authors identify a causal effect of aid on democracy and human rights.

Incidentally, the functioning of a multilateral institution also gives rise to the exogenous variation used in Hyde (2007)’s study of election observation in Armenia, though through a different mechanism: OSCE observers were assigned sporadically to polling stations throughout the country, with a general objective of geographic diversity in coverage but lacking sufficiently detailed information about local political conditions to allow for strategic assignment to polling stations based on anticipated incumbent vote share (based on anticipated extent of vote fraud). A similar mechanism of bureaucratic haphazardness generates the identifying variation in Sexton (2016)’s study of US counterinsurgency aid in Afghanistan. The author claims that weak oversight of program administration, along with bureaucratic incentives to spend down funds quickly and without concern for consequences, creates variation in aid expenditures which can be considered as-if random with respect to insurgent violence.

Another approach to causal identification in the intervention literature comes from shift-share instruments. With this approach, Dube and Naidu (2015) leverage heterogeneity in Colombian municipalities’ exposure to supply shocks to US military and antinarcotics assistance: specifically, they interact out-of-region US aid (the “shift”) with the presence of a US military base in a given municipality (the “share”), and use this difference-in-differences to isolate exogenous variation in the municipality-year receipt of US aid—which in turn is used to estimate the effect of aid on paramilitary and guerilla violence. With a similar analysis of a country-year panel, Nunn and Qian (2014) identify exogenous variation in US food aid by interacting annual US wheat prices (translating to wheat surpluses which the US government donates abroad) with a country’s total number of aid-receiving years over the period with (proxying for exposure to the wheat supply shock). This enables estimation of the causal impact of food aid on civil conflict. Simpser and Donno (2012) similarly instrument for monitoring of a given national election using the lagged regional incidence of monitoring.

Finally, two of the studies cited above use regression discontinuity designs to support their causal claims. Dell and Querubin (2018) leverage two separate discontinuities. First, a rounding discontinuity in an algorithm employed by the US Air Force, in which a continuous hamlet-level security rating was discretized to a five-point scale, proves predictive of hamlet-level bombing: that is, hamlets just below a rounding cutoff were more likely to be bombed, but are otherwise comparable to hamlets just above the cutoff. Second, the authors examine a geographic discontinuity along the border of areas within Vietnam controlled by different branches of the US military which followed different counterinsurgency doctrines. Crost, Felter and Johnston (2014) use a discontinuous threshold in Philippine municipalities’ eligibility for receipt of World Bank assistance to estimate the effect of aid on insurgent violence—exploiting yet another source of exogenous variation that arises from the routinized procedures of multilateral institutions.

#### 4.1.1.2 Implications

The studies reviewed in the preceding paragraphs demonstrate creative and compelling approaches to estimating the causal impacts of international interventions. What should be clear from this discussion, however, is just how difficult it is to develop research designs on this topic that overcome problems of non-random

assignment of interventions. Further, as is the case for empirical research in other domains, there is a perennial tension between internal and external validity. The most credible causal estimates in this literature, in our view, rely on more narrow, within-case variation; but it is unclear the extent to which any one of these internally-valid studies of individual historical cases can be prudently generalized to policy implications for present-day purposes. Similarly, findings generated from idiosyncratic features of multilateral institutions may be limited in their applicability to our understanding of unilateral interventions. And research designs relying on shift-share instruments, while possibly enabling more systematic cross-national analyses, may be susceptible to confounding due to spurious trends (see, for instance, Christian and Barrett (2017)).

We should also be sure not to lose sight of the substantive results that emerge from this group of well-identified studies: generally speaking, these studies reach qualitatively similar conclusions to those reached by the larger set of studies that rely on controlling for observables. The distinction between findings of intervention success versus failure seems to map more closely to a distinction of multilateral versus unilateral interventions, as depicted above, rather than a distinction of well-identified versus inconsistent estimation techniques. (It may be merely incidental that multilateral institutions both execute more successful intervention strategies and lend themselves to better-identified causal estimation.) In short, as a first approximation, the possibility of bias due to non-random assignment of interventions does not seem to be the predominant explanation for the widely documented empirical pattern of failure of foreign interventions. We thus turn to consider other possible explanations.

