

FINISHING THE JOB

HOW AMERICAN PRESIDENTS JUSTIFY EXIT STRATEGIES IN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS

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Statement of originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material that have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at the Australian National University or any educational institution. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in grey ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'AS' followed by a long horizontal line.

Date: 31 January 2020

Acknowledgements

I came to this research project after having spent 10 years in the humanitarian protection sector working with and on behalf of people fleeing persecution, torture and mass atrocities. Throughout my work I struggled to reconcile my commitment to pacifism with my anger and frustration that there were so few effective avenues available to stop these human rights abuses, often perpetrated by governments against their own people. This PhD thesis is a step along the way to me better understanding the possibilities and limitations of using violence to respond to violence.

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Abstract

Humanitarian interventions to stop mass atrocities are among America's most controversial uses of military force overseas since the end of the Cold War. While there is much research analysing the justifications for and conduct of humanitarian interventions, there is very little scholarly investigation of how and why interventions end. Indeed, successive US presidents have struggled to implement exit strategies from humanitarian interventions with the outcome often dismissed as 'mission creep'.

In this thesis, I use US presidential rhetoric as a way to understand exit strategy dynamics in humanitarian interventions. In particular, I explore how American presidents publicly justified their exit strategies in four interventions from 1991-2011—northern Iraq, Somalia, Kosovo and Libya. My normative concepts analysis of more than 700 texts shows how presidents craft exit strategies through practices of public justification and legitimation to their domestic audience. I argue a president's discursive engagement is constrained by three groups of normative expectations shaping the realm of imagined possibilities for how America should use force when responding to humanitarian crises; specifically the US should: (1) fulfil its moral responsibility to stop atrocities, fight evil and promote political transformation; (2) win its military engagements; and (3) avoid quagmires. These expectations frame justifiable uses of military force, but also exist in tension with one another, and are in turn affected by changing battlefield conditions, past intervention experiences, domestic and international pressures, and personal preferences. How presidents navigate these tensions affects their troop withdrawal decisions, including failures to

implement exit strategies.

My thesis is the first comparative analysis of America's exit strategies in four of the most significant humanitarian interventions of the post-Cold War era. By using public justification analysis to illuminate decision-making dynamics, I overcome the shortcomings of applying extant victory, war termination and end state planning theories to humanitarian interventions. By identifying the normative constraints on exit strategy decision-making, I demonstrate how and why mission creep occurs. My thesis provides evidence for military planners and policy advisers who are considering using force to stop a mass atrocity, to take normative expectations seriously in considering when and how troops will withdraw.

Contents

Contents	11
1 Introduction	17
1.1 Chapter outline	26
2 Humanitarian Intervention, Victory, Exit Strategies and Mission	
Creep	33
2.1 Introduction	33
2.2 What is ‘humanitarian intervention’?	35
2.3 Success in humanitarian interventions	39
2.4 Victory and its limitations	45
2.5 Theories of war termination and mission creep	48
3 Discourse, Justification and Normative Expectations	59
3.1 Introduction	59
3.2 A word on normative expectations	61
3.3 Discourse and foreign policy action	63
3.3.1 Discourse and culture in foreign policy analysis	63
3.3.2 Political discourse theory	69
3.3.3 Public justification theory	71
3.3.4 The rhetorical presidency during wartime	74
3.3.5 Narrative framework and national role conception	78
3.4 A discursive understanding of exit strategies	81
3.4.1 Political myths in the narrative framework of intervention	82

3.4.2	US exceptionalism and manifest destiny	83
3.4.3	‘Good’ and ‘bad’ wars	91
3.4.4	Victory still matters	97
3.5	Context	99
3.5.1	Domestic institutional framework	100
3.5.2	International context	103
3.5.3	Presidential agency	105
3.6	Conclusion	107
4	Method, Data and Research Findings	109
4.1	Method	109
4.2	Data overview	121
4.3	Analytical framework for research findings	127
4.4	Conclusion	131
5	Providing Comfort in Northern Iraq (1991–1996)	133
5.1	Introduction	133
5.2	The rhetorical context	136
5.2.1	The end of the Cold War and the new world order	136
5.2.2	The Gulf War, moral duty and the Vietnam Syndrome	138
5.3	Talking about exit before intervention	141
5.4	Justifying exit in <i>Provide Comfort</i>	150
5.5	Justifying exit with ground troops deployed	157
5.6	UN transition exit strategy not an exit	167
5.7	Justifying exit in <i>Provide Comfort II</i>	171
5.8	Conclusion	176
6	Providing Relief in Somalia (1992–1995)	183
6.1	Introduction	183
6.2	The rhetorical context	186
6.2.1	Humanitarian crisis in Somalia	186
6.2.2	Expanding the ‘humanitarian exception’ to nonintervention	187
	Finishing the job	10

6.2.3	The new world order's transformative potential	189
6.3	Justifying exit in <i>Provide Relief</i>	192
6.4	Justifying exit in <i>Restore Hope</i>	197
6.5	UN transition exit not an exit	205
6.6	Justifying exit in <i>Continue Hope</i>	212
6.7	Justifying exit after the Battle of Mogadishu	219
6.8	Conclusion	226
7	Striking the Noble Anvil in Kosovo (1999–)	231
7.1	Introduction	231
7.2	The rhetorical context	234
7.3	Talking about exit before intervention	236
7.4	Justifying exit in <i>Noble Anvil</i>	245
7.5	Problems exiting from <i>Noble Anvil</i>	260
7.6	Justifying exit in <i>Joint Guardian</i>	266
7.7	Conclusion	272
8	Dawning Odyssey in Libya (2011)	277
8.1	Introduction	277
8.2	The rhetorical context	281
8.2.1	Obama's promise to end America's wars and prevent genocide	281
8.2.2	Emerging responsibility to protect (R2P) ideas and practice	284
8.2.3	The Arab Spring reaches Libya	286
8.3	Talking about exit before intervention	287
8.4	Justifying exit in <i>Odyssey Dawn</i>	294
8.5	Exit from <i>Odyssey Dawn</i> not an exit	302
8.6	Justifying exit in <i>Unified Protector</i>	305
8.7	Problems exiting from <i>Unified Protector</i>	315
8.8	Conclusion	320
9	Conclusion	323
	Finishing the job	11

Bibliography

Acronyms

AU African Union

CAQDAS computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

DHA discourse-historical approach

DMZ demilitarised zone

ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States

EEC European Economic Community

EU European Union

FPA foreign policy analysis

ICC International Criminal Court

ICISS International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

IED improvised explosive device

IFOR Implementation Force

IR international relations

ISIS the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

JCS Joint Chiefs of Staff

KDP Kurdistan Democratic Party

KFOR Kosovo Force

KLA Kosovo Liberation Army

LAS League of Arab States

LTTE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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MARO Mass Atrocity Response Operations

NAC North Atlantic Council

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NFZ no-fly zone

NGO non-government organisation

NoCA normative concepts analysis

NSC National Security Council

NTC National Transitional Council–Libya

OAS Organisation of American States

OAU Organisation of African Unity

OIC Organisation of the Islamic Conference

OPCW Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

PDD-25 Presidential Decision Directive 25

PDT political discourse theory

PJT public justification theory

PKK Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

PUK Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

QRF Quick Reaction Force

R2P responsibility to protect

SFOR Stabilisation Force

UN United Nations

UNGA United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNIKOM United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission

UNITAF Unified Task Force

UNOSOM United Nations Mission in Somalia

UNOSOM II United Nations Mission in Somalia II

UNPROFOR United Nations Protection Force

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UNSCOM United Nations Special Commission on Iraq

UNSG United Nations Secretary-General

USAID United States Agency for International Development

USC United Somali Congress

WMD weapon of mass destruction

WWII World War II

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

How do American presidents justify their decisions to end military interventions attempting to stop atrocities overseas? Or, as is sometimes the case, how do presidents explain why exit strategies have changed and soldiers will not be coming home as originally planned? The conventional wisdom is presidents choose to withdraw soldiers once their objectives are achieved. Indeed American presidents often talk about their exit strategies in terms of ‘finishing the job’ at which point they can declare ‘mission accomplished’.

Perhaps the most famous ‘mission accomplished’ announcement occurred, not during a humanitarian intervention, but on 1 May 2003 with those very words emblazoned on a banner on USS *Abraham Lincoln*. The banner was the literal and metaphorical backdrop for a harness-wearing President George W. Bush, arriving in spectacular fashion, having co-piloted an arrested landing on the aircraft carrier. The Commander-in-Chief was there to laud America’s achievements in the Iraq War less than two months after it began. Bush’s banner was memorable because public declarations about mission completion carry practical and political consequences. Bush was talking about a military operation, which, at least at the time, was an inter-state war. In this context, ‘mission accomplished’ meant military victory. Bush referred to winning on the battlefield in his 1 May speech saying US troops had “prevailed in

Iraq”, congratulating them on a “job well done”.¹

The American public, domestic media outlets and international commentators interpreted Bush’s banner as declaring American victory in Iraq, and with the war almost over, US soldiers would soon return home. These initial interpretations were based on a discursive link between victory and troop withdrawal;² if Bush said troops had achieved their mission, there was little reason to keep American soldiers in and around Iraq. Stage-managing an event to foreground this discursive link also helped vindicate Bush’s initial decision to deploy troops while simultaneously reassuring audiences exit was imminent. The interpretations were inaccurate, however, as the Iraq War was far from over in May 2003.

As the Iraq war continued, the Bush Administration tried recasting the memory of the ‘mission accomplished’ banner as a press “mischaracterisation”.³ At the same time, the White House publicly reinforced the idea of winning in Iraq as a precursor for exiting. Bush’s National Security Council framed its 2005 strategy for victory in Iraq as a strategy for exit, while also reminding observers “no war has ever been won on a timetable”.⁴

Despite the promise of this strategy and its many subsequent iterations, US military involvement in Iraq continued for a further ten years. American troops deposed Saddam Hussein and assumed control of the vestiges of his regime; troops conducted

1. George W. Bush, *Address to the Nation on Iraq From the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 1, 2003.

2. Gideon Rose, “The Exit Strategy Delusion,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1998, no. 1, 56–67.

3. Deputy Assistant for Communications in the Bush White House, Scott Sforza quoted in Tahman Bradley, “Press Missed ‘Mission Accomplished’ Meaning, Says Bush Staffer,” *ABC News*, September 19, 2001,

4. The *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* sets out “8 Pillars of Victory”: Defeat the Terrorists and Neutralise the Insurgency; Transition Iraq to Security Self-Reliance; Help Iraqis Form a National Compact for Democratic Government; Help Iraq Build Government Capacity and Provide Essential Services; Help Iraq Strengthen its Economy; Help Iraq Strengthen the Rule of Law and Promote Civil Rights; Increase International Support for Iraq; and Strengthen Public Understanding of Coalition Efforts and Public Isolation of the Insurgents. The Strategy acknowledges the obvious breadth of these goals noting that the US government is organised for “long-term success” and in Iraq, the US is “organised for victory to an extent not seen since the end of the Cold War.” George W. Bush, “National Strategy for Victory in Iraq,” 2005, accessed October 25, 2017; See also Gareth Porter, “The Third Option in Iraq: A Responsible Exit Strategy,” *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 3 (2005): 29–45; Kurt Shillinger, “The ‘Victory’ Code: Bush’s Exit Strategy and Prospects for Iraq,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12, no. 2 (2005): 105.

counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism operations, disbanding, reforming and training the Iraqi military. Billions of dollars in United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs and related state-building, democracy and human rights initiatives, including overseeing national elections, buttressed the work of US soldiers and military contractors.⁵ A decade after his infamous speech and well after he left office without an end to the Iraq war in sight, Bush acknowledged the banner had misled observers into thinking the war was over.⁶

Bush and his successor Barack Obama tried to convince Americans they had won (or were at least on track to winning) the war in Iraq, despite the rising US casualty numbers, persistent instability and unrelenting insurgent attacks. The war invited comparisons with the earlier Vietnam War, a now-pathologised example of US defeat and failure to make a timely exit.⁷ While the differences between the Iraq and Vietnam Wars far outnumber their similarities, the *quagmire* frame associated with Vietnam was applied to Iraq in domestic American popular discourse and scholarly analysis.⁸ Even when Obama officially ended the Iraq War in 2014,⁹ his decision to redeploy US soldiers to Iraq the following year to fight a new war against the global terrorist organisation ISIS took the shine off victory declarations and undermined his exit strategy implementation. A number of analysts argued ISIS emerged and

5. Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, Adelphi, 434-435 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012); Toby Dodge, "Intervention and Dreams of Exogenous Statebuilding: The Application of Liberal Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 5 (2013): 1189-212; Gregory M. Morgan, "History of Iraq, 1990-Present," in *The Encyclopedia of Middle East Wars: The United States in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Conflicts*, ed. Spencer Tucker and Priscilla Mary Roberts (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 590-97; James Dobbins, Coalition Provisional Authority, and International Security and Defense Policy Center, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp., 2009).

6. David Sanger, "President Says Military Phase in Iraq Has Ended," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2003, James Wright, "10 Years After 'Mission Accomplished,' the Risks of Another Intervention," *The Atlantic*, May 1, 2013, Cheryl Gay Stolberg, "Mistakes, I've Made a Few, Bush Tells Reporters," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2009,

7. The connections between the two wars has been the subject of scholarly inquiry, see for example: John Dumbrell and David Ryan, eds., *Vietnam in Iraq: Tactics, Lessons, Legacies and Ghosts*, Contemporary Security Studies (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2007).

8. Herbert W. Simons, "From Post-9/11 Melodrama to Quagmire in Iraq: A Rhetorical History," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2007): 188; Discussion of the errors of the war, including the failed exit strategy, spawned a number of works including Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

9. For more on the strategic, logistic and other challenges of ending the Iraq War see Rick Brennan Jr et al., *Ending the US War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Manuever, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).

grew in prominence in part because of America's 2003 war.¹⁰

So strong is the connection in the public imagination between winning and exiting that Bush's 'mission accomplished' banner has become a symbol of hubris in wartime, of mission creep and the difficulties of successfully ending a war, of a president misunderstanding the nature of a military engagement and executing a poor public relations strategy. Satirical references to the mission accomplished banner in American television shows and elsewhere in domestic media all point to the prematurity of Bush's success claims precisely because US troops remained in Iraq and the goals of dramatic political transformation were not achieved.¹¹

In strategic studies and international relations literature, the connection between ideas of victory and exit in military operations is axiomatic. Victory means exit and having a good exit strategy is part of winning. If troops don't leave after they fulfil their objectives, they have fallen prey to 'mission creep', a problem best avoided through more careful operation planning. The relationship between victory, exit and mission creep is problematic in humanitarian interventions, however, because the normative impetus for these military operations and expectations for their conduct are different to other military operations where defending foreign citizens from falling victim to mass atrocities is not central to commencing or continuing an operation, especially when compared to defeating the enemy. The 'humanitarian' character of humanitarian intervention demands a mission motivated by and conducted with moral integrity. This requires more than simply following just war principles but includes adhering to taken-for-granted, normative expectations of how to use military force appropriately. These include expectations about how far America's moral

10. Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Robert K. Brigham, "The Lessons and Legacies of the War in Iraq," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. Beth L Bailey and Richard H Immerman (New York, 2015); John Cassidy, "ISIS and the Curse of the Iraq War," *The New Yorker*, August 28, 2015.

11. For example, in the 2004 HBO series *The Wire* included an episode entitled "Mission Accomplished" that writer David Simon explained was his homage to the war in Iraq, in particular the problems of continuing and ending a war commenced on false pretences. In 2009 Fox television's long-running cartoon *The Simpsons* included an episode in which the 'mission accomplished' banner unfurled on the shores of England prior to the historic battle where the English Navy defeated the Spanish Armada. Fox television's *Arrested Development*, which more broadly parodied the US relationship with the Iraqi government prior to its 2003 war, also featured a 'mission accomplished' banner over one of the Bluth family's poorly-constructed homes.

responsibilities extend and in which directions, what it means to succeed or ‘win’, and the conditions under which US troops can withdraw with their honour intact. The practical challenges of matching the instrument of military force with the objectives of solving a human rights problem extends to decisions about how and when to end these operations.

The term ‘exit strategy’, only entered US public discourse in 1993 with America’s humanitarian intervention in Somalia.¹² In Somalia, the US encountered difficulties deploying soldiers into hostile territory to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Protecting civilians proved difficult in the absence of functioning state institutions, famine and civil conflict. In Somalia US policy-makers tried to frame the question of troop withdrawal separately from the question of victory. While America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have come to epitomise the challenge of exit strategies, humanitarian interventions are what have given exit strategies their shape as military planning and rhetorical concepts.