#### 4.1.2 Defining the sample of analysis and accounting for off-path interventions

Beyond non-random assignment, the study of international intervention is bedeviled by some more subtle econometric concerns. One issue arises from the selection of the sample of analysis, and the possibility that the sample of observed cases is shaped in important ways by considerations that arise off the equilibrium path of play. We explicate this concern with a focus on interventions into civil conflicts, for which the issue of off-path expectations seems especially pervasive and problematic, but the general concern applies to other forms of intervention as well.

Studies of the consequences of foreign intervention on civil conflicts typically define their sample by the existence of ongoing civil conflicts. However, it is entirely plausible that the anticipation of intervention affects whether a civil war emerges in the first place. The bias arising from these concerns is potentially large and of indeterminate direction. It could be that the expectation of an overwhelmingly effective foreign intervention motivates would-be combatants to settle their disagreements short of armed conflict, in which case the most successful cases of intervention are removed from the sample, and our estimates of effectiveness are biased toward zero. Or alternatively, the cases in which intervention would be ineffective may be the cases where the party relying on intervention opts out of conflict, thus inflating our estimates of intervention success when analyzing only the cases in which civil war actually occurs.

Some theoretical and empirical work has taken on the task of accounting explicitly for expectations of intervention. A common approach of these studies is to view a third-party intervention as a subsidy that partially offsets the fighting cost of one of the parties to the conflict, or alternatively, as a supplement to that party's fighting capabilities and thus its probability of victory. Cetinyan (2002) takes the latter approach, and argues that a commonly-shared expectation of third party intervention in support of a domestic group will simply be priced into that group's bargaining with the government, shifting the equilibrium bargaining outcome (i.e. the distribution of goods at issue) but not affecting the probability of bargaining failure (i.e. the outbreak of war).

Thyne (2006) approaches the question somewhat differently. He examines (informally) a bargaining context in which the domestic would-be combatants are incompletely informed as to the third party's probability of intervening, but rely on the signals sent by that actor regarding its intentions. By a similar reasoning to Cetinyan's, Thyne predicts that costly signals will be interpreted clearly and will not affect the probability of conflict onset. But cheap signals, he argues, can lead to divergent expectations, which can either increase or decrease the probability of war. The argument relies on an asymmetry in the government's and rebels' processing of signals sent by a potential intervener: in essence, the claim is that rebels are less diplomatically sophisticated and more likely to perceive cheap talk as credible. The rebels' overly-optimistic interpretation of a cheap foreign signal of support for their cause will in turn lead them to demand too much, resulting in a war which the government knows it will win (and so does not make concessions to avoid); while the rebels'



misperception in the opposite direction—believing a third party to be more likely to support the government than it actually is—leads them to demand too little, decreasing the risk of conflict.

Yet another approach comes from Cunningham (2016), who focuses on one largely neglected aspect of the domestic conflict bargaining game: the corner solution. Standard bargaining models of conflict tend to focus on interior solutions, in which either peaceful settlement or bargaining failure could occur depending on the size of the offer or demand. But Cunningham argues that, in many contexts, a foreign intervention in support of the government would bring such overwhelming and decisive victory that it pushes the domestic players into a corner solution where the government offers nothing and the rebels prefer that to the costly lottery of war. The author uses Lake (2009)’s index of US security hierarchy as a proxy for intervention expectations, and shows that this index is related to both a decreased probability of civil conflict and an increase in state-perpetrated human rights abuses, where the latter serves to proxy for the state’s excessive “demand” in the bargaining game.

Focusing on external support for anti-government forces, Kuperman (2008) argues that such an intervention constitutes a subsidy to the rebels’ fighting costs, and that the expectation thereof thus encourages excessively risky behavior on the rebels’ part which raises the risk of conflict. Kuperman describes this phenomenon as moral hazard, though Rauchhaus (2009) points out that it may be better understood as a commitment problem. Moral hazard would involve the agent (rebels) taking risky actions which the principal (third-party intervener) cannot observe but would refuse to “insure” were those actions observable. The more typical problem facing the intervener, Rauchhaus argues, is not that it is unaware of the rebels’ provocative behavior; rather, the problem is that once the foreign actor has issued a security guarantee to the rebels, it becomes politically difficult or otherwise undesirable to renege on that guarantee, regardless of whether or not the rebels are to blame for the ensuing conflict. Knowing this, rebels will take advantage of the third-party commitment by making more excessive demands of their government than they would make absent the guarantee.

Theoretical work by Spaniel (2018) formalizes this cost-subsidy logic, and demonstrates conditions under which intervention expectations can either raise or lower the risk of conflict, depending on the particular nature of the intervention and the informational asymmetries at play. Considering one-sided incomplete information—side A knows only its own costs of conflict, while side B knows both—Spaniel shows that an intervention to mitigate the costs for A increases the risk of conflict: the expected payoff for fighting increases relative to the expected payoff for any given demand A makes in the bargaining stage, thus inducing A to demand more and increase the probability that B rejects the demand in favor of war. An intervention in support of B, however, can have the opposite effect: by mitigating B’s costs, the intervener effectively reduces the variance (from A’s perspective) of potential reservation values B might have. A marginal reduction of A’s demand thus has a larger effect on reducing the probability of bargaining failure, making the “gamble” of a greedy demand relatively less attractive.

The above studies do not examine the effectiveness of interventions *per se*, but they all highlight the same general concern for the empirical assessment of interventions’ effects: many interventions exist off the equilibrium path of play, because the civil wars in which a third party would intervene do not occur in equilibrium—due, in part or in whole, to the anticipation of the intervention itself. This problem has been examined the most thoroughly and directly with respect to militarized interventions into civil wars, but the general point applies more broadly. Extending beyond the civil war context, recent work has considered how the prospect of foreign intervention affects the day-to-day politics of autocratic regimes: Di Lonardo, Sun and Tyson (2019) model the interaction between an autocrat, a domestic opponent, and a foreign intervener, showing how the autocrat can exploit the prospect of foreign intervention to deter domestic threats (and vice versa); Boutton (2019) finds that the expectation of a supportive intervention (as proxied by defense agreements and security assistance) leads autocrats to engage in more aggressive coup-proofing behavior, even when facing substantial risk of retaliatory violence. Marinov (2005)’s study of the destabilizing effect of economic sanctions points out that the sanctions that are the most damaging to the target leader’s survival prospects are also the most likely to occur off the path of play. The general takeaway is that in any situation in which an intervention is likely to occur, rational expectations will drive domestic actors to adjust their behavior in light of that fact, possibly preempting the intervention through their strategic anticipatory responses. An unbiased assessment of the consequences of foreign interventions must take account of these considerations.

To our knowledge, the study that most thoroughly integrates off-path expectations into the analysis of

interventions is a recent paper by Gibilisco and Montero (2019). They conduct a structural analysis, with an integrated theoretical and statistical model of conflict onset and intervention, which yields some striking implications: were the five major powers (US, UK, France, Russia, and China) all able to commit to intervene in all civil conflicts, there would be little aggregate effect on the onset of civil conflicts; yet if they made a commitment to *never* intervene, the probability of conflict outbreak would increase substantially. Thus in the real world, the authors conclude, absent any such counterfactual commitments, the coordination that we observe among the major powers “has been maximally successful at deterring civil conflict”—a starkly different qualitative conclusion from that reached by previous empirical analyses which selected on cases of conflict. As an additional implication, the authors find that the US is unique among the major powers in its effect on conflict onset: the average direct effect of a US intervention on a rebel group’s payoff for initiating a conflict is positive, and the US’s counterfactual unilateral commitment to intervene in all conflicts increases the aggregate risk of conflict onset. This finding calls into question the generalizability of empirical studies focusing exclusively on US interventions, as the other major power interventions may differ not only in the magnitude but also in the direction of their impact.