My thesis focuses on presidential exit strategy justifications in humanitarian interventions for four reasons. First, exit decisions are under-theorised and -examined, especially when compared with decisions to launch humanitarian interventions and prescriptions for conducting interventions. Second, despite the role public justification plays in framing and constraining foreign policy action, it has not attracted a commensurate level of scholarly attention. Third, conventional explanations of why successive US presidents struggled to conclude humanitarian interventions often rely on the assumption presidents do not plan for exit making them susceptible to ‘mission creep’. This explanation is unconvincing in its generality and, given the resources devoted to operational planning, does not adequately explore the dynamics of how and why mission creep occurs. Fourth, my emphasis on public justifications demonstrates the value of discourse analysis to foreign policy analysis, international relations and strategic studies.

12. Rose, “The Exit Strategy Delusion.”

American presidents do not speak in a vacuum and the audiences for their remarks exist far beyond US borders. At the same time, however, in my examination of presidents' verbal statements regarding humanitarian intervention, their primary audience was domestic constituents. Even when a president talks overseas, the overwhelming majority of the comments about US foreign policy are framed in ways that resonate with American audiences and are explicitly targeted at this domestic audience. Even in press conferences, almost all answers presidents provide are to questions posed by American journalists writing for domestic press outlets. Together with other rhetorical presidency and public justification scholars, therefore, I focused on analysing presidential speech acts, contextualising them with the help of Congressional debates, media coverage and opinion poll data.

While I acknowledge presidential rhetoric may at times be insincere or calculated to manipulate, this does not diminish the value of a president's public justifications. A president's public statements demonstrate, at the very least, they believe their audience will find such statements persuasive and consequently influence future discourse and action. The primary interest for my thesis is not to uncover the subconscious core of presidential intent or motivation or to reveal the truth or otherwise of particular statements about intervention. Rather, it is to make apparent the discursive strategies adopted in the service of a specific political objective: ending a humanitarian intervention. My aim is also to reveal the effects these strategies have on subsequent discursive strategies presidents adopt; even when they actively seek to later relax or change these standards they are constrained by their earlier rhetorical choices.

Because humanitarian interventions are a response to a human rights crisis overseas affecting foreigners, rather than a direct domestic threat, presidents cannot rely on 'self-evident' justifications like protecting the homeland from an existential threat. Humanitarian interventions are therefore among the most politically controversial military operations and more likely to require presidents to consciously, publicly justify their actions. I chose to focus on humanitarian interventions because they

arise in circumstances where protecting others, rather than ‘national interest’ or existential threat is the dominant, publicly-stated motivation. Consequently the tensions and contradictions between normative expectations about the role of military force in achieving foreign policy objectives, setting boundaries for mission success, and the limitations of military force to achieve sustainable human rights outcomes are more easily observable. My thesis thus explores how these tensions manifest in practice when presidents are faced with decisions about troop withdrawal. Although the emergence of the responsibility to protect movement in 2001 has affected public discourse on collective international responsibility to protect civilians from gross human rights violations wherever they occur, humanitarian intervention remains an act worthy of investigation because it is still an option under R2P principles when it is too late to pursue other atrocity prevention solutions or those actions have failed. R2P has also opened space for humanitarian intervention to be used preventatively as well as in response to an atrocity already underway.

In my thesis I follow the work of Uriel Abulof and Markus Kornprobst to identify the normative expectations framing presidential justifications for exit strategy decisions in humanitarian interventions.¹³ In particular, I show how normative expectations shape US presidents’ imagined possibilities for justifiably withdrawing troops; how these expectations foreclose some exit options for decision-makers and make others practically and politically unavoidable. I also demonstrate these normative expectations remain salient across time and persist whether the president is Republican or Democrat; whether, like Bush or Clinton, a president conducts more than one humanitarian intervention during his term of office; whether an intervention, like northern Iraq or Somalia, begins with one president and ends with another; and whether, as with Obama, the humanitarian intervention follows a major strategic shock such as the September 11 terrorist attacks. What *does* change, however, is the way presidents attempt to navigate these expectations, crafting strategic narratives

13. Uriel Abulof and Markus Kornprobst, “Introduction: The Politics of Public Justification,” *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 1 (2017): 1–18; Uriel Abulof and Markus Kornprobst, “Unpacking Public Justification,” *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 1 (2017): 126–33; Uriel Abulof, “Normative Concepts Analysis: Unpacking the Language of Legitimation,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 73–89.

based on past humanitarian intervention experiences, battlefield realities and personal preferences. My case studies were selected because they enabled me to make these comparisons, augmenting case study analysis with a story of continuity and change. I look into the black box of mission creep to uncover some of the dynamics that keep America from successfully ending its humanitarian interventions.

My research shows that far from failing to consider exit in humanitarian interventions, American presidents are preoccupied with exit strategies, devoting much of their time to discussing the conditions for exit and how they are going to create those conditions. In some cases, presidents refused to commence operations until they were convinced a viable exit strategy was in place; at other times they chose operational approaches based predominantly on their preferred exit strategy.

After line-by-line analysis of all public verbal texts on the humanitarian interventions under review, the argument I develop in this thesis is that presidential justifications for exit strategies consistently draw upon a cluster of domestic normative ideas regarding the best use of American military power. Three groups of normative expectations emerged from the data: (1) America must **fulfil its moral responsibilities** to stop atrocities, fight evil and promote political transformation; (2) America must **achieve victory** preferably decisively; and (3) US troops must be **assured of an exit** to guarantee troops will not get stuck in a quagmire, costs will be minimal, and America will not be an occupying power. These normative expectations are grounded in ideas regarding America's national identity as a moral actor in international relations, a national obsession with winning and, based on 'lessons' from World War II and Vietnam, ideas about what it means to fight and win good wars. As embodied representatives of the American nation and leading foreign policy actors, presidential rhetoric reproduces and reinforces these normative expectations, referencing the expectations in public justifications for exit.

It is hard, however, for presidents to satisfy all three groups of normative expectations simultaneously over the course of a humanitarian intervention. This means

US presidents can be observed making **strategic narrative choices** about which normative expectations to emphasise in their public narratives about each humanitarian intervention. These choices were, of course, affected by changing battlefield conditions, domestic and international pressures and personal preferences but I demonstrate how these choices were persistently constrained by the three sets of normative expectations about the justifiable use of force. Presidents' constrained narrative choices affect their exit options and contribute to less-than-ideal or not implemented exit strategies.

My investigation is situated within the study of discourse in foreign policy analysis, specifically public justification analysis.¹⁴ I examined more than 700 texts comprising verbal statements delivered by American presidents in the form of public addresses and answers to questions over the course of four humanitarian interventions between 1991 and 2011: northern Iraq (1991–1996), Somalia (1992–1994), Kosovo (1999–) and Libya (2011). My thesis is the first comparative study of US humanitarian intervention exit strategies in the post-Cold War period. It provides a unique insight into how exit strategies and their justifications are similar over time and space and how they change, thereby contributing to the literature on humanitarian intervention, exit strategies in military operations, and US foreign policy analysis. My research also augments the literature exploring presidential rhetoric, demonstrating the role presidential discourse plays in shaping exit strategies for humanitarian interventions. I show how presidents exercise agency in crafting strategic narratives as well as how these narratives are shaped and constrained by normative expectations about American foreign policy behaviour.

The research method I adopt in this thesis contributes to the growing field of public justification analysis. It is one of the few studies of foreign policy and military strategy combining the discourse-historical approach with normative concept analysis to look at public justifications for decisions. Discursive analysis is not a tool that is

14. Liah Greenfeld, "Caveat: Addressing Public Justification as an Empirical Phenomenon," *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 1 (2017): 120–25; Markus Kornprobst, "From Political Judgements to Public Justifications (and Vice Versa): How Communities Generate Reasons upon Which to Act," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2014): 192–216.

often applied in the field of military strategy. My research provides an example of how discourse analysis can help decision-makers better understand the constraints and opportunities they have to shape strategic narratives about military operations and exit strategies.

1.1 Chapter outline

In the following chapter I explore the contours of theoretical debates about humanitarian intervention as they intersect with war termination and victory theories. I highlight a gap in the literature where all three fields overlap and show the ways existing analyses have not sufficiently considered the domestic normative expectations inherent in conducting humanitarian interventions. In particular, I identify the ways existing literature often fails to distinguish between the different types of exit strategies contemplated by decision-makers in humanitarian interventions that are not always a feature of other military operations, including operational disengagement, and transitions to the United Nations (UN), regional organisations or local authorities.

In Chapter 3 I present the conceptual framework for my analysis, focusing on discourse analysis, public justifications and political myths. I examine the ‘discourse of foreign policy’ and explain how this conceptual framework provides a way to move beyond the presently inadequate explanations of exit strategy formation and implementation in humanitarian interventions. I note the ways that discourse provides the ‘context of action’ for decision-makers. Following the work of rhetorical presidency scholars, I explain why presidential discourse is an important locus for understanding decision-making in military operations. As the Commander-in-Chief, the US president has singular authority to deploy US soldiers overseas. Congressional efforts to constrain this authority have been weak to the point some scholars have argued an “imperial” presidency has emerged and continued to develop over the subsequent presidential

terms.¹⁵ As the head of the executive branch of the federal government, the president also represents and discursively re-presents the American people to themselves and the world beyond. US presidential rhetoric can therefore reveal how the context of action is constructed and constrains presidents' imagined possibilities for action.

In Chapter 4 I set out my method and analytical framework for the four case studies that follow. I outline the steps in my analysis showing how I integrated a discourse-historical approach with discourse tracing and normative concepts analysis. The methodological approach I selected builds on the investigation methods pioneered by public justification scholars. My granular analysis of a large number of texts allowed me to identify and compare thematic framing patterns within and between cases. It also allowed me to observe connections within and between texts that might otherwise be obscured by a purely semantic analysis.

In Chapter 5 I apply my analytical framework to the first US humanitarian intervention of the post-Cold War era: the intervention in northern Iraq (1991–1996). This was an intervention from which US troops did not completely withdraw despite there being two exit strategies of operational disengagement and UN transition. I show how both president Bush's and president Clinton's focus on America's moral responsibilities to the Kurds constrained their exit strategy choices, especially as both presidents were committed to not ending the intervention until US troops had 'succeeded'. In this case study I show how success is important for implementing exit but also how ideas of victory and success are defined by normative ideas of moral responsibility, which in turn affect the possibilities for exit. Northern Iraq was an intervention shared between two presidents of different political persuasions but the narrative choices Bush made about how to frame the conditions for American troop withdrawal also constrained Clinton's decisions about how to implement an exit strategy. Both Bush and Clinton's imagined possibilities for withdrawing troops were shaped by persistent normative expectations of how to use military force in humanitarian crises. Both chose to emphasise America's moral responsibility to

15. William C. Banks and Jeffrey D. Straussman, "A New Imperial Presidency? Insights from US Involvement in Bosnia," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 2 (1999): 195–218.

promote political transformation in Iraq over other considerations. Without effectively removing the threat President Hussein posed to the Kurds, both presidents found it difficult to withdraw American forces lest their 'success' be undermined by a return to violence. Despite the failing to result in a complete removal of troops, Bush and Clinton's narrative choices in northern Iraq shaped exit strategy discourse in subsequent US humanitarian interventions.

In Chapter 6 I discuss how Bush's absorption of the northern Iraq intervention into the wider narrative of the Gulf War's 'success' contributed to him framing an intervention in Somalia as similarly 'doable'. Somalia, however, became notorious for the difficulties American presidents face when crafting and implementing exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. Despite the conventional wisdom that neither Bush nor Clinton had an exit strategy in Somalia, it is more correct to say there was no *consistent* exit strategy. There were in fact three exit plans: operational disengagement, UN transition and a combined local transition/withdrawal. Problems implementing these strategies occurred as both Presidents Bush and Clinton changed how they framed moral responsibilities over the course of the intervention, which in turn affected their decisions to change exit strategies. Again, Clinton continued an intervention begun by his predecessor, and while he was constrained by Bush's exit justifications for Somalia, he also shaped his own strategic narrative about exit. In Somalia Clinton's exit strategy justifications changed to immediate withdrawal when success seemed unachievable but failure could not be admitted. In this instance, Clinton's narrative was still affected by normative expectations regarding American moral purpose and success to make a noble exit possible.

Somalia affected the way the US responded to future humanitarian crises. Somalia's 'lesson' created the so-called Somalia Syndrome and contributed to Clinton's reticence to use military force to stop the 1993 genocide in Burundi and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, but also limited his response to mass atrocities in Bosnia in 1992–1995. When a new round of mass atrocities threatened the Kosovar Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, Clinton supported another humanitarian intervention, a case

I examine in Chapter 7. Despite (or perhaps because of) his discursive focus on exit, Clinton pursued three different exit strategies over the course of the Kosovo intervention. Taking a different approach to that he followed in Somalia, Clinton's strategic narrative emphasised the normative expectation his intervention must have an implementable exit strategy for American forces over the expectation America had a moral obligation to protect civilians from mass atrocities. Clinton's justifications for his exit strategies revealed how difficult it was to maintain this emphasis and ultimately, how prioritising exit opened the Kosovo intervention to criticism that US moral responsibilities were unmet and therefore the intervention was unsuccessful. Thus, when Clinton decided to embrace the full extent of America's moral duties with a view to achieving sustainable success, troop withdrawal became very difficult to the point US troops remain in Kosovo today, fulfilling essentially the same mandate under which they were deployed in 1999.

More than a decade passed between Clinton commencing the Kosovo intervention and the next time a US president used military force to stop a mass atrocity.¹⁶ In the meantime, America experienced the 9-11 terrorist attacks and in response, President George W. Bush launched wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. These two wars were controversial for many reasons including concerns about exit strategies. The debate the Somalia intervention prompted about the wisdom of overseas nation-building resurfaced with respect to the US wars in the Middle East, and with it debates about obligations America has to countries to which it deploys its troops.

In Chapter 8 I look at the US humanitarian intervention in Libya, conducted in 2011 while president Obama was attempting to fulfil his election promise to end the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Obama, a Democrat like Clinton, was personally committed to the idea of using military force to defend human rights as 'just wars'. Having decided to intervene in Libya, Obama followed Clinton's example by

16. Note, however, that President George W. Bush did station US troops off the coast of Liberia to support the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention in Liberia in May 2003 and both Bush and Obama considered intervention in Darfur from 2003–2010.

prioritising an implementable exit strategy over expansive framings of America's moral responsibility to the Libyan people. Unlike Clinton, however, Obama opted for a (partial) transition to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), followed by an exit strategy combining operational disengagement with transition to local authorities. Obama was clear about limiting US moral responsibility, diffusing it through NATO and restricting US duty to preventing an imminent mass atrocity event. However, Obama did not demonstrate the discursive discipline required to maintain this limited moral obligation, allowing normative expectations of how America should respond in this humanitarian crisis to expand to addressing the 'root cause' of the atrocities with regime change. In *Libya I* show how, despite the domestic debate about nation building in a post-9/11 world, the normative expectations for how America should best respond to humanitarian crises were just as salient and largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War. Obama struggled to justifiably limit the scope of American moral responsibilities to the Libyan people, particularly after US troops were deployed to the region, no matter if they were 'leading from behind'. In *Libya*, Obama found America was held responsible rhetorically and reputationally, if not practically, for the wider consequences of its humanitarian intervention.

I conclude my thesis in Chapter 9 with an overview of the similarities and differences between each of the cases. I argue that the difficulties America faced in withdrawing troops from humanitarian interventions were about more than just mission creep. Exploring the discourse of exit strategies shows us how normative expectations about justifiable uses of military force shape the imagined possibilities of action for decision-makers in humanitarian interventions. So long as military responses remain part of the US government's approach to dealing with mass atrocities—as occurred in Mt Sinjar, Iraq (2014) and Syria (2017, 2018)—we must accept it is almost impossible to achieve a humanitarian intervention that fulfils America's moral responsibility, is victorious, and delivers on a quick timetable for exit. Armed with this knowledge, analysts and policy-makers can make more informed decisions about which expectations will go unmet and better understand the consequences of these

choices.

CHAPTER 2

Humanitarian Intervention, Victory, Exit Strategies and Mission Creep

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I uncover a gap in the current literature on exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. I begin with an overview of the concept of humanitarian intervention, I note that humanitarian interventions are unique applications of military force because, unlike other operations, they are primarily motivated by defending and protecting the human rights of others. Moral considerations thus bear particularly heavily on decisions in humanitarian interventions, including decisions to exit. Much of the literature on humanitarian intervention focuses on justifications for commencing an intervention and how best to conduct it. With a handful of exceptions, comparatively little work has been done exploring exit strategies in humanitarian interventions.