### 4.1.3 Measuring and substitutability of intervention strategies

A separate but similarly pernicious concern for studying the consequences of foreign interventions pertains to the measurement of the independent variable. Recent work by Alborno and Hauk (2014) outlines some of these concerns:

Interventions in foreign conflicts are often secretive and indirect and therefore unlikely to be fully reflected in available data. As an additional difficulty, many are the ways for foreign governments to intervene in domestic civil wars. They can provide covert encouragement, allow for (and promote) arms transactions, supply war intelligence and resources, and give sanctuary to rebels or support a third state that is also involved in the civil war.

Rarely will an empirical analysis be able to capture all relevant forms of intervention; indeed, the multitude of means of foreign intervention (as alluded to in this quote and in Section 2 above) implies that any study focusing on a single one necessarily omits others from consideration.

Even in its most innocuous form, random measurement error of the independent variable of interest will bias estimated effects towards zero. In most applications, erroneous measurement of international interventions will rarely resemble this best-case scenario. For one, there is reason to suspect that certain kinds of intervention, particularly those of a covert or inconspicuous nature, will be more likely to be recorded systematically when they succeed, or alternatively, when they fail spectacularly and are subsequently discovered, publicized, and politicized. Further, existing studies have found evidence of substitution effects in the various means of intervention that a foreign actor can employ. Regan (2000) finds that a variety of both domestic and international factors predict the tendency of US administrations to switch from one intervention tactic to another in the foreign conflicts in which it involves itself. Similarly focusing on US intervention tactics, Joseph and Poznansky (2018) find that the decision to intervene covertly versus overtly (versus refraining from intervention entirely) is influenced by the quality of information and communication technologies in the target state which heighten the risk of exposure. Garcia-Alonso, Levine and Smith (2016) demonstrate theoretically how direct intervention and military assistance to a target state are substitutable tactics for an intervening state in its counterterrorism efforts. The general implication of these analyses follows straightforwardly from the logic of omitted variable bias: if a state’s use of one intervention tactic is negatively correlated with its use of a different tactic, then finding that one tactic fails to achieve its objectives could either mean that the tactic under examination is ineffective or that it is simply less effective than the omitted tactic.

Beyond the finding of substitutability of intervention tactics, other work has examined the possibility of spillovers in different third-parties’ decisions to intervene at all. Gent (2007) finds evidence of strategic substitution, or free-riding incentives, among potential third-party interveners in civil conflicts when their interests are closely aligned. Studies of interventions by one major power may therefore be biased by omission of interventions by other major powers, with the direction of the bias being a function of the particular issues at stake. In contrast, Gibilisco and Montero (2019) generally find evidence of strategic complementarities among interveners (with the notable exception of substitution between US and French interventions), a

discrepancy which may be due to the fact that Gent selects on cases of civil conflict whereas Gibilisco and Montero attempt to account for off-path interventions.

Given the multitude of concerns surrounding measurement of foreign interventions, a number of recent contributions have found ways to circumvent the problem. The aforementioned study by Albornoz and Hauk aims to identify the effect of foreign interventions on the incidence and onset of civil conflicts, and they do so while excluding measures of intervention from the analysis entirely. Instead they examine the reduced-form relationship between predictors of intervention and consequences of intervention: specifically, the independent variables in their analyses are US presidential approval and the party of the US presidential administration, following the theoretical expectations that both Republican presidents and presidents facing low prospects of reelection will find greater political advantage to intervening in foreign conflicts. They find that these factors indeed increase the global incidence of civil conflict, a result that comports with Gibilisco and Montero’s finding that the US is unique among great powers in its propensity to encourage civil conflicts abroad through the prospect of its intervention.

Another reduced-form analysis comes from Lee (2018), who examines the effect of foreign intervention on state consolidation. Hostile neighbors, the author argues, have both a variety of incentives and a variety of means through which to undermine a neighboring state’s authority over its entire geographic territory—but the means of interference are neither common across contexts nor systematically observable. The author thus uses as an independent variable a measure of susceptibility to foreign intervention, coded as one for province-years sharing a border with a rival state and zero otherwise. This measure of susceptibility to intervention proves to be a negative predictor of state capacity, which is itself proxied using a measure of accuracy of census data. The reduced-form approaches employed both by Lee and by Albornoz and Hauk entail a tradeoff between two competing methodological concerns: on the one hand, they rely on an untestable claim that the relationship they document is in fact mediated by the unmeasured and unobserved factor of foreign intervention; but the payoff, on the other hand, is that they are able to avoid the more common problem of erroneous or incomplete measures of intervention.

## 4.2 Interveners’ objectives

The preceding discussion considered the possibility that econometric issues may account for the general finding that international interventions fail to achieve their objectives. A second class of explanation, independent of any econometric concerns, pertains to the objectives themselves: perhaps scholars have simply been looking at the wrong outcomes, but once we assess interventions according to their actual objectives—rather than their assumed or purported objectives—they prove to be a successful instrument of foreign policy. As Regan (2010) has previously pointed out (with specific reference to civil war interventions but with arguably broader applicability), “[a]s a result of all the research on interventions. . . we know next to nothing about the goals of the interveners.” Here we review a collection of articles which do away with the standard assumptions that interventions are meant to manage or mitigate conflict or to improve governance and development, and examine a range of other outcomes instead.

One possibility is that interventions are not intended to bring about an end to hostilities per se, but rather to enhance the prospects of victory for one side of a domestic conflict, even at the cost of extending the conflict or worsening the pain and suffering borne by the target population. Balch-Lindsay, Enterline and Joyce (2008), for instance, use a competing risks model to show that while third-party interventions decrease the hazard of a negotiated settlement to a conflict, they increase the hazard of victory for the beneficiary of the intervention. Examining interventions into elections rather than civil conflicts, Levin (2016) finds that partisan interventions do provide a substantial boost for the party or candidate receiving the external support; simply getting a preferred candidate in office may be the extent of the intervener’s aims—even when the intervention carries the risk of inciting domestic terrorism or heightening the risk of democratic breakdown (as documented in Levin (2018, 2019*b*)).

Several studies reviewed above likewise reject the supposition that interventions aim to democratize or otherwise improve governance within the target states. According to Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006), our predictions regarding objectives of foreign intervention should be derived from the utility functions of the leaders in the intervening state, and in particular from their incentives to retain office. From this perspective, it is not clear that an intervening power will generally stand to benefit from truly democratizing the target state. Instead, the more politically profitable strategy will often to be to install a less democratic,

less domestically accountable regime which will be more accommodating of the intervener’s demands—while maintaining a window dressing of democratic institutions to appease the intervener’s domestic audiences. Taking a similar perspective on foreign aid, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2007, 2009) develop and test a model of an aid-for-policy exchange between donor and recipient, in which both participants’ primary objective is to maximize their own political survival. Many policy concessions prove more politically beneficial for the donor than will the recipient’s democratizing reforms, so it should be entirely unsurprising that aid from strategic donors fails to promote democracy.

Continuing in this spirit, other work has suggested that some interventions are conducted not to improve governance but rather explicitly to undermine it. This is the central claim of Lee (2018) (discussed above), and it comports with the conventional wisdom regarding Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 US presidential election (Mueller, 2019). A set of experiments by Tomz and Weeks (2020), motivated by the latter example, demonstrate that “even modest forms of electoral intervention can divide and demoralize” the target society—a conclusion consistent with Corstange and Marinov (2012)’s finding of a broadly polarizing effect of foreign interventions in the very different context of the 2009 Lebanese parliamentary elections.