Without their own well-developed analyses and theories of exit strategies, humanitarian intervention scholars have adopted war termination theories developed for other military operations. In sections 2.2 and 2.3 I outline these orthodox war termination theories and show how they consider victory a prerequisite for troop

withdrawal. Prevailing ideas about victory and exit — even those developed for operations like counter-insurgency or cyber-warfare — focus on comprehensively neutralising the enemy and withdrawing forces once victory is achieved. I agree with scholars studying war termination that decisive or unambiguous victory is not always possible in most military operations, but I suggest applying the concept of victory to humanitarian intervention is especially complicated because of the centrality of moral responsibilities to the *raison d'être* of humanitarian intervention and, relatedly, because ideas of what it means to succeed in a humanitarian intervention are different from other types of military operations.

I consider two of the most common ways to view success in humanitarian intervention: (1) saving more lives through intervention than would have otherwise been lost; and (2) creating sustainable human rights outcomes. The problem is these ideas of success are all based on securing battlefield victory and do not explain how, when or why troops should withdraw, or the ways exit strategies are implemented in practice. There are a handful of works looking explicitly at exit in humanitarian interventions but they too use victory as the trigger for exit, without accounting for situations where victory may be neither possible nor morally desirable.

Beyond the humanitarian intervention and war termination literature, just war scholars have problematised the connection between victory and exit in war planning with their theory of *jus ex bello*, or ‘just exit’ (section 2.5). *Jus ex bello* is a useful theoretical development but it does not address the practicalities of pursuing an exit strategy, the role of normative considerations in constraining exit strategy options, or how exit norms are reproduced in public discourse for wars generally or humanitarian interventions in particular. This is the gap my thesis bridges.

2.2 What is ‘humanitarian intervention’?

‘Humanitarian intervention’ is the term I and other writers including Brendan Simms, D.J.B. Trim, Sean Murphy, Nicholas Wheeler, Thomas Weiss and Fernando Tesón consider the most accurate and historically consistent way to describe military operations to stop or prevent mass atrocities or widespread human rights abuses.¹ Humanitarian interventions comprise a discrete subset of US military operations, distinct from wars, peacekeeping operations, stabilisation operations, military occupations and aid missions. In this thesis, I define ‘humanitarian intervention’ as:

- a government deploying its troops
- into a foreign territory
- without permission of that foreign territory’s government, and if there is no legitimate government, then the territory is hostile to the foreign troops
- to achieve objectives primarily (but not necessarily exclusively) centred on human rights protection for foreign citizens (that is, the intervenor is not protecting its own citizens)
- with or without authorisation from an intergovernmental organisation such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

It is this paradoxical aspect—the uninvited use of the instruments of war and lethal force to protect civilians—that prompts extensive debates about humanitarian inter-

1. For more on the definition of humanitarian intervention, see Alex J. Bellamy, “Motives, Outcomes, Intent and the Legitimacy of Humanitarian Interventions,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 216–32; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2006); Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Sean D. Murphy, *Humanitarian Intervention: The United Nations in an Evolving World Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Fernando R. Tesón and Bas Van der Vossen, *Debating Humanitarian Intervention: Should We Try to Save Strangers?* (New York, 2017); Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action*, Third edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

vention² as does the question of whether or not specific humanitarian interventions are 'lawful' or otherwise 'permitted'. With its substantial military resources the US has led or played a pivotal role in four humanitarian interventions from 1991–2011 that meet the above criteria and are the focus of this thesis: northern Iraq, Somalia, Kosovo and Libya.

Humanitarian intervention is not a universal term, however, because what constitutes 'intervention' is often a matter of contention; for instance, should economic sanctions be classified as intervention because they can cripple a country as much as any military assault? The meaning of the word 'humanitarian' has also changed over time from a focus on the "humanity or divinity of Christ" to a focus on human rights and crimes against humanity.³ In addition, even when humanitarian interventions are supported by international law and the opinion of the international community, they are still considered exceptional state action taken in extraordinary circumstances as a last resort.⁴

Starting with Liberia in 1990, the UNSC began considering intra-state conflict its remit of preventing threats to international peace and security. In Liberia, the UNSC supported ECOWAS efforts to implement a ceasefire. Representatives of the Liberian government noted in their statements to the UNSC, that this case was an instance where the Council should reconsider its reluctance to involve itself in internal state matters.⁵ Although the UNSC did not call these operations humanitarian interventions, it authorised military interventions in Iraq (1991), Somalia (1992), Bosnia (1995), Sierra Leone (1997), Kosovo (1999) and Libya (2011) that met the

2. For more on the ethical challenges posed by the issue of causing deaths with humanitarian interventions see: Lars Christie, "Distributing Death in Humanitarian Interventions," in *Who Should Die? Liability, Rights, and the Moral Context of Killing in War*, ed. Ryan C. Jenkins, Michael Robillard, and Bradley Jay Strawser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 186–201; For a broader discursive critique of killing in war see: Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

3. Simms and Trim, *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

5. Decision of 22 January 1991 (2974th meeting), UN Security Council. For a good overview of the development of the UN's construction of international peace and security since its formation in 1945 see Trudy Fraser, *Maintaining Peace and Security? The United Nations in a Changing World* (Houndmills: Palgrave/Macmillan Education, 2015); Hikaru Yamashita, "Reading "Threats to International Peace and Security," 1946–2005," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, no. 3 (2007): 551–72.

definition of humanitarian intervention outlined in Section 2.2 above. The US led all these interventions except Sierra Leone and was at the forefront of promoting these military interventions in UNSC debates.⁶ Alex Bellamy argues these UNSC authorisations established a “humanitarian exception” to the principle of state sovereignty and non-intervention.⁷ UNSC support for humanitarian intervention was not always easily won, however, and there were notable instances where the UNSC failed to act in a timely fashion to prevent genocide in Burundi (1993), Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1995). In Burundi and Rwanda in particular international inaction was largely on account of US resistance to intervention.

In 2000 the Canadian government formed an *ad hoc* International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).⁸ The Commission’s 2001 report reframed the dominant discourse on sovereignty away from the rights of states, and onto the responsibilities of statehood, in particular, the responsibility of states to protect their citizens from “avoidable catastrophe”.⁹ According to the Commission, such avoidable catastrophes include not only war crimes, genocide and gross human rights violations, but also mass starvation and state failure. Where a state is unable to discharge this “responsibility to protect” (R2P), the responsibility automatically falls to the wider international community that can then use it as grounds for intervention. The Commission’s grounds for the military intervention aspect of R2P are heavily based on just war principles of right intention, right authority, last resort, proportional means and reasonable prospects.¹⁰

6. In addition to this small group of humanitarian interventions, there are a number of operations that are occasionally referred to as humanitarian operations—for example, East Timor (1999), Mali (2013), Iraq (2015)—but as they do not satisfy all of the criteria for humanitarian operations I adopt, the label is not strictly accurate in this group of cases.

7. Bellamy, “Motives, Outcomes, Intent and the Legitimacy of Humanitarian Interventions,” 218.

8. The Commission identifies its remit as flowing from a question posed by the then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan: “. . . if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systemic violations of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity?” Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2001), vii.

9. *Ibid.*, viii.

10. This responsibility to intervene is articulated as follows: “Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect”. *Ibid.*, xi–xii.

The ICISS and subsequent UN contributions on R2P stress armed foreign intervention is only one end of the spectrum of permissible actions for responding to “situations of compelling human need”,¹¹ but it is the military intervention aspect of R2P that draws the most critical attention. In 2005 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recognised R2P with respect to four areas much narrower than those envisaged by the ICISS but aligning more closely with the *Rome Statute* prohibitions of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In 2009, United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Ban Ki-moon released his report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*. The document provides a framework for the 2005 General Assembly resolution and downplays the prominence usually accorded to the armed intervention element of R2P.¹²

The boundaries between humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, aid delivery and state-building are increasingly blurred, especially as operations beginning as humanitarian interventions may later include elements of peacekeeping, aid delivery, and state-building. Efforts to ‘mainstream’ humanitarian responsiveness and human rights protection into operational approaches of Western military forces has further contributed to dissolving categories of military/humanitarian action. Indeed, a number of the more recent publications on humanitarian intervention, civilian protection, atrocity prevention, peacekeeping and aid focus on understanding the relationship between these concepts and how they intertwine in practise.¹³

11. W. Andy Knight and Frazer Egerton, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 143.

12. For more on the impact of R2P see Alex J. Bellamy, “The Responsibility to Protect Turns Ten,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2015): 161–85; Rosa Brooks, “Humanitarian Intervention: Evolving Norms, Fragmenting Consensus (Remarks),” *Maryland Journal of International Law*, 2014, Thomas G. Weiss, “RtoP Alive and Well after Libya,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2011): 287–92.

13. Cecilia Jacob, Alistair D. B. Cook, and University of Queensland, eds., *Civilian Protection in the Twenty-First Century: Governance and Responsibility in a Fragmented World*, First edition (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2016); Paul D. Williams, “Protection, Resilience and Empowerment: United Nations Peacekeeping and Violence against Civilians in Contemporary War Zones,” *Politics* 33, no. 4 (2013): 287–98; Angus Francis, Vesselin Popovski, and C. J. G. Sampford, eds., *Norms of Protection: Responsibility to Protect, Protection of Civilians and Their Interaction* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2012); Sreeram Chaulia, *International Organizations and Civilian Protection: Power, Ideas and Humanitarian Aid in Conflict Zones*, The Library of International Relations 54 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Michael N. Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested: Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011).

In the next section I turn to ways in which scholars and policy-makers judge if a humanitarian intervention is going to be, or has been, successful. Understanding success is critical for knowing when it is best to end an intervention as success is frequently proffered by decision-makers as a pre-requisite for troop withdrawal. I show that definitions of success are elusive, leading to reliance by scholars, analysts and strategists on traditional ideas of military victory ill-suited to humanitarian interventions.

2.3 Success in humanitarian interventions

All discussions about humanitarian interventions, be they popular or scholarly, begin with the idea these operations are fundamentally about using military force to protect vulnerable people from death or serious harm. While there may be disagreements about how, when, and under what circumstances military force is employed, it is the civilian protection or rescue aspect that gives interventions their ‘humanitarian’ character. There are high normative stakes for any government pursuing a humanitarian intervention primarily because of the inherent contradiction of using lethal force to save lives. Intervention also challenges the principle of state sovereignty as the cornerstone of inter-state relations, serving as an exception to the general prohibitions against using military force to resolve conflict. Questions regarding intervention success are thus of major importance to humanitarian intervention scholars.

Because protection claims are central to humanitarian intervention, it seems obvious we should judge the success of an intervention by measuring the number of people saved against the deaths and injuries that may have occurred in the absence of intervention. This is precisely Taylor Seybolt’s approach in his 2007 review of six humanitarian interventions since 1990.¹⁴ Seybolt’s work is the most comprehensive attempt to systematically and comparatively evaluate humanitarian interventions

14. Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

using the ‘lives saved’ criteria. Seybolt’s method can be criticised for not including other impacts of intervention/non-intervention in addition to lives potentially saved/lost, for example, the effects of intervention on infrastructure, state legitimacy or self-determination. His study is useful, however, because public debates about intervention in cases of mass atrocity, genocide or war crimes often feature calculations about numbers to be saved and sacrificed.¹⁵

The normative stakes of humanitarian intervention are high, however, making it difficult for governments and scholars to limit evaluations solely to equating hypothetical lives saved versus lives lost. Instead, I suggest at the heart of debates about how we should judge humanitarian interventions and when it is appropriate to exit, are varying *expectations* of what an intervention should deliver. If intervention is expected to stop a mass atrocity from occurring or worsening, then Seybolt’s calculation is relevant: foreign forces standing between perpetrators and victims, deterring or preventing violence, will make this intervention successful. This type of action also helps create an international norm against states committing acts of mass violence because it signals the international community is willing to use military force to protect those who may be the targets of violence.

It may be possible to successfully curtail an atrocity currently being committed but such success may be short-lived. Research on genocide and mass atrocities shows incidents of mass violence, while sometimes unpredictable, are not spontaneous but rooted in social, political and economic structures.¹⁶ If humanitarian intervention is expected to do more than prompt a temporary pause in violence and instead promote

15. In support of the continuing relevance of Seybolt’s approach see Ned Dobos, “Idealism, Realism, and Success in Armed Humanitarian Intervention,” *Philosophia* 44, no. 2 (2016): 497–507; See also recent debates about the utility of military intervention in Syria versus other options captured in Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *The Syria Dilemma* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013).

16. For analysis of the causes and dynamics of mass atrocities, see Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); See also Ben Kieman, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); For frameworks on the precipitating factors for genocide and other atrocities see United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention,” 2014, This framework was preceded by another framework focusing exclusively on genocide prevention Office of the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, “Genocide Prevention Analysis Framework,” 2013,

the longer-term protection of vulnerable populations, then the sustainability of an intervention's positive effects must be part of measuring success. If not, violence may recur, requiring repeated interventions. Achieving sustainable protection outcomes, however, means a range of wider conflict management activities may become tied to humanitarian intervention and assessing its success.

If intervention is expected to address the grievances that precipitated violence, then post-conflict peace-building becomes a potentially necessary component of successful humanitarian intervention. Kristin Kosek and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis measure the success of humanitarian interventions according to their ability to contain conflict.¹⁷ As with most other studies of humanitarian interventions and post-conflict peace-building, Kosek and Gizelis separate the military phase of intervention from post-conflict reconstruction, arguing interventions only succeed when the local population contributes to the development of the "intervention strategy" after foreign combat troops have withdrawn. Michael Walzer, for instance, argues wars should end with the protagonist fostering self-determination, reconstruction, democratic rule and civil rights,¹⁸ while Doug McCready argues there is an obligation to "reestablish political, economic and social stability... to prevent domestic consequences of the war from becoming the seed of future conflict".¹⁹ These obligations may require the ongoing presence of peacekeepers to help safeguard the process of broader societal transformation. Such transformation could take the form of (liberal) state- and institution-building, including promoting democracy, market reforms and gender equality. If a government was responsible for causing the violence or allowing it to continue, then regime change may be the scale of societal transformation required to prevent atrocities recurring.²⁰ As pointed out in the previous sections, however, there are problems with state-building, not least the fact US efforts in this regard

17. Theodora-Ismene Gizelis and Kristin E. Kosek, "Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail: The Role of Local Participation," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 40, no. 4 (2005): 363–83.

18. Michael Walzer, "Just and Unjust Occupations," *Dissent*, 2004, no. 1, 61–63.

19. Doug McCready, "Ending the War Right: Jus Post Bellum and the Just War Tradition," *Journal of Military Ethics* 8, no. 1 (2009): 66–78.

20. Michael Walzer argues policies of regime change can be compatible with just war theory: Michael Walzer, "Regime Change and Just War," *Dissent* 53, no. 3 (2006): 103–8.

have led to increased authoritarianism and coercive institutions.²¹

Just war scholars, whose work is often used in the context of analysing humanitarian intervention, argue a justifiable humanitarian intervention is one where: (1) there is just cause to defend foreign citizens from their own government or other groups in their territory; (2) the intervening state intends its protection to be the outcome of its military action even if protection is a means to another end; (3) the intervener complies with *jus in bello* principles and has a reasonable chance of succeeding; and (4) the intervention is necessary, proportionate and does not undermine prospects for just peace.²² Within just war theory, Luke Campbell offers one of the few contributions exploring the ‘reasonable prospect of success’ requirement for just war. Campbell argues there is a disconnect between the putatively objective idea of success in war as a matter of rationality, and the reality that judgments are based on “emotional memories, metaphors and cultural symbols”, or rather, the “affectively familiar”.²³ In my thesis, I take Campbell’s work further, arguing in the case of American humanitarian interventions, the idea of success is also framed by normative expectations about what it means to win a war. Victory, even in humanitarian interventions, is an integral component of the US public discourse of exit strategies.

Governments can thus use a range of criteria to assess the utility of deploying military force for civilian protection purposes, to measure an intervention’s success.

A government’s standards will depend on the outcomes it claims an intervention will

21. Dodge, “Intervention and Dreams of Exogenous Statebuilding: The Application of Liberal Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq,” 1211.

22. For more detail on just war criteria see: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*; Michael Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success),” *Social Research* 69, no. 4 (2002): 925–44; David Boucher, “The Just War Tradition and Its Modern Legacy: Jus Ad Bellum and Jus in Bello,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2011, 1–20; Bellamy, “Motives, Outcomes, Intent and the Legitimacy of Humanitarian Interventions”; Brian Orend, “Justice after War,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2002): 43–56; John J. Davenport, “Just War Theory, Humanitarian Intervention and the Need for a Democratic Federation,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, no. 3 (2011): 493–555; John W. Lango, “Preventative Wars, Just War Principles, and the United Nations,” *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 247–68; Francis V. Harbour, “Reasonable Probability of Success as a Moral Criterion in the Western Just War Tradition,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 10, no. 3 (2011): 230–41; Larry May, *After War Ends: A Philosophical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Tesón and Van der Vossen, *Debating Humanitarian Intervention*; C. A. J. Coady, *The Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention*, Peaceworks 45 (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2002), 47.