A separate strand of literature locates the impetus for interventions in the private interests that stand to benefit from them. Aidt and Albornoz (2011) develop a formal model in which a foreign government can intervene in a target state’s politics so as to impose a set of policies more amenable to the interests of firms within the intervener state that wish to invest in the target state. A similar claim underlies the predictions in Albornoz and Hauk (2014): for an unpopular US president, a foreign intervention provides the opportunity to “gamble for resurrection” in part because US corporations will reward the president with campaign contributions in exchange for expanding business opportunities within the target state. If the primary goal of a foreign intervention is to improve business conditions for domestic firms operating abroad, then any detrimental impact on security, governance, or development in the target state is simply an inconvenient byproduct, rather than evidence of a policy failure.

Examining declassified records of US covert interventions in support of foreign coups d’etat, Dube, Kaplan and Naidu (2011) find that the US corporations standing to benefit from a given coup enjoy abnormal returns to their stock prices at the time of the coup authorization, but not at the time of the coup itself—indicating that classified information about covert operations was leaked to those corporations and their shareholders in advance. This evidence does not necessarily imply that the coups were undertaken for the benefit of corporate interests, but it is certainly consistent with an account of US corporations wielding substantial influence over US intervention decisions. Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath (2013) systematically examine US covert interventions to install and/or support foreign leaders, and the effect of those interventions on US exports. They find that US interventions not only increase US exports to the target state, but that they do so largely through government purchases, and particularly in sectors in which US firms are comparatively disadvantaged; taken together, these findings provide compelling evidence of the US using covert interventions to exert political influence over the target governments for the benefit of US exporters.

Finally, Maurer (2013) documents how interventions aimed at protecting the property or interests of U.S. investors in foreign countries have shifted from politicized military confrontations early in the 20th Century to legal disputes in international forums in recent decades.

To our knowledge, research interrogating the role of private interests in foreign intervention policy has been overwhelmingly US-centric. Future work may seek to extend these analyses beyond the US context, or alternatively, to consider whether these empirical patterns are uniquely resultant of the influence that US corporations wield in shaping US foreign policy.

### 4.3 Persistent failure

There remains another possible explanation for the overall pattern of intervention failure described above: that international interventions do systematically fail to achieve their intended objectives, and that policy makers continue to undertake foreign interventions despite this fact.

A number of formal models provide a theoretical basis for such pessimistic expectations. Luo and Rozenas (2018) identify an “election monitor’s curse”, whereby a monitor’s overall effectiveness in deterring fraud and preventing violence requires that they cause greater violence in fraudulent elections. This gives rise to a sort of impossibility theorem in election observation, in that “election monitors who simultaneously aim to deter fraud and prevent post-election conflict while trying to remain impartial will neither deter election fraud

nor prevent conflicts.” Russell and Sambanis (2018) likewise identify a set of dilemmas that plague foreign actors’ (even well-intended) efforts to promote post-conflict national-building: an “institutional dilemma” arises when the foreign power crowds out the legitimacy of indigenous leaders, while a “sovereignty dilemma” arises when the foreign power succeeds in fostering a national identity, thus inducing the population to reject the foreign presence. A model of economic sanctions by Smith (1995) yields a similar conclusion of the impossibility of effective sanctions: sanctions generally occur and persist only when they are politically beneficial for the sender, and when acquiescing to the policy demand is more costly for the target than abiding the sanctions.

As an empirical matter, a systematic failure of interventions does seem plausible. As discussed above, substantive findings from a handful of causally well-identified studies tend to comport with findings of the broader body of research designs which we might expect to be susceptible to bias due to non-random assignment. And even in cases where the intervener’s true objective is essentially unambiguous—there is little doubt that the US genuinely sought to defeat the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam, for instance—we still find compelling empirical evidence of counterproductive means being employed to that end.