23. Luke B. Campbell, “The ‘Importance of Winning’: Affect, Just War and the ‘Familiarization’ of Success” (PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2015).

deliver, and the length of time considered reasonable for the positive effects of an intervention to last (or at least to outweigh any negative consequences). Consequently, a humanitarian intervention's success may rest as much on the effectiveness of non-military programs supporting and following the intervention. And yet, humanitarian intervention is ultimately about the use of military force. As noted above, calls for humanitarian intervention only arise because the circumstances are considered so extraordinary they require *military* action to protect civilians, not just aid and development programs. At the same time, humanitarian interventions are supposed to be short and generally distinct from wars resulting in occupation.²⁴ Success is thus linked to the protection outcomes achieved as much as to the smooth withdrawal of foreign forces and transition to civilian authorities. So how then do we understand if the military operation aspect of a humanitarian intervention was successful and under what circumstances foreign soldiers should leave?

It is at this point much of the existing scholarly literature on humanitarian interventions encounters difficulties because, for the most part, contributors leave exit strategy decisions to the realm of strategic and operational theory. Failure to explicitly discuss exit strategies in humanitarian interventions results in an analytical gap regarding the relationship (if any) between intervention success and the timing of exit.

For example, in their edited volume covering the various dilemmas of intervention, J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert Keohane do not include detailed discussions of issues regarding exit.²⁵ Michael Bhatia's book on the issues of war and intervention also does not cover exit strategies with only a single reference to how goals of intervention might require reinterpretation of exit strategies.²⁶ Robert Pape's analysis of the future of humanitarian intervention following the NATO operation in Libya similarly does not discuss the role of exit strategies in shaping "pragmatic" approaches to

24. Bellamy, "Motives, Outcomes, Intent and the Legitimacy of Humanitarian Interventions," 225.

25. J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

26. Michael V. Bhatia, *War and Intervention: Issues for Contemporary Peace Operations* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc, 2003).

intervention.²⁷ In his extensive list of “tough choices” in humanitarian interventions, Dayton Maxwell only considers whether stipulating an exit date for foreign forces may affect the prospects for stable peace.²⁸

Neither the seminal text on humanitarian intervention, Nicholas Wheeler’s *Saving Strangers*,²⁹ nor more recent contributions on historical antecedents and contemporary challenges of humanitarian intervention, such as Fabian Klose’s edited collection,³⁰ provide more than passing reference to exit strategies. With the exception of a handful of works on exit strategies in the US intervention in Somalia,³¹ even analyses of specific humanitarian interventions only issue general calls for “better exit strategies” without explaining what these might entail.³² Admittedly it is not the intention of the scholars I identify to engage in detailed discussion of exit strategies and decision-making about troop withdrawals in humanitarian interventions. But this is precisely my point: humanitarian intervention analyses have been traditionally preoccupied with the when, why and how questions of commencing military operations. Apart from nods to Clausewitz’s axiom regarding the foolishness of starting a war without appreciating what one intends to achieve,³³ humanitarian intervention scholars have generally been much less interested in questions of why, when and how interventions should and do end. Instead humanitarian intervention scholars rely on theories of victory and exit developed for war and other types of armed conflict, which are not suited to humanitarian intervention. In the following sections 2.4 and 2.5 I explain the shortcomings of prevailing theories of victory and war termination for humanitarian interventions.

27. Robert A. Pape, “When Duty Calls: A Pragmatic Standard for Humanitarian Intervention,” *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 41–80.

28. Dayton L. Maxwell, “Facing the Choice among Bad Options in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 9, no. 1 (March 1998): 179–91.

29. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*.

30. Fabian Klose, ed., *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, Human Rights in History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

31. For example: Douglas Delaney, “Cutting, Running, or Otherwise? The US Decision to Withdraw from Somalia,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 28–46.

32. Michael G. Smith, “Military Intervention and Humanitarian Assistance,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 20, no. 3 (October 2008): 243–54.

33. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 88–89.

2.4 Victory and its limitations

In traditional Clausewitzian framing, victory is war's ultimate aim, its primary motivation, and the universal metric for determining success.³⁴ At the same time 'victory' is a political state, often shifting, and frequently not readily identifiable before, during or at war's conclusion.³⁵ While it is often difficult to secure strategic goals *without* achieving battlefield objectives, practically speaking there is no necessary connection let alone an inevitable causal link between battlefield success and strategic victory.³⁶ Take, for example, the US battlefield victories during the Vietnam War or Israel's military defeat of neighbouring Arab nations. Grappling with this disconnect is fundamental to much recent literature on theories of strategic victory, although it is not a new insight. The idiom of a 'Pyrrhic victory'—victory achieved at such a price as to amount to a defeat—is, after all, drawn from Ancient Roman historiography.

Strategic studies scholars acknowledge a linear relationship between military and political victory does not exist. William Martel finds most war outcomes contain elements of both victory and defeat.³⁷ Colin Gray similarly notes victory's decisiveness lies on a continuum; while achievable, decisive battlefield victory needs to be supplemented by elements of strategic success and strategic advantage.³⁸ With its longer time horizon and broader political goals, strategic victory is a contested concept. In his treatise on victory, Robert Mandel moves beyond Colin Gray's

34. Clausewitz, *On War*, 75; Colin S. Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory* (Carlisle Barracks.: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002), 10.

35. On the idea of the three levels of victory, the relationship between them and how they can be best achieved see Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*; Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006); J Boone Bartholomees, "Theory of Victory," *Parameters*, 2008, 25–36; Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Stephen Biddle, "Military Power: A Reply," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 3 (2005): 453–69; Ryan Grauer and Michael C Horowitz, "What Determines Military Victory? Testing the Modern System," *Security Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012): 83–112.

36. Bernard Fook Weng Loo, "Decisive Battle, Victory and the Revolution in Military Affairs," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 189–211.

37. William Martel, *Victory in War: Foundations of Modern Military Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

38. Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*.

equation of strategic victory with decisive battle. Mandel argues securing strategic victory in modern conflicts is far more difficult than in earlier times because states no longer equate wartime success with abjectly crushing the enemy. Strategic victory today is more variegated with overlapping and sometimes contradictory components of which Mandel identifies six: information control, military deterrence, political self-determination, economic reconstruction, social justice and diplomatic respect. For Mandel, strategic victory also has a moral dimension requiring the vanquished be treated fairly.³⁹ Not all writers accept Mandel's definition of strategic victory, but others such as J. Boone Bartholomees and Bernard Fook Weng Loo agree with his fundamental Clausewitzian principle: victory requires breaking the will of the enemy to continue fighting.⁴⁰ For all these writers, war termination is equated with one side successfully imposing its will on its adversary through battlefield (military) and political (strategic) victories sustained over the longer term.

Victory is not always objectively discernible and scholars note perceptions of military outcomes matter.⁴¹ Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney have devised a theory of victory applied to case studies including the Cuban Missile Crisis and the US intervention in Somalia. Their theory highlights the importance of perceptions, biases and discursive framing of military outcomes.⁴² Framing conditions for victory—such as US President Roosevelt's call in 1943 for “unconditional surrender” of Axis forces as a condition for ending World War II—also affect the timing of exit, the prospect for negotiated settlement and the costs to be borne by the victor and vanquished.⁴³

Perceptions aside, the majority of contributions to the literature on victory take as their starting point the idea that victory through battle is ultimately achievable. If not annihilation of the enemy, at least neutralisation of the threat the enemy poses, is a precondition for orthodox understandings of victory in war. Even renowned just

39. Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory*.

40. Boone Bartholomees, “Theory of Victory”; Loo, “Decisive Battle, Victory and the Revolution in Military Affairs.”

41. Boone Bartholomees, “Theory of Victory,” 26.

42. Dominic D P Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, “Essence of Victory,” *Security Studies* 13, no. 2 (2003): 350–81.

43. Michael Balfour, “Unconditional Surrender,” *International Affairs* 46, no. 4 (1970): 719–36.

war scholar Michael Walzer argues that in a just war there is “nothing like winning. There are alternative outcomes, of course, but these are accepted only at some cost to basic human values”.⁴⁴

The construction of victory as comprehensive defeat of the enemy persists even in so-called ‘unconventional’ military operations such as counterinsurgency or cyber-war. For example, in their in-depth analysis of 41 counterinsurgency operations Christopher Paul and his colleagues still see the objective as “defeating insurgencies” and creating “durable peace intervals”, even if the “crush them” approach tends to be unsuccessful.⁴⁵

Most of the literature on victory in war does not countenance the notion that victory may be less than total or decisive *by design*. The idea it may be necessary to forgo decisive battlefield victory in order to achieve more desirable, longer-term political outcomes is also not often considered. This is despite the fact strategists and policy-makers, particularly those theorising about the employment of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, were reluctant to talk about strategic/political victory in Clausewitz’s absolutist vein.⁴⁶ Even in post-Cold War non-nuclear military engagements, US decision-makers were faced with the prospect that something less than decisive victory might be the most desirable outcome. Analysing this reality, however, remains at the margins of orthodox scholarship on victory, making it difficult to see how the moral expectations inherent in humanitarian intervention can be accommodated.

The major exception to this position is that of Dominic Tierney who argues that “we

44. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 122.

45. Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*, Report for the Office of the US Secretary of Defense (Washington DC: RAND Corporation, 2013), 188; For a compelling, if lone, voice calling for a reconceptualisation of victory in the context of cyber-war, in particular the problem of seeing victories as defeats see: Jason Healey, “Winning and Losing in Cyberspace,” in *Cyber Power* (Estonia: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2016).

46. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 31; For notable exceptions, however, see Colin S. Gray, “Nuclear Strategy: The Case for a Theory of Victory,” *International Security* 4, no. 9 (1979): 54–87; Edward N. Luttwak, *On the Meaning of Victory: Essays on Strategy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

live in an age of unwinnable wars, where decisive triumph has proved to be a pipe dream”.⁴⁷ Tierney argues that US military history was dominated by victories until the mid-21st century, which, as I note in Chapter 2 helped establish a normative expectation that if the US entered a war, it would win. Today, however, Tierney suggests that the cost of pursuing victory can be so catastrophic that it is unwinnable; in this case, “losing the *right* way is a kind of victory”. For Tierney, losing the right way involves having an exit strategy, which he states should ultimately be based on a “cost-benefit analysis”. Despite his focus on examining failure in war, therefore, Tierney’s analysis is very similar to the approach adopted by other war termination scholars who also adopt a cost-benefit approach, which, as I point on in the following section, is not the best framework for thinking about decision-making in humanitarian interventions.

2.5 Theories of war termination and mission creep

War termination analysis—looking at when and how wars end—can be divided into quantitative and qualitative studies. Empirical studies suggest a (non-exhaustive) combination of variables significantly affect how and when armed conflicts end. Comparative qualitative studies of war termination are not widespread and dominated by US case studies.⁴⁸ Possibly the most famous contribution is *Every War must End* by Fred Iklé, which he wrote following America’s difficult experience successfully ending the Vietnam War, updated 30 years later after the US began experiencing similar difficulties ending its 2003 war in Iraq. Iklé argues the decisions to commence military operations are often made without considering how those military operations will end. Even when decision-makers are cognisant of the need for an exit strategy,

47. Dominic Tierney, *The Right Way to Lose a War: America in an Age of Unwinnable Conflicts* (New York: Little, Brown & Co, 2015).

48. There is a related body of work on exit from post-conflict, liberal state-building or peacekeeping operations. See, for instance Dominik Zaum, “The Norms and Politics of Exit: Ending Postconflict Transitional Administrations,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2009): 189–208; Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Richard Caplan, “After Exit: Successor Missions and Peace Consolidation,” *Civil Wars* 8, nos. 3-4 (2006): 253–67.

they frequently misinterpret enemy behaviour, misjudge the effect specific operational decisions will have on the eventual war outcome, are adversely affected by domestic political constraints, or otherwise have their plans thwarted through the unpredictable nature of war itself.⁴⁹

Other contributions also echo Iklé's findings even while they are restricted to analysing only the US experience.⁵⁰ Two key contemporary publications are *Between War and Peace: How America Ends its Wars* edited by Matthew Moten, and Gideon Rose's *How Wars End: Why we Always Fight the Last Battle*. Both books use the US experience ending wars to draw more general conclusions about conflict termination. After looking at six wars beginning with World War I and ending with the 2003 Iraq War, Rose concludes the explanation for termination rests in power politics, even though both domestic and battlefield factors can influence the outcome of wars. For Rose, the neoclassical realist construction of international relations and strategic theory is most useful for understanding both the conduct and conclusion of armed conflicts. Moten's volume covers a wider historical arc beginning with the American War of Independence, ending with the Iraq War, and covering another eleven wars in between. Despite the disparate nature of the conflicts, Moten proffers six war termination principles gleaned from this history, including: war aims change constantly but "gradually converge" toward an agreement to end hostilities; war fighting cannot be sequestered from "the influence of the world beyond"; and the limited usefulness of decisive campaign/victory in understanding war termination.

There are three over-arching shortcomings with the existing literature on war termination making them appropriate only in the most general terms for understanding

49. Fred Iklé, *Every War Must End*, Revised (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Iklé reaches similar conclusions to those in other comparative works including Paul Seabury and Angelo Codevilla, *War: Ends and Means* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989); George H. Quester, "Wars Prolonged by Misunderstood Signals," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 392 (How Wars End 1970): 30–39; A J P Taylor, *How Wars End* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985); Robert Rothstein, "Domestic Politics and Peacemaking: Reconciling Incompatible Imperatives," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 392 (How Wars End 1970): 62–75; James L. Foster and Garry D. Brewer, "And the Clocks Were Striking Thirteen: The Termination of War," *Policy Sciences* 7 (1976): 225–43.

50. Ashley Tellis J., "Terminating Intervention: Understanding Exit Strategy and U.S. Involvement in Intrastate Conflicts," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 2 (1996): 117–51; David M. Edelstein, "Exit Lessons," *Wilson Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2009): 34–39.

how and why decision-makers end humanitarian interventions. First, most studies adopt the Clausewitzian cost-benefit calculation as the criterion for planning and judging exit strategies.⁵¹ Clausewitz famously wrote that war is an extension of politics. Consequently, a war must end if the effort expended to achieve war objectives exceeds the value of the war's political goal. Following Clausewitz further, planning for war termination is central to war initiation. Any other approach is politically short-sighted and undermines victory.⁵² Considerations outside this cost-benefit calculation—which is itself assessed exclusively in terms of resources expended versus political goal to be achieved—and how they might shape decisions about war termination, are usually not explored. To the extent authors accept other issues affect exit strategies, these are considered symptomatic of Clausewitzian wartime friction or problems implementing an exit strategy that should have been accommodated at the outset.⁵³ For humanitarian interventions, however, moral imperatives complicate both the costs and benefits side of the strategic decision-making equation because human rights objectives are the ends but externally-imposed violence is the means. Moral considerations affect cost/benefit calculations but also operate independently in decisions about ending humanitarian interventions short of victory.

Second, in orthodox war termination analyses, little attention is paid to contemplating when a war should stop before political objectives are reached or before costs to any party become too great to bear. The ideal exit thus occurs after victory is achieved. There is also little discussion of instances a war should not be terminated but rather continue *despite* its burden of costs outweighing its political gain.

Third, the stochastic nature of violent conflict further complicates the question of war termination, what Roy Licklider refers to as “war [taking] on a dynamic of its own” such that we cannot “assume that the causes or the issues of the war influence

51. James C. Walker, “War Termination: Why, When, Who What, Where and How” (Naval War College, Newport R.I., 1996); Michael C Griffith, “War Termination: Theory, Doctrine and Practice” (US Army Command and General Staff College, 1992); Tellis, “Terminating Intervention: Understanding Exit Strategy and U.S. Involvement in Intrastate Conflicts.”

52. Clausewitz, *On War*.

53. Dominic J. Caraccilo, *Beyond Guns and Steel: A War Termination Strategy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2011).

its conclusion”. Instead,

the important variables may have more to do with things that occur during the war rather than its ostensible causes or at least wars with similar causes may have very different patterns of termination. This may also explain why many such wars end with the ostensible causes not really addressed.⁵⁴

Some writers including David Baum, Jon Western and Joshua Goldstein, have recognised the challenges of planning and adhering to a precise exit strategy leading them to focus on ‘end state planning’ instead.⁵⁵ Although not fixated with a specific moment in time and often concerned more with processes than outcomes, these studies and their incorporation within US military doctrine, share the same theoretical premises as the orthodox literature on war termination. This interest in end state planning has contributed to growing interest among policymakers and military operations planners in the idea of transition as exit, which often involves the continued presence of foreign troops. It is questionable, however, whether this type of ‘exit’ is really an exit at all or simply a type of military occupation.

These challenges persist in three contributions looking explicitly at exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. The first is a 1996 article *Terminating Intervention* by Ashley Tellis, part of a larger RAND Corporation project on US intervention in interstate conflict. The timing of the article leads Tellis to rely on Cold War case studies of Greece, Congo, Lebanon, Dominican Republic, Grenada and Panama, a limitation when considering how his conclusions could be applied to post-Cold War humanitarian interventions. Nevertheless, Tellis’ definition of exit as part of strategy has general applicability. He argues exit strategies should have three components: (1) “limited, stable and worthwhile political objectives to be achieved”; (2) achievable operational goals derived from those political objectives; and (3) “fallback options that must be anticipated” if (1) and (2) cannot be secured “for any conceivable reason”.⁵⁶ Tellis views exit strategies as a means for preventing “entrapment” in a

54. Roy Licklider, “Early Returns: Results of the First Wave of Statistical Studies of Civil War Termination,” *Civil Wars* 1, no. 3 (1998): 127.

55. David Baum, “The Exit Strategy Myth and the End State Reality,” (Washington DC), 2001, Jon Western and Joshua S. Goldstein, “Humanitarian Intervention Comes of Age: Lessons From Somalia to Libya,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2011, no. 6, 48–59.

56. Tellis, “Terminating Intervention: Understanding Exit Strategy and U.S. Involvement in

war by requiring decision-makers to set objective “victory criteria”.⁵⁷

As with other contributions on exit strategies, Tellis’ conception of exit is inextricably linked to victory. Winning is the ultimate objective and when winning by one standard cannot be achieved then the solution is to set a new standard. The main problem with this idea, however, is that definitions of victory are not infinitely elastic. There are discursive and practical limits to how far ‘fallback options’ can deviate from initial political objectives and from the overall expectations of what accounts for a successful intervention.

The second contribution is an edited collection by Richard Caplan, *Exit Strategies and State-Building*,⁵⁸ examining the conclusion of cases where state-building was the primary purpose of foreign intervention. Although the focus of the volume is on peace and stability in state-building operations, a number of the case studies—Sierra Leone and Kosovo in particular—began as humanitarian interventions. Thus some of the wider policy observations regarding exit are of relevance to humanitarian interventions. In his chapter in Caplan’s book, Robert Wilde argues decision-makers are faced with competing normative requirements about their responsibilities when considering when and how to exit from state-building interventions: on the one hand, they are to act as “trustees” with a civilising mission (similar to that expected of colonial authorities); on the other hand, they should allow for local self-determination and exit as soon as possible, regardless of whether the country is “ready”.⁵⁹ Wilde’s focus on normative constraints resonates with my findings regarding US experiences of intervention and the normative requirements incumbent on American exit strategies.

In his concluding chapter, Caplan defines an exit strategy as:

a transitional plan for the disengagement and ultimate withdrawal of external parties from a state or territory, the parties ideally having attained their principal state-building objectives. If the objectives have been attained, a successful

Intrastate Conflicts,” 122.

57. Tellis, “Terminating Intervention: Understanding Exit Strategy and U.S. Involvement in Intrastate Conflicts,” 123.

58. Caplan, *Exit Strategies and State Building*.

59. Ralph Wilde, “Competing Normative Visions of Exit,” in *Exit Strategies and States Building*, ed. Richard Caplan (ebook: Oxford University Press, 2012), 261–75.

exit strategy will contribute to the consolidation of these achievements. If the objectives have not been attained, a successful exit strategy will entail measures to preserve the partial gains or minimise the losses, including any reputational costs to the state-building actors.⁶⁰

In the context of state-building operations, Caplan says a successful exit strategy means leaving behind a “consolidated peace”, which he explains is a “self-sustaining peace”,⁶¹ although he acknowledges this is not always possible. In his list of factors contributing to successful exit—accomplished mission mandate, interests converging among conflicting parties, and a pre-existing functioning state existing—Caplan notes a continuing presence of foreign troops might also be required. It is questionable, however, whether an exit without complete foreign troop withdrawal is an exit at all.

The third contribution is a 2001 UNSG report entitled *No Exit without Strategy* regarding the considerations for determining how and when UN peacekeeping operations should end.⁶² The report sets out some “guidelines for an exit strategy” which differ depending on the extent to which the peacekeeping mandate of establishing “sustainable domestic peace” has been achieved.⁶³ Where the mandate has been only partially achieved, the report argues troop withdrawal decisions should be based on whether more harm than good is to be achieved by ending the mission, mindful of governments’ willingness to maintain the necessary troop commitment.⁶⁴ The report acknowledges that although sustainable peace is the goal, it is “not always possible in the short run”.⁶⁵ Beyond this UN report, there is a debate within the peacekeeping literature about the conditions required for success. Within this literature there is a consensus that peacekeeping operations can succeed when there is a clear mandate for operation and a great power is involved in delivering on that mandate. The time horizon for achieving ‘success’ can be lengthy and sustained financial, resources and

60. Richard Caplan, “Policy Implications,” in *Exit Strategies and States Building*, ed. Richard Caplan (ebook: Oxford University Press, 2012), 313.

61. *Ibid.*, 314.

62. United Nations Secretary-General, *No Exit without Strategy: Security Council Decision-Making and the Closure or Transition of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, Report of the Secretary-General S/2001/394 (New York: United Nations Security Council, April 20, 2001).

63. *Ibid.*, para 10.

64. *Ibid.*, paras 29-34, 55-58.

65. *Ibid.*, para 24.

political commitment is required over this time to deliver intended outcomes.⁶⁶ Much like the Caplan volume, these contributions on peacekeeping are not specifically about humanitarian interventions but there is overlap in the missions often used as illustrations, for example Kosovo and Somalia. A number of Caplan's policy recommendations also mirror those recommendations and findings found in these works.

While these three works are instructive, they are ultimately about state-building and peacekeeping operations that, as I noted in Section 2.2 are sometimes related but otherwise distinct from humanitarian interventions. The goals of state-building and peacekeeping are fostering liberal democratic institutions and resolving armed conflict, and these goals shape success metrics and contemplated exit strategies. It is not apparent how applying these standards to humanitarian interventions are illuminating or effective.

A circular prescription has filled the gap in understanding the relationship between success and exit in humanitarian interventions: successful intervention requires foreign forces to exit, and in order to exit smoothly, foreign forces must succeed at their mission.⁶⁷ To borrow David Edelstein's framing, the belief is "there is no such thing as a failed intervention capped by a good exit strategy".⁶⁸ This assumption is also exhibited in attempts to engage concretely with issues such as what tasks soldiers should carry out in humanitarian intervention and to establish criteria for military success. For example, in their appraisal of humanitarian interventions from Somalia in 1992 to Libya in 2011, Jon Western and Joshua Goldstein argue that on balance, interventions have demonstrated potential to protect civilians and truncate civil wars.⁶⁹ They point to the need for quick action, strong UN mandates and sufficient troop commitments as requirements for a successful intervention. However

66. Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brulé, *Evaluating Peacekeeping Missions: A Typology of Success and Failure in International Interventions* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

67. C. A. J. Coady, "The Dilemmas of Militant Humanitarianism," *Global Change, Peace and Security* 20, no. 3 (2008): 257.

68. Edelstein, "Exit Lessons."

69. Western and Goldstein, "Humanitarian Intervention Comes of Age: Lessons From Somalia to Libya."

in arguing for a “transition strategy” rather than an exit strategy for foreign troops, Western and Goldstein end up creating a division between victory in the military aspect of humanitarian intervention and longer-term, post-conflict state-building activities.⁷⁰

Another example can be found in the Mass Atrocity Response Operations (MARO) Handbook,⁷¹ a ground-breaking effort by Sarah Sewall and her colleagues to establish mass atrocity prevention and response as a distinct category of military operation. The handbook represents a unique attempt to think through the practical considerations of using US soldiers in humanitarian interventions. The conceptual framework of MARO is an operational environment in which there are multiple actors, an “illusion of impartiality”, and the “escalation dynamic of mass atrocities”.⁷² It provides guidance for US military planners on how to craft mission objectives and understand tactical considerations specific to situations where widespread threats to civilians are occurring or imminent. The authors note one of the main political considerations for interveners is determining how much responsibility they have for civilian protection as this will affect troop actions and withdrawal strategy.⁷³ Such political considerations, however are largely separated from the work of operational planners. In the process of fitting within existing frameworks governing military action, the handbook accepts the principles of victory and exit strategies associated with conventional military operational planning. As a result, the MARO Handbook makes explicit what is presumed or otherwise taken for granted in other analyses of humanitarian interventions: the unique character of humanitarian interventions does not extend to our conceptualisation of victory and exit in these military operations.

A small group of just war scholars has begun to question the extent to which conventional frameworks for understanding victory and exit strategies can adequately address some of the difficulties decision-makers have ending a war. This group has

70. Ibid., 59.

71. Sarah Sewall, Dwight Raymond, and Sally Chin, *MARO - Mass Atrocity Response Operations: A Military Planning Handbook* (Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School and the US Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, 2007).

72. Ibid., 9.

73. Ibid., 18.

developed an additional branch of just war theory, termed “*jus ex bello*” or “*jus terminatio*”.⁷⁴ To date, most just war scholarship proceeded on the basis that a war satisfying *jus ad bellum* (just reasons for commencing war) and *jus in bello* (justifiable actions during war) criteria is morally justified in being fought until it concludes. *Jus ex bello* proponents argue, however, that in some instances wars commenced and fought justly may need to be ended short of victory because this is the most morally defensible course of action.⁷⁵ In addition, *jus ex bello* permits certain wars commenced unjustly to continue because to end them prematurely would result in a graver injustice.⁷⁶ A war can also justifiably be continued past the initial point of victory because armed force is needed to stop or prevent an injustice manifesting only after the war began. Consequently, a war’s legitimacy should be iteratively assessed throughout its prosecution and terminated or continued as appropriate. Exit decisions should also be separated from decisions about starting a war and how it should be fought.⁷⁷

Jus ex bello thus provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the practical and moral considerations at play in exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. David Rodin, one of its leading proponents has explicitly noted its relevance in these cases.⁷⁸ *Jus ex bello* is currently the only framework grappling with how to justify exit strategies when war’s circumstances, or reasonable beliefs held about those circumstances, change. It also explicitly tackles the phenomenon of war aims that prioritise avoiding defeat rather than winning, ‘sunk costs’,⁷⁹ and risk calculations.⁸⁰ *Ex bello* allows for the possibility that by increasing costs beyond those

74. Darrel Mollendorf, “Jus Ex Bello,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2008): 123–36; Darrel Mollendorf, “Two Doctrines of Jus Ex Bello,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 653–753; David Rodin, “The War Trap: Dilemmas of Jus Terminatio,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 674–95; Daniel Statman, “Ending War Short of Victory? A Contractarian View of Jus Ex Bello,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 720–50; Cecile Fabre, “War Exit,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 631–52; Gabriella Blum and David Luban, “Unsatisfying Wars: Degrees of Risk and the Jus Ex Bello,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 751–80; Janina Dill, “Ending Wars: The Jus Ad Bellum Principles Suspended, Repeated, or Adjusted?,” *Ethics* 125 (2015): 627–30.

75. Mollendorf, “Two Doctrines of Jus Ex Bello,” 124; Statman, “Ending War Short of Victory? A Contractarian View of Jus Ex Bello.”

76. Mollendorf, “Two Doctrines of Jus Ex Bello,” 124.

77. David Rodin, “Ending War: A Response to Richard Miller,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2011): 360.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. Blum and Luban, “Unsatisfying Wars: Degrees of Risk and the Jus Ex Bello.”

considered proportionate prior to war commencing, moral outcomes can be secured. Protagonists may therefore have a moral responsibility to continue a war they know might be unjust overall.⁸¹ Wars could be also justifiably escalated, ratcheting costs in the hope of ultimate moral vindication.

Ex bello theory does not, however, help determine if the ends being sought are themselves justifiable, regardless of whether they have shifted during the course of the war. While *ex bello* provides a means for reconceptualising the relationship between military victory and exit it can only offer a partial explanation, if any, for the decisions US presidents confront when justifying their exit strategies to the American people in humanitarian interventions. If *jus ex bello*-type justifications have traction with the American public, especially when the US president is trying to explain why he has decided to postpone a planned troop withdrawal, expand troop objectives or withdraw soldiers prior to achieving decisive victory, it is important to understand why this is, as well as how it might be complicated by other normative considerations. These are among the questions I seek to answer in my thesis.

Like ‘exit strategy’, the term ‘mission creep’ has also entered public discourse, in this instance as a pejorative way to describe and explain military operations extending beyond planned activities or end dates. Despite its taken-for-granted meaning, there is almost no scholarly work on the conditions creating mission creep or how the idea relates to unimplemented exit strategies. The term emerged in the 1990s when the Supreme Allied Commander Europe expressed his desire to avoid mission creep in the Implementation Force (IFOR) operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁸² Adam Siegel was arguably the first to define the term. He identified four types of “mission change”: task accretion (progressively adding tasks viewed as necessary to achieve initial mission goals); mission shift (when additional tasks disconnected from political decision-making about objectives cause the mission to expand); mission transition (where a mission “undergoes an unclear or unstated shift in objectives”, often through

81. Rodin, “Ending War: A Response to Richard Miller,” 361.

82. Adam B. Siegel, “Mission Creep or Mission Misunderstood?,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 2000, 112–15.

“gradual” modification); and mission leap (where a mission is “radically changed”).⁸³ The 2010 US Army Field Manual, *The Army in Multinational Operations*,⁸⁴ defined the term as “tangential efforts to assist in areas of concern unrelated to assigned duties that cripple efficient mission accomplishment”. The term also appears in the 2016 edition of the manual, without definition, its meaning presumed in statements about commanders needing to “avoid” it.

In terms of analysing mission creep dynamics or causes, Michael Robinson attempted to identify the factors causing NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR) expansion. His focus was on regional and local Kosovo dynamics and does not explain how events in the US contributed, if at all, to this change.⁸⁵ Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray provide the most extensive explanation of how mission creep occurred within the US military and defence establishment since the 9-11 terrorist attacks, but theirs is a meta-analysis of changing institutional mandates and expectations and the effect on American foreign policy.⁸⁶ Although humanitarian interventions like Somalia and Kosovo have been criticised for mission creep, there is an absence of detailed comparative work on how and why the missions shifted over time, and how these changes affected exit strategies or vice versa.

83. Siegel, “Mission Creep or Mission Misunderstood?”

84. The United States Army, *US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-16, The Army in Multinational Operations* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), 2–4.

85. Michael A. Robinson, “Military Operations in Kosovo and the Danger of ‘Mission Creep’,” *Military Review*, May 28, 2014, 1–5.

86. Gordon Adams and Shoon Kathleen Murray, eds., *Mission Creep: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy?* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

Discourse, Justification and Normative Expectations

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I noted existing scholarly and policy literature largely overlooks the issue of humanitarian intervention exit strategies. Instead, analysts tend to presume exit strategies are implemented as transition points between the combat phase of interventions and post-conflict peace-building, even if foreign soldiers frequently remain throughout. Where exit strategies are considered, they are treated parenthetically and rely on orthodox conceptions of victory and war termination. I argued the problem with these prevailing approaches is they do not adequately account for the deep moral impetus motivating humanitarian interventions and constraining expectations of success. To more accurately appreciate the dynamics of exit strategies in US humanitarian interventions, I suggest it is helpful to look at exit strategy discourse, including how it is embedded within culturally constructed justifications for withdrawing troops from military interventions.

To develop a better understanding of this discourse and how it might affect justifications and decision-making about exit, in this chapter I turn to discourse theory for

my conceptual starting point. Discourse theory has numerous entry points and in the first section I chart a course through the various discourse frameworks to show where my thesis fits. I begin by explaining how discourse and culture are understood within international relations (IR) and foreign policy analysis (FPA). Explanations of political discourse theory (PDT), rhetorical presidency public justification theory studies follows.

Next I consider narrative framework theory as a new approach for unpacking American public discourses about US military operations. This narrative framework does not simply exist; it is shaped by citizens' national role conception, including normative expectations for America's international behaviour. My own research supports other scholars in finding America's national role conception centres on three sets of normative expectations for using military force: (1) American exceptionalism and manifest destiny; (2) World War II as an archetype of a 'good' war and the Vietnam War as its antithesis; and (3) winning as morally vindicating the decision to use force. In my thesis I show how commonly-held ideas and perceptions about exit strategies and military force shape ideas about the reasonableness of some political actions and foreclose other options for US presidents¹ as foreign policy decision-makers and affects how they craft and justify exit strategies from humanitarian interventions. While discourse is central to understanding presidential justifications for exit strategies, it does not provide a complete explanation for all exit strategy justifications in every case. To conclude this chapter I consider the wider domestic and international context affecting presidential action, as well as the scope for strategic narrative.