If empirical investigation of foreign intervention continues to produce causally-identified findings of intervention failure, assessed according to the interveners’ clearly defined objectives, that would be the most puzzling conclusion to emerge from this review. In this case, researchers may want to turn to examination of the bureaucratic, organizational, or group-psychological factors which lead to sub-optimal information aggregation and decision making in the foreign policy domain (Allison, 1971; Halperin and Clapp, 2007; Horowitz et al., 2019). Alternatively, we may wish to interrogate why it is the accumulated scientific knowledge on a policy-relevant subject has failed to translate from the academy into government and policy circles (Desch, 2019).

## 5 Future Directions

We close by offering some suggestions for promising directions of future research on foreign interventions.

### 5.1 New research designs

The last several years have seen the emergence of some especially well-identified research designs estimating the causal impact of various international interventions. Almost all of these rely on natural experiments that exploit within-country variation and we believe this is the most promising avenue for the discipline. Of course natural experiments are, by their nature, idiosyncratic and difficult to generalize to a broader research program. But the recent development of various micro-level datasets, as discussed above, presents promising opportunities for a wide range of novel empirical tests.

Another potentially fruitful avenue for new research designs would be the leveraging of exogenous “supply-side” determinants of interventions in macro-level analyses. For instance, Salehyan (2008) and Bove and Böhmelt (2019) respectively argue that the presence of refugees, and of emigrants more generally, increases the probability that one country intervenes militarily in another; Fordham (1998) and Alborno and Hauk (2014) demonstrate how domestic political and macroeconomic concerns shape the US President’s propensity to use foreign intervention as a tactic for improving his domestic popularity. Insofar as these various predictors of interventions are orthogonal to intervention outcomes in potential target states, they can be incorporated into empirical designs to estimate the consequences of interventions. Researchers may similarly seek to identify supply-side determinants of various non-military means of intervention, such as sanctions, foreign aid, and election monitoring.

### 5.2 New forms of intervention

While the data sources and methodological tools for studying historical interventions continue to expand, so too do the means of intervening. New military technologies, such as drones, alter the lethality, accuracy, and collateral consequences of military interventions, with potentially dramatic strategic and political implications (Fuhrmann and Horowitz, 2017; Horowitz, 2016, 2020; Jetter and Mahmood, 2020). Instruments of cyber warfare may be even more disruptive (Gartzke and Lindsay, 2015; Baliga, Bueno de Mesquita and

Wolitzky, 2019). Propaganda and (dis-)information campaigns provide potentially powerful means of intervening in a target state’s electoral processes and politics more broadly (Golovchenko et al., Forthcoming; Martin, Shaprio and Nedashkovskaya, 2019; Tomz and Weeks, 2020). All of these fast-moving changes in the contemporary practice of intervention will require the development of new theories and the adaptation of old ones, the collection of new datasets and the execution of new research designs.

Similarly, the release of classified information via leaks and whistle blowers allows for a better understanding of foreign intervention but also opens up concerns about the ethics of using data from these sources.

### 5.3 Changing Balance of Power

Most existing work on foreign intervention since World War II focuses on the United States, the Soviet Union and other Western nations. This is partly explained by the distribution of power in the context of the Cold War.

However, the changing balance of power in recent decades, in particular the rise of China as a global leader, points to the importance of researching foreign intervention by new actors. For example, it is often claimed that aid by China is less likely to be conditional on the implementation of political or institutional reforms by recipient countries, which can in turn delay democratic transitions and crowd out aid from other countries (see Dreher et al. (2018) for work on this topic).

There is also limited quantitative research on intervention by other regional leaders such as Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East (one notable exception is Corstange and Marinov (2012) that studies voter’s attitudes towards Iranian intervention in the 2009 Lebanese elections).

Finally, future work should study the role of *regional* (as opposed to UN) peacekeeping forces that may have greater legitimacy in the eyes of local actors and may thus be more effective in preventing conflict (see for example, Bara and Hultman (2020)).

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