Figure 3.1 is a graphical representation of how I see the theories I discuss in this chapter contributing to a discursive framework for presidential justifications for humanitarian intervention exit strategies. The arrow connecting each component of the framework represents a feedback loop; components are not static or immutable but are themselves sites of discursive struggle in which the president participates during an intervention. One outcome of this discursive struggle is that the way this

1. Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 137.

framework operates in one intervention also shapes how components are constructed in subsequent interventions.

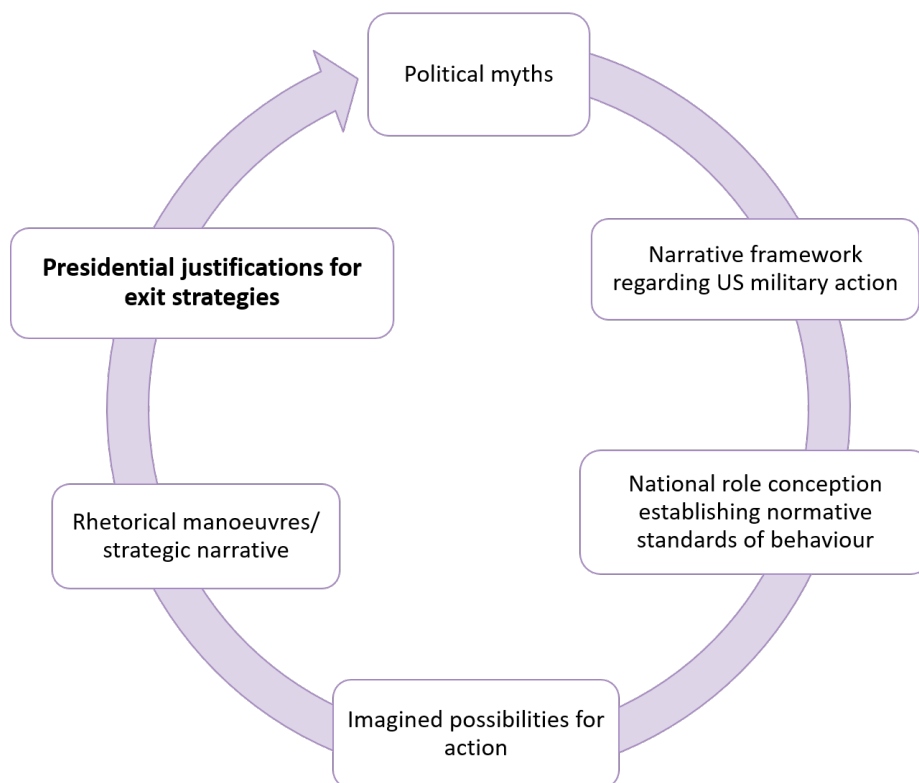


Figure 3.1: Discursive framework of presidential justifications for exit strategies

3.2 A word on normative expectations

The idea that individuals hold certain ideas or beliefs about the world around them and use these ideas to guide their own behaviour as well as judge the behaviour of others, is a well-established tenet of psychology, law, sociology, and political science. These ideas are ‘expectations’ because they are prospective in nature; they anticipate the behaviour of others. An individual’s own actions are also based on presumptions about what other actors’ expect and on others’ reactions. These expectations are ‘normative’ insofar as they contain a moral or values-based judgement; that is, expectations are judgments about behaviour that are ‘good’ or ‘bad’, behaviour that

'ought' or 'ought not' to occur.² Normative expectations can be evidenced through behaviour including speech.

It is not the purpose of my research to investigate the reasonableness or otherwise of the normative expectations held in the context of developing, justifying or implementing exit strategies from humanitarian interventions.³ Nor is it my purpose to measure these normative expectations. I treat normative expectations in the functionalist sense, wherein expectations imbue social action with meaning, with the behaviours they give rise to creating a shared values and identities.

My research focuses on demonstrating the existence of these normative expectations, to identify how the source of these expectations are grounded in pervasive (but not unchanging) ideas in popular American discourse about the role of military force. I explore how these expectations constrain presidential decision-making through a series of case studies demonstrate interplay of normative expectations and their relative influence in the presidential decision-making. In essence, I adopt Cristina Bicchieri's idea that normative expectations constrain presidential discourse and other behaviour because presidents believe that their constituents expect them to fulfil these expectations, even when other choices may be open to them.⁴

Bicchieri's and my work are thus closely aligned with Frank Schimmelfennig's work on rhetorical action and entrapment. However, while Schimmelfennig tends to focus on 'naming and shaming' and reputational risk as a means for coercing compliance with international norms, my work argues that discursive constraints need not be actively invoked by those who judge presidential action. Rather normative expectations and the discursive constraints within them form a part of the pre-existing framework within which contemporary presidents have had to craft their

2. Nicholas Onuf, *International Legal Theory, Essays and Engagements, 1966-2006* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 446.

3. For an example of a work that attempts to do this see Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (online: Princeton University Press, 2015), who looks at whether or not expectations about economic decline in times of war are 'factual'.

4. Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

exit strategy justifications in humanitarian interventions.⁵ For more on my use of normative expectations in this thesis see subsection 3.3.5.

3.3 Discourse and foreign policy action

3.3.1 Discourse and culture in foreign policy analysis

Discourse studies explores the ways humans use modes of expression—frequently language but also visual, auditory and other communications—to create, transmit and reproduce knowledge. Discourse scholars argue discourse is neither neutral nor natural; instead discourse shapes and is shaped by relationships of power, domination, resistance and hierarchy.⁶ As founding discourse scholar Michel Foucault argues, communication is not rational but regulated by ritual:

We know perfectly well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of anything at all in any circumstance whatsoever; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything.⁷

Like Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu argues language is a social-historical phenomenon. Bourdieu notes some expressions of language or utterances are performative; not strictly true or false but “ways of acting or participating in a ritual. . . inseparable from the institution that defines the conditions (such as the place, the time, the agent) that must be fulfilled for the utterance to be effective”.⁸ Bourdieu argues social institutions underpin the power, authority and believability of justifications rather than any claim to rationality.⁹

Bourdieu’s theory of practice¹⁰ counters rationalist decision-making models that presume actions are outcomes of conscious calculation. Instead, “by virtue of the

5. Frank Schimmelfennig, “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union,” *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (2001): 47–80.

6. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2002).

7. Michel Foucault, *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 11.

8. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power*, Reprint, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 8.

9. *Ibid.*, 8–10.

10. Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 14–25.

habitus, individuals are already predisposed to act in certain ways”, and because individuals are the product of social histories that “endure in the *habitus*, their actions can never be analysed adequately as the outcome of conscious calculation”.¹¹ Bourdieu also notes all discourse takes place within certain contexts—‘markets’—such that all actors within those contexts must take into account the ‘market conditions’ in which their words will be received and valued by others. Consequently a process of ‘censorship’ occurs in discourse as actors preemptively attempt to ensure that their speech is compatible with market expectations.¹²

I agree with discourse theorists that social actors construct their reality. The ontological assumptions underpinning discourse theory can be categorised as *idealist*.¹³ My epistemological approach is social constructionist.¹⁴ I position myself alongside social scientists in arguing knowledge construction occurs “against a background of shared interpretations, practices and language; they occur within our historical, cultural and gendered ways of being”.¹⁵ The source of ideas derives from humans “making sense” of the physical world and their relationships with others through inter-subjective, meaning-making activities.¹⁶

The discourse theories of Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and others have influenced inquiry across the humanities.¹⁷ Within political science and IR, post-structuralists were the first discourse scholars, arguing language should be taken seriously and explaining states and other foreign policy actors are constituted in discourse. Discursive deconstruction in IR allows analysts to look behind unquestioned axioms of identity, power and rationality shaping our understanding of foreign policy action.¹⁸

11. Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power*, 16–17.

12. *Ibid.*, 19.

13. Norman Blaikie, *Approaches to Social Enquiry*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 16.

14. *Ibid.*, 22.

15. *Ibid.*, 23.

16. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

17. Ove K. Pedersen, *Discourse Analysis*, Working Paper 65 (Frederiksberg: Copenhagen Business School, 2009); Michael Karlberg, “Discourse Theory and Peace,” in *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, ed. Daniel J. Christie (Malden: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2012).

18. Lene Hansen, “Reconstructing Desecuritisation: The Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply It,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 99.

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) is an agent-oriented branch of IR theory focusing on decisions made by individuals or groups about issues beyond the borders of the nation-state.¹⁹ FPA provides a framework within which comparatively recent efforts to understand how culture and social constructions affect state behaviour can be integrated into IR analysis.²⁰ FPA's theoretical antecedents lie mainly in the work of social constructivists, acknowledging ideas construct preferences, interests and the material world. FPA goes further than most social constructivist thinking, placing human decision-makers as the purveyors of ideas, rather than the disembodied ideas themselves, at the crux of inquiry.²¹ For example, Richard Jackson explains how the US 'war on terror' and '9/11' have become cultural ideographs²² and Frédéric Mérand uses Bourdieu's sociological framework rather than 'strategic culture' to explain challenges to maintaining common European identity.²³ FPA also provides an avenue for acknowledging domestic constraints and context in shaping state behaviour.

In her comprehensive guide to FPA, Valerie Hudson provides a typology of its main levels of analysis, each with different foci and investigative approaches. These levels are: cognitive processes; leader personality and orientation; small group dynamics; organisational process; bureaucratic politics; domestic political considerations; national attributes; regional and international systems, and culture and identity.²⁴ Hudson contends this final category—culture and identity—is one of the least developed in FPA and it is where I have situated my investigation.²⁵

A key aspect of the relationship between discourse theory and the study of culture in FPA is that discourse provides an insight into the way culture is understood, processed, recreated and challenged. Discourse is what gives culture meaning because

19. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 4, 7.

20. Valerie M. Hudson, ed., *Culture & Foreign Policy* (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1997).

21. Margaret Sprout and Harold Sprout, *An Ecological Paradigm for the Study of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Centre of International Studies, 1968).

22. Richard Jackson, "Culture, Identity and Hegemony: Continuity and (the Lack of) Change in US Counterterrorism Policy from Bush to Obama," *International Politics* 48, nos. 2-3 (2011): 390–411.

23. Frédéric Mérand, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Birth of European Defense," *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 342–74.

24. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 34.

25. *Ibid.*, 118.

it is how meaning is constructed.²⁶ In conducting discourse analysis, foreign policy analysts generally focus on public texts. Discourse analysis in FPA is less concerned with the ‘inner workings’ of decision-makers (unlike, for example, those studying political psychology) and instead focuses on how discourses are invoked to achieve particular purposes. I agree with Kenneth Wilkening that it is useful to look at questions of culture in foreign policy analysis, not because of any resulting claims about causality in decision-making, but because of the relationship culture has to the broader issue of power in politics; that is, as an endeavour to explore which cultural ideas are harnessed by whom to achieve what purposes.²⁷

While culture is an important field of inquiry in FPA, social context has been part of strategic studies literature, albeit at the margins. In 1977 Russell Weigley wrote about an “American way of war”.²⁸ That same year Jack Snyder introduced the concept of ‘strategic culture’ to understand the USSR’s nuclear doctrine.²⁹ In the subsequent decades there was also some peripheral scholarly interest in using culture to explain different approaches by the US and other countries to assessing their national security interests, threat perceptions and war fighting approaches. Examples include Colin Gray’s discussion of an American ‘national style’,³⁰ and K.P. O’Reilly’s analysis of America’s ‘rogue states’ doctrine.³¹ Some scholars have also explored links between strategic culture and presidential discourse, including studies of the role US presidents can play in shaping strategic culture. For example, in analysing

26. Alan Cienki and Dvora Yanow, “Why Metaphor and Other Tropes? Linguistic Approaches to Analysing Policies and the Political,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16, no. 2 (2013): 168, accessed October 30, 2017; David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Rev. ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

27. Kenneth E. Wilkening, “Culture and Japanese Citizen Influence on the Transboundary Air Pollution Issue in Northeast Asia,” *Political Psychology* 20, no. 4 (1999): 701–23.

28. Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana University Press paperback ed, *The Wars of the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

29. Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* R-2154-AF (Washington D.C.: RAND Corporation, September 1977).

30. Colin S. Gray, “National Style in Strategy: The American Example,” *International Security* 6, no. 2 (1981): 21–47.

31. K. P. O’Reilly, “A Rogue Doctrine?: The Role of Strategic Culture on US Foreign Policy Behavior: *A Rogue Doctrine?*,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, no. 1 (2013): 57–77; See also: Carnes Lord, “American Strategic Culture,” *Comparative Strategy* 5, no. 3 (1985): 269–93; Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson's influence on US foreign policy, Stephen Walker and Mark Schafer conclude these presidents' beliefs about the nature of the "political universe" in which they operated affected their political decisions.³²

Nevertheless, prevailing approaches to studying American strategic culture suffer some limitations. First, these works commonly privilege the US historical experience without always acknowledging collective memories of these experiences or the lessons learned are themselves socially embedded. Recent illustrative but not unique examples are found in a 2014 volume of *Contemporary Security Policy* dedicated to US strategic culture, including Brice Harris' contribution in which he takes as axiomatic US strategic culture causing Americans to "substitute technology for strategy in war".³³ Such contributions do not explain where US strategic culture comes from or why certain experiences yield cultural legacies and others do not. Instead, 'culture' is used as an explanation of last resort; to cover causative elements resistant to shoehorning into realist explanations.³⁴ Looking directly at presidential justifications allows us to get behind these assumed tenets of strategic culture, unpacking ideas that might not necessarily be wholly truthful or accurately applied but are nevertheless salient in providing the moral basis for strategic action.

Second, other approaches to strategic culture delve into the realm of political psychology, to uncover the origins of individual belief systems, travelling down the difficult path of discerning intention, motivation and individual agency in strategic decision-making. Such micro-level analysis may prove interesting but it is difficult to grasp the overall trajectory of culture, or discern patterns in strategic culture-making or -reinforcement. The social context in which the individual is situated may be downplayed such that influences on an individual's reasoning—what is within the realm of imagined possibilities—are only addressed parenthetically. While I do not explore political psychology in this thesis, I acknowledge the context of presidential

32. Stephen G. Walker and Mark Schafer, "Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as Cultural Icons of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 6 (2007): 747–76.

33. Brice F. Harris, "United States Strategic Culture and Asia-Pacific Security," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 2 (2014): 290–309.

34. Mérand, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Birth of European Defense."

discourse in what I refer to as “room for rhetorical manoeuvre”, which I discuss in section 3.5 below.

Despite its potential to yield new insights, research on culture and discourse remains at the margins of IR, FPA and strategic studies.³⁵ On the specific topic of humanitarian intervention, there are three contributions worth mentioning, although all focus on the decisions to commence rather than end intervention. In her discourse analysis of UNSC debates about intervention, Carrie Booth Walling shows UNSC members are more likely to support intervention when they agree to construct human rights as compatible with ideas of sovereignty.³⁶ Booth Walling’s study influenced decision-making quantitative analysis in other humanitarian crises, including Juraĵ Medzihorsky and colleagues’ look at how human rights discourse featured in UNSC debates about intervention in Syria.³⁷ Martha Finnemore takes a broad view of the phenomenon of intervention, tracing how the idea and its use have changed over 400 years. She argues state intervention persists while the reasons for and meaning of intervention shifted. Finnemore notes the types of interventions rejected in earlier times have now been normalised. Changes in perspectives arose as the normative value of armed force declined, equality norms expanded and the importance of international law increased.³⁸ In his analysis of humanitarian intervention discourse, Gustavo Gozzi traces the discursive shift from humanitarian intervention to responsibility to protect arguing both discourses fundamentally challenge sovereignty ideas and represent “hegemonic discourse”.³⁹

My approach extends Booth Walling’s, Finnemore’s and Gozzi’s work on the initial stages of humanitarian interventions, using discourse analysis to develop explanations

35. Jennifer Milliken, “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods,” *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 225–54.

36. Carrie Booth Walling, *All Necessary Measures: The United Nations and Humanitarian Intervention*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

37. Juraĵ Medzihorsky, Milos Popovic, and Erin K. Jenne, “Rhetoric of Civil Conflict Management: United Nations Security Council Debates over the Syrian Civil War,” *Research & Politics* 4, no. 2 (2017): 1–10.

38. Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

39. Gustavo Gozzi, “The “Discourse” of International Law and Humanitarian Intervention: The “Discourse” of International Law,” *Ratio Juris* 30, no. 2 (2017): 186–204.

for ending interventions. In aligning my work with the cultural and discourse school of thought in FPA my thesis provides a new avenue for considering the dynamics of humanitarian intervention exit strategy decision-making and justifications. My theoretical approach draws on FPA but is also informed by political discourse theory, public justification theory and rhetorical presidency analysis. All these approaches consider how elite decision-makers use ideas, myths and narratives that resonate with their audiences to create compelling justifications for political action.

3.3.2 Political discourse theory

Political discourse comprises actions and interactions occurring predominantly in the public sphere between participants in political processes, including politicians, bureaucrats, citizens, organisations and institutions. Political discourse reflects and is constrained by schematic forms of political action.⁴⁰ Before political discourse theory (PDT) was established in the 1960s as a distinct field of research, similar inquiries occurred in rhetoric and argumentation studies. There are four main approaches to PDT, each of which are associated with their principle proponents: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,⁴¹ Paul Chilton,⁴² Isabel and Norman Fairclough,⁴³ and Ruth Wodak and Martin Riesgl.⁴⁴ My work in this thesis draws most heavily on Wodak

40. Teun A. van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis?," in *Political Linguistics*, ed. Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1995), 28.

41. Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, "Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory," in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE, 2002); Claire Sutherland, "Nation-Building through Discourse Theory," *ASEAN* 11, no. 2 (2005): 191; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

42. Paul Chilton and Christina Schäffner, "Introduction: Themes and Principles in the Analysis of Political Discourse," in *Politics as Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse*, ed. Paul A. Chilton and Christina Schäffner (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002), 1–44; Paul A. Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

43. Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis. a Method for Advanced Students* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012); Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd (London: SAGE, 2009), 1–33; Ruth Wodak et al., *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis: In Search of Meaning* (London: SAGE, 2000); Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor, *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007).

44. Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd (London: SAGE, 2009), 87–121; Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak, eds., *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003).

and Reisigl's discourse-historical approach (DHA).

Although my thesis is situated within DHA, it is important to emphasise some common themes across all PDTs informing my investigative approach. First, all political discourse theorists agree language is socially constituted and affected by institutional and historical constraints, as well as structures of power, domination and hierarchy. I argue humanitarian interventions, as political endeavours, are constrained by collective historical understandings and dominant, 'common sense' views of how intervention should be conducted and ended. Second, political discourse is more than explanation; it is a process of argumentation in which social actors attempt to persuade others of the normative superiority of their world views. I argue that during interventions, one major purpose US presidents have is to convince their domestic constituents that troop withdrawal choices are morally justified and satisfy normative expectations of appropriate action. Third, although interesting, it is not important whether the US president "believes" his exit strategy justifications. What matters is his or her decision to frame justifications in particular ways believing they convince Americans of the rightness of his or her actions because these frames are sufficiently internalised as 'truthful' representations of reality. Finally, political discourse is not fixed but subject to processes of contested reproduction changing over time. For humanitarian interventions, I argue debates in the US and the wider international community about using military force to defend human rights affect the imagined possibilities available for presidents justifying decisions about withdrawing troops from humanitarian interventions.

Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl and their colleagues developed the discourse-historical approach (DHA) in the late 1980s.⁴⁵ Much DHA work occurred outside the English-speaking academic world with most publications in German. DHA focuses on the "validity claim of normative rightness" occurring through argumentation.⁴⁶

45. Wodak and Meyer, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology"; Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)."

46. Martin Reisigl, "Argumentation Analysis and the Discourse-Historical Approach: A Methodological Framework," in *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies*, ed. Christopher Hart and Piotr Cap (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 69.

DHA scholars integrate normative dimensions into their analysis, primarily by distinguishing between reasonable and fallacious argumentation. DHA provides ten “pragma-dialectical rules of critical discussion” to help distinguish between ‘sound’ and ‘fallacious’ argumentation, although Martin Reisigl argues these ten principles are not rigid rules but rather function as guidelines.⁴⁷ Argumentation soundness is one area explored by DHA scholars and Reisigl identifies another three: (a) functional, formal and content-related analysis of argumentation; (b) analysis of the macro-, meso- or micro-structure of argumentation; and (c) argument representation versus argument performance.⁴⁸

Public justification fits within the DHA approach. For DHA scholars, argumentation is ultimately a strategic issue. *Topoi* are a way of strategically organising speech acts to indicate how social actors can most convincingly engage in argumentation.⁴⁹ Like other DHA scholars, my work is content-related; I identify the main ideas underpinning the ways US presidents justify decisions to withdraw troops from humanitarian interventions. My approach uses the rhetorical concept of *topoi* as a means for identifying the dynamic premises of arguments, which Reisigl says reveals the “specific character of discourses (subject positions, controversial claims, justification strategies, ideologies, etc.)”.⁵⁰ The way I use *topoi* in my thesis is as “normative concepts”, which are part of normative concepts analysis (NOCA) and discourse tracing methods of studying public justification. I discuss these methods in Chapter 4.

3.3.3 Public justification theory

DHA scholars influenced public justification theory (PJT) when it emerged in 2015. PJT focuses on argumentation in public political communication. Studies of public justification acknowledge inter-subjective reasoning as central to the public, political

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 76.

49. Ibid., 90.

50. Ibid., 77.

answers given to the ‘why?’ question asked of social actors.⁵¹ PJT scholars trace the way language reflects and shapes justifications, examining the “communicative process of legitimacy-making (and unmaking) in the public sphere”.⁵² Public justification is grounded in social context. Social context underpins an actor’s legitimacy and authority to speak as well as furnishes her with reasons likely to resonate with an audience and have the most persuasive value. In order to craft justifications that “make sense”, an actor will invariably rely on reasons with a “taken-for-granted” quality.⁵³ To understand public justifications, researchers must therefore identify and deconstruct these unquestioned/unquestionable ideas and reflect on how they are (re)produced, internalised or subverted, examining the process of ‘creating reality’.

Contemporary public justification theory draws much from the work of leading DHA scholar Theo van Leeuwen who set out a framework for analysing legitimation in human communication.⁵⁴ van Leeuwen proposes four categories of legitimation: “authorisation” (based on reference to authority of tradition, custom, law and institutional authority); “moral evaluation” (based on values); “rationalisation” (based on goals and uses of institutionalised social action); and “mythopoesis” (conveyed through narratives rewarding legitimate action).⁵⁵ vanLeeuwen suggests legitimation is not restricted to speech acts but can be performed through visual or musical representations.⁵⁶

Building on van Leeuwen’s work, Anthony Reyes examines how “political leaders justify their political agendas”. He sees political legitimisation, or public justification, as behaviour “enacted by argumentation”, seeking audience approval.⁵⁷ Reyes’ categories of legitimisation are:

51. Abulof and Kornprobst, “Unpacking Public Justification.”

52. Abulof and Kornprobst, “Introduction,” 9.

53. *Ibid.*, 6.

54. Theo van Leeuwen, “Legitimation in Discourse and Communication,” *Discourse & Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007): 91–112.

55. *Ibid.*, 92.

56. *Ibid.*, 107.

57. Antonio Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions,” *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 6 (2011): 782–84.

1. *Legitimisation through emotions.* Speakers create two sides to a given event resulting in a positively-portrayed ‘us’ group and a negatively depicted ‘them’ group.⁵⁸
2. *Legitimisation through a hypothetical future.* Speakers identify a future threat requiring immediate present action.
3. *Legitimisation through rationality.* Speakers refer to socially-acceptable decision-making processes to present actions as thoughtful and considered judgments.⁵⁹
4. *Legitimisation through voices of expertise.* Speakers identify experts in a specific field as supporting a specific course of action.
5. *Altruism.* Speakers present a course of action as serving the ‘common good’ including the audience and/or a remote society in need of ‘our’ help.⁶⁰

I use both van Leeuwen and Reyes’ categorisations of justification practices as a starting point for analysing presidential public justifications for humanitarian intervention exit strategies. The US president occupies a unique social position as a person with the power to define political reality as viewed from the vantage point of the United States. Portraying this reality also sets the standards for how others outside the US judge its actions. Again, it is not about whether those outside the US believe the justifications themselves are ‘true’ but that they form the frame of legitimate and legitimisable American foreign policy action. At the same time, for a president’s definition to be believed, to be considered legitimate and to ‘resonate’ with his audience, the president’s approach must fit within the American people’s ‘taken-for-granted’, normative expectations. It is valuable, therefore, to understand how the president reflects and shapes the reality of humanitarian interventions through his exit strategy justifications. I discuss this view in greater detail in section

58. See also Wodak et al., *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*; Edward J. Lordan, *Case for Combat: How Presidents Persuade Americans to Go to War* (ebook: EBSCO Publishing, 2010), 12.

59. David Zarefsky, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2004): 607–20.

60. Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions,” 785–87.

3.3.4 drawing on the work of scholars who study the ‘rhetorical presidency’.

3.3.4 The rhetorical presidency during wartime

The rhetorical presidency—the study of US presidential discourse⁶¹—was pioneered in the 1980s, first in the work of J.W. Ceaser and colleagues,⁶² and then Jeffrey Tulis in *The Rhetorical Presidency*.⁶³ The central motivation for this research is that presidential rhetoric matters, even if its impact cannot always be guaranteed.⁶⁴ Despite political, social and technological changes the power of the institution of the presidency is such that it defines national realities and constitutes the American nation.⁶⁵ Notwithstanding its significance, the literature on presidential discourse in wartime remains relatively small and focuses almost exclusively on how US presidents frame decisions to start wars or continue fighting them.⁶⁶ My work extends this literature into exit strategies and decisions to end humanitarian interventions.

At no time is the president’s ability to define reality for the American people more marked than when the US is fighting wars overseas. The majority of US citizens have no direct experience of military action and must therefore look to people like their president who hold themselves out as authorities on the realities of war. Even with the prevalence of news media, the information journalists can access is partial

61. Mary E. Stuckey, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric,” *Review of Communication* 10, no. 1 (2010): 38–52; Terri Bimes, “Understanding the Rhetorical Presidency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, ed. George C. Edwards and William G. Howell, The Oxford Handbooks of American Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

62. J. W. Ceaser et al., “The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency,” in *Rethinking the Presidency*, ed. Thomas E. Cronin (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 233–52.

63. Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Pr, 1987).

64. Zarefsky, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” 611.

65. Stuckey, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric,” 41; Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *Before the Rhetorical Presidency*, 1st edition, Presidential Rhetoric Series 19 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 133.

66. Eran Ben-Porath, “Rhetoric of Atrocities: The Place of Horrific Human Rights Abuses in Presidential Persuasion Efforts,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2007): 181–202; Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, “Post-Realism, Just War and the Gulf War Debate,” in *Politically Speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere*, ed. Ofer Feldman and Christ’l De Landtsheer (Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), 184–93; Andrew J. Brown, “The Righteous Use of Violence: Rhetoric and Mythmaking before the First Gulf War (1990–91),” *PoLAR* 27, no. 2 (2004): 20–44; Alfred Fusman, “U.S. Presidential Discourse, September 11–20, 2001: The Birth of the War on Terror,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 34 (2013): 126–51.

and must frequently rely on government sources; fuller analysis is also often not timely. Therefore how US presidents frame wars—motivations, conduct, objectives, evaluations—affects how those wars are understood and remembered by the American people.⁶⁷

Looking at a president's public justifications for military decisions reveals which options are considered 'legitimate' and enables us to identify which choices are open or foreclosed.⁶⁸ Presidential justifications therefore reflect, reinforce and shape a language of practicality within which the wider security and foreign relations community discusses and advocates particular policy positions.⁶⁹ As Consuelo Cruz argues, the pervasiveness of particular ideas central to identity formation can constrain the "collective field of imaginable possibilities" of action.⁷⁰ What US discourse permits as legitimate or legitimisable is all the more important given America's great power status, its ability to support its normative predispositions with military force, and the extent to which its normative frameworks have historically been assimilated into global institutional structures.⁷¹ This is particularly true of the international framework for using military force for humanitarian purposes.

The classic objection to this discursive approach, extended to discourse analysis more generally in strategic studies and IR, is that regardless of his motivations, presidential justifications do not matter. After all, civilian control of the military is well-established in the US and the president has authority—within the bounds of the Constitution—to deploy troops and withdraw them as he sees fit. Presidents taking the trouble to communicate decisions to the American people, let alone convince

67. Lordan, *Case for Combat: How Presidents Persuade Americans to Go to War*, This prevailing power of the president can be seen, for example, in the narrative about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that became the dominant narrative for that war, despite its inaccuracy.

68. Vanessa B. Beasley, "Identity, Democracy and Presidential Rhetoric," in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas*, ed. Roderick P. Hart and Bartholomew H. Sparrow (Rowman / Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 20.

69. G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Metapolitics of the 2002 Iraq Debate: Public Policy and the Network Imaginary," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2010): 67; D. Scott Bennett, "Democracy, Regime Change and Rivalry Termination," *International Interactions* 22, no. 4 (1997): 172–73, 178.

70. Consuelo Cruz, "Identity and Persuasion: How Nations Remember Their Pasts and Make Their Futures," *World Politics* 52, no. 3 (2000): 277.

71. Chris Brown, "Do Great Powers Have Great Responsibilities? Great Powers and Moral Agency," *Global Society* 18, no. 1 (2004): 5–19.

them the decisions are legitimate, is arguably a mere courtesy rather than a demand of the office, as the long history of covert military operations under every president since George Washington attests.⁷² Further, even if one accepts the president's role involves justifying foreign policy decisions, justifications are arguably just the window dressing of military action and do not have substantive bearing on the actual killing, dying and political transformation in war. This is Stephen Walt's view. A major critic of the poststructuralist/discursive IR approaches Walt argues "issues of war and peace are too important for the field to be diverted into a prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world".⁷³ My position is public discourse is far from removed from reality; it is the way in which we create, represent and understand reality. It is precisely the seriousness of war and peace issues that behave us to move discourse from the margins to the centre of our analysis of foreign policy decision-making.

There are a number of political and practical reasons why presidential justifications are important during wartime and why analytic frameworks acknowledging their normative foundations are useful. The importance of presidential justifications relates partly to questions of political legitimacy⁷⁴ and partly to the role of political discourse discussed in Section 3.3.2 above. First, employing military force involves making inherently moral choices about life and death. Citizens have a stake in constructing their nation's character and thus have an interest in how, when and under what circumstances wars are fought, including acceptable levels of American and foreign casualties. Pressure to justify and legitimise war-making and -ending decisions is amplified in humanitarian interventions because these operations are grounded in moral rightness claims and willingness to sacrifice a nation's own citizens to save the

72. Stephen F. Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

73. Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 223.

74. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994); A. John Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on Rights and Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964); Beasley, "Politics, Discourse, and American Society."

lives of foreigners.⁷⁵

Second, even when decisions about war are constructed in ways assumed to be morally clear—for example, responding to an existential threat, or fulfilling ‘national security’ objectives—they are ultimately normative judgments.⁷⁶ The ethical issues involved make it incumbent upon democratically-elected leaders to justify these decisions to their populations. Analysing presidential strategies of legitimation thus has potential to reveal “cause-consequence effects about shared beliefs within a cultural group” and explain how they affect war and national security decisions.⁷⁷

Third, in democratic societies, leaders need to justify their political actions to maintain legitimacy and be re-elected. Appearing morally consistent bolsters credibility and supports a government defending its legitimacy. Fourth, believable justifications ensure public support for military action; an essential component of a war’s success.⁷⁸ Finally, as pointed out in section 3.3.2, the primary goal of political discourse is convincing other members of the social group a particular course of action is the most correct.⁷⁹

As I noted in section 3.3.2, while it is important to acknowledge presidential rhetoric may at times be insincere or calculated to manipulate, this does not diminish the value of studying public justification. Public statements demonstrate, at the very least, the speaker believes her audience will find such statements persuasive and consequently “even insincere speech may shape future sincere discourse”.⁸⁰ The

75. Nathaniel Berman, “Intervention in a ‘Divided World’: Axes of Legitimacy,” in *Human Rights, Intervention and the Use of Force*, ed. Philip Alston and Euan MacDonald (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 215–42; Denise M. Bostdorff, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Cheyney Ryan, “The Dilemma of Cosmopolitan Soldiering,” in *Heroism and the Changing Character of War: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 120–41; Roberta L. Coles, “Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s’ War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined,” *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 4 (2002): 404.

76. Campbell, *Writing Security*; Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

77. Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions,” 783.

78. A point Carl von Clausewitz acknowledges in one of his ‘trinitities’ required for victory. Clausewitz, *On War*.

79. Piotr Cap, “Towards the Proximization Model of the Analysis of Legitimization in Political Discourse,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (2008): 17–41.

80. Abulof and Kornprobst, “Introduction,” 10.

primary interest for public justification researchers and for this thesis, therefore, is not to uncover the subconscious core of presidential intent or motivation or reveal the truthfulness of particular statements; rather, it is to make apparent the discursive strategies adopted in service of a specific political objective.

There are other good reasons for excluding motivations and intentions from my examination of humanitarian interventions, not least because there is a surfeit of popular and scholarly discussion of the motivations of military action, including interrogations of the genuineness of professed humanitarian intentions and assertions of mixed or ulterior motives for intervention. This interest is understandable and the veracity of a government's claims to be acting with a humanitarian purpose may indeed play a role in influencing the way an armed intervention is conducted and ended. At the same time, trying to discern 'real' or 'true' intention is not possible with any degree of certainty. Individual decision-makers rarely behave with a single purpose; there could (and most likely are) a range of motivations for a particular president deciding to deploy US armed forces in a foreign territory. The existence of other, non-humanitarian motives also does not prevent an intervention from being classified as humanitarian.⁸¹

Rhetorical presidency studies show the president cannot craft their war rhetoric in a vacuum. Presidents must fit their rhetoric into a narrative framework that resonates with the American people to be believed and for their decisions to be considered legitimate. In section 3.3.5 I look at this idea of narrative frameworks and how they manifest in the humanitarian intervention context.

3.3.5 Narrative framework and national role conception

Elements comprising the context of presidential public justifications constitute a narrative framework. This idea is drawn from Walter R. Fisher who argues humans judge

⁸¹ Fernando R. Tesón, "Humanitarian Intervention: Loose Ends," *Journal of Military Ethics* 10, no. 3 (2011): 192–212.

rationality based on—and are thus more convinced by—communications resonating with stories believed to be true about their lives.⁸² Fisher’s narrative paradigm theory has much in common with the schema theory of political communication, which examines how people process new information they receive about particular events. Schema theorists such as Doris Graber argue individuals assimilate new information based on existing knowledge they have about a situation.⁸³ Narrative framework also maps onto Nathan Leites’ ‘operational code’,⁸⁴ a set of “general beliefs about fundamental issues of history and central questions of politics” affecting elite decision-making.⁸⁵ Leites identified a Bolshevik operational code underpinning Soviet action but Alexander George suggests the concept can be used to understand actors’ assumptions about the nature of political conflict.⁸⁶

There is a reflexive, dynamic relationship between the dominant narrative framework, justification and strategic action. US presidents will, by-and-large, take actions considered justifiable, but justifiable actions are those consistent with the dominant narrative framework. To maintain legitimacy, US Presidents are *required* to draw on the American narrative to craft convincing justifications for decisions to withdraw troops from humanitarian interventions. Martha Finnemore locates this type of reasoning in the ‘logic of appropriateness’ where norms drive action. In these instances “actors may ask themselves, ‘what kind of situation is this?’ and ‘what am I supposed to do now?’ rather than, ‘how do I get what I want?’”⁸⁷

Narrative frameworks are central to forming what K.J. Holsti calls “national role

82. Walter R. Fisher, “Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm,” *Communication Monographs* 56, no. 1 (1989): 55.

83. Doris A. Graber, ed., *Media Power in Politics*, 4th ed (Washington, D.C: CQ Press, 2000); Robert Axelrod, “Schema Theory: An Information Processing Model of Perception and Cognition,” *American Political Science Review* 67, no. 4 (1973): 1248–66; Richard K. Herrmann et al., “Images in International Relations: An Experimental Test of Cognitive Schemata,” *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (1997): 403–33.

84. Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*, 1st edition (New York: RAND Corporation, 1951).

85. Alexander L. George, “The ”Operational Code”: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making,” in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989), 483.

86. Ibid.

87. Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, 29; See also Vincent Pouliot, “The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities,” *International Organization* 62, no. 2 (2008): 257–88.

conception". Holsti argues a nation's view of itself and its role in international affairs is formed through discursive socialisation affecting behaviour. Role conception includes what policymakers define as "suitable" actions and imagine as "appropriate orientations and functions".⁸⁸ At times of "acute international conflict", the self-defined national role conception takes precedence over externally determined behavioural expectations, such as those prescribed by international law.⁸⁹

Holsti identifies 17 national roles, concluding the US self-identifies with eight different "active" role types, which Holsti notes coincide with America's active role in international affairs. US role types are: regional protector, anti-imperialist agent, defender of the faith, developer, bastion of revolution-liberator, mediator/integrator, regional collaborator, and faithful ally.⁹⁰ Using national role conception as a shorthand for understanding state behaviour can create its own pitfalls: expectations states will behave in a particular way because of their perceived role conception may affect how that role is constructed.⁹¹ Holsti acknowledges role conceptions and perceptions are not determinative and inconsistencies between role conception and actions can occur. Role conception may also vary depending on the relationship or issues involved.⁹²

Holsti's idea of national role conception continues to influence contemporary scholarship about US foreign policy.⁹³ For example Hanns Maull notes the US has had a "remarkable degree of continuity" in its role conception since the end of the Cold War revolving around five themes: (1) exclusive international leadership and repudiation of imperialism; (2) devoting substantial national resources to pursuing global power; (3) promoting the "American ideology" of democracy, human rights and market economics as a morally and practically beneficial social order; (4) a

88. K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1970): 246.

89. *Ibid.*, 243.

90. *Ibid.*, Table 2.

91. Bernardo Teles Fazeiro, "Rethinking Roles: Reflexive Role Ascription and Performativity in International Relations," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (2016): 487–507.

92. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 298.

93. For the theory's application to other countries see: Nele Noesselt, "China's Contradictory Role(s) in World Politics: Decrypting China's North Korea Strategy," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 7 (2014): 1307–25; Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in Latin America," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2014, 662–81.

practical rather than principled approach to multilateralism; and (5) a propensity for military intervention, including unilateral action.⁹⁴ Maull further suggests differences between US presidents in their foreign policy actions are more closely related to how to interpret and pursue roles rather than the role conception itself. He also notes American exceptionalism is the “most pervasive element” in US political culture, deeply influencing US foreign policy.⁹⁵

I agree with Holsit and Maull’s constructions of US national role conception. I build on their analysis, exploring where the normative expectations underpinning the national role conception come from and how they operate in presidential decisions about humanitarian interventions. To do that I turn to the ideas of political myths; what public justification theorists incorporate within the notion of ‘taken-for-granted’ ideas.

3.4 A discursive understanding of exit strategies

In this section I consider theoretical approaches for determining which elements of the narrative framework should be explored in a discursive study of intervention exit strategies. In the following chapter I explain how I combined these elements with my research findings to develop a discursive framework for presidential justifications for humanitarian intervention exit strategies.

94. Hanns W. Maull, “Hegemony Reconstructed? America’s Role Conception and Its “Leadership” within Its Core Alliances,” in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hanns Maull, Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics (New York: Routledge, 2011), 170–71.

95. *Ibid.*, 168.

3.4.1 Political myths in the narrative framework of intervention

Political myths are neither objects nor the same as political symbols; they do not describe the world but rather ‘create’ their own world and are thus self-fulfilling.⁹⁶ Myths do not make empirical claims to truth. Their function is to insert events within a narrative framework to “ground” it.⁹⁷ Political myths thus make moral claims about reality, expressing a “paradigmatic truth”.⁹⁸ While political myths are enduring they are not immutable or static. Nor do myths possess agency in themselves; they are tools social actors use when engaging in argumentation in political discourse. As their potency ebbs and flows and political myths undergo processes of (d)evolution, they continue to provide reference points for exercising, experiencing and understanding US military power. Presidential justifications about humanitarian interventions contribute to the ‘mythic history’ of US military action against which all past, current and future experiences of humanitarian intervention are understood.

I argue three of the most salient political myths in American decision-making about using military force are: (a) US exceptionalism and manifest destiny; (b) World War II and the Vietnam War archetypes of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ wars respectively; and (c) winning military operations as proving moral vindication. In singling out these three myths for analysis, I am not suggesting that they are the only political myths that operate in Presidential foreign policy discourse (others include the myths of the American Civil War, the ‘discovery’ of America by Christopher Columbus, Thanksgiving and the idea that America’s founding fathers were all Christians). I

96. Chiara Bottici, “Towards a Philosophy of Political Myth,” *Iris* 3, no. 5 (2011): 34; Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, “Rethinking Political Myth: The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 3 (2006): 315–36; Chiara Bottici, “Philosophies of Political Myth, a Comparative Look Backwards: Cassirer, Sorel and Spinoza,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no. 3 (2009): 365–82; Joanne Esch, “Legitimizing the “War on Terror”: Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric,” *Political Psychology* 31, no. 3 (2010): 257–391; Robert S. Leib, “Political Myth: An Archeology of Magical Language” (PhD thesis, 2016); John Flowerdew, “The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal: A Case Study in the Creation of Mythic Discourse,” *Discourse and Society* 8, no. 4 (1997): 453–77.

97. Bottici, “Towards a Philosophy of Political Myth,” 38.

98. Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24.

am arguing, however, that they are among the most significant and pervasive, giving rise to normative expectations about justifiable uses of military force.⁹⁹

3.4.2 US exceptionalism and manifest destiny

The political myth of exceptionalism and manifest destiny derives from the collective story of America's founding, the character of its people, and its role in the world. The myth is the US, from its puritan beginnings, is a divinely chosen nation with a righteous responsibility to lead by example and transform the world in accordance with its values of freedom, democracy and economic prosperity.¹⁰⁰ This political myth is so entrenched it is sometimes known as American civil religion.¹⁰¹ The myth's impact is significant enough it has been used axiomatically when constructing US strategic interests, strategic objectives and military operations.¹⁰² Unlike Joanne Esch who has examined political myths evident in presidential discourse on the war on terror, I consider the idea the US is a chosen nation with a duty to civilise less enlightened peoples to be part of, rather than separate to, the US exceptionalism myth.¹⁰³

There are two influential aspects of the exceptionalism/manifest destiny myth observable in American humanitarian interventions. The first is the idea America's

99. Coles, "Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined"; Lane Crothers, "The Cultural Roots of Isolationism and Internationalism in American Foreign Policy," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 21–34; Stephen W. Silliman, "The "Old West" in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country," *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 2 (2008): 237–47; Catherine Sneberg, "The Purpose of American Strategic Culture: A Study of American Exceptionalism and Its Implications for U.S. Grand Strategy and America's Global Role" (Masters thesis, University of Oslo, 2015); Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots," *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (August 2008): 319–30; David P. Forsythe and Patrice C. McMahon, *American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: US Foreign Policy, Human Rights, and World Order*, International Studies Intensives (New York: Routledge, 2017).

100. Robert Booth Fowler et al., *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture and Strategic Choices*, 5th (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013); Raymond Haberski, "A Theology of American Exceptionalism? Iraq, Civil Religion and American Public Morality," in *Moral Values, Cultural Change, and Post-Materialism in Europe and North America* (Lisbon, April 14, 2009); Coles, "Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined."

101. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21.

102. Gray, "National Style in Strategy: The American Example"; Glenn P. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, and Future*, Tenth edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

103. Esch, "Legitimizing the "War on Terror": Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric."

God-given gift of wealth and power is accompanied by a moral responsibility to propagate the values and institutions believed to underpin this privileged position.¹⁰⁴

The second is US military operations are liberating for target populations because it is a non-imperial actor.¹⁰⁵

Walter McDougall and Walter Russell Mead link the exceptionalism/manifest destiny myth to the moral and moralist drivers of US foreign policy and the role of religion in American public life.¹⁰⁶ Alan Wolfe argues liberals, conservatives and neo-conservatives in America adhere to US exceptionalism, although they have different ideas about how to pursue its tenets.¹⁰⁷ Although exceptionalism and manifest destiny are sometimes analysed separately, they are closely related, representing two facets of the same myth and often used interchangeably in popular discourse.¹⁰⁸ Even scholars who set out to debunk the exceptionalism myth recognise it is discursively pervasive and powerful.¹⁰⁹ In their four-volume treatise on the history of American exceptionalism, Timothy Roberts and Lindsay DiCuici note even in the early days of the Republic, “anti-exceptionalism contained within it an entrenched belief in American distinctiveness”.¹¹⁰ The myth has power to bound decision-making, creating and constraining the slate of strategic options US Administrations believe can be reasonably pursued in military operations.¹¹¹

104. Coles, “Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s’ War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined.”

105. Sterling-Folker, “The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots.”

106. Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, Reprinted, A Century Foundation Book (New York: Routledge, 2009).

107. Alan Wolfe, “Back to Crackpot Moralism,” *World Policy Journal* 25, no. 3 (2008): 218–20.

108. Coles, “Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s’ War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined,” 415–16.

109. William Blum, *America’s Deadliest Export: Democracy: The Truth about US Foreign Policy and Everything Else* (Halifax: Fernwood Publications; Zed Books, 2013); Forsythe and McMahon, *American Exceptionalism Reconsidered*, 27.

110. Timothy Roberts and Lindsay DiCuirci, eds., *American Exceptionalism*, vol. 4 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), vii.

111. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*; Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Andrew Rojecki, “Rhetorical Alchemy: American Exceptionalism and the War on Terror,” *Political Communication* 25, no. 1 (2008): 67–88; Eugene Secunda and Terence P. Moran, *Selling War to America: From the Spanish American War to the Global War on Terror* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007); William B. Allen, “The Moral Foundations of Political Choices: George Washington, Foreign Policy and National Character,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2011): 3–12.

Exceptionalism/manifest destiny myths rarely operate in isolation as factors in presidents' decisions about military action. Other motivations include expanding US sphere of influence, self-defence, acquiring territory, and promoting favourable trade conditions. Nevertheless I suggest even when *realpolitik* considerations catalyse decisions, they do so with the accompanying moral weight of the exceptionalism myth providing additional support for and at times constraining action. Derek Chollet and Tod Lindberg argue it would be impossible to talk about US foreign policy *without* talking about its moral expectations because they are woven so tightly into the fabric of the collective national narrative.¹¹² Sarah Maxey similarly finds that humanitarian justifications are central to motivating public support for all military operations, not just humanitarian interventions.¹¹³ To help demonstrate this point, the following is a brief historical overview of the myth's place in US foreign policy decision-making.¹¹⁴

In providing this account my approach diverges from the most common explanations for the contours of US foreign policy.¹¹⁵ These accounts tend to divide American foreign policy behaviour into the categories of isolationism, internationalism, realism, idealism, unilateralism and multilateralism.¹¹⁶ The categories presuppose a tension between, for example, the foreign policy approach of Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe who advocated isolationism, versus Presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson who supported greater US involvement in world affairs and global institutions. Instead of adopting a similar approach, I take my lead from scholars such as Lane Crothers who focuses on cul-

112. Derek Chollet and Tod Lindberg, "A Moral Core for US Foreign Policy," *Policy Review*, no. 146 (2007): 3–23.

113. Sarah Maxey, "The Power of Humanitarian Narratives: A Domestic Coalition Theory of Justifications for Military Action," *Political Research Quarterly*, 2019, 1–16.

114. For readers interested in more detailed historical accounts of US foreign policy see the works of: Bryan Mabee, *Understanding American Power: The Changing World of US Foreign Policy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, The Oxford History of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

115. For a good example of this see Mabee, *Understanding American Power*, 14–53; On the challenges of conducting an historical inquiry into US foreign policy see: Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

116. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy*; Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Tudor A. Onea, *US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: Restraint versus Assertiveness from George H. W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

tural explanations for certain tropes persisting in the American political debate about foreign policy. Crothers argues it is overly simplistic to view US foreign policy as ‘isolationist turned interventionist’, as all debates are largely rooted in the US exceptionalism myth. Crothers’ view provides a convincing explanation for neo-conservative enthusiasm for US military interventions despite their otherwise isolationist tendencies.¹¹⁷

During the early days of the republic, President George Washington attempted to distinguish the US from other European nations, particularly imperial powers Britain and France. Washington argued America should pursue global economic expansion while avoiding political alliances. Washington’s principles are an early expression of a politically independent (rather than isolationist) US foreign policy tied to moral action.¹¹⁸ Keeping with this moral drive, President Thomas Jefferson (elected in 1800) focused on developing the US as a light on the hill and an ‘empire of liberty’ at home.¹¹⁹ Continental expansion continued with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

In 1819, President James Monroe further expanded US territory by negotiating with Spain to annex Florida. Despite increasing America’s own footprint in the region, Monroe’s official policy supported newly independent states in the Western hemisphere against influence from European and other imperial powers. Monroe justified his 1823 Monroe Doctrine as morally incumbent on the US republic.¹²⁰ President Andrew Jackson continued the US expansion project, annexing Texas in 1845, declaring war with Mexico (1846-49) and negotiating with Britain for Oregon (1848). Jackson used manifest destiny to justify these actions arguing it was America’s God-given right to control this territory and civilise the Western frontier.¹²¹ The Civil War that followed (1861-1865) became a touchstone in American collective

117. Crothers, “The Cultural Roots of Isolationism and Internationalism in American Foreign Policy.”

118. Mabee, *Understanding American Power*, 17–18.

119. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, 1st, A Critical Issue (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 22.

120. Christopher R. Rossi and Elihu Root, eds., “The Monroe Doctrine and International Law in the Americas,” in *Whiggish International Law* (Online: Brill Nijhoff, 2019), 123–53.

121. Zoë Hess Carney and Mary E. Stuckey, “The World as the American Frontier: Racialized Presidential War Rhetoric,” *Southern Communication Journal* 80, no. 3 (2015): 163–88.

identity. Almost half of all wartime deaths in US history occurred during the Civil War (620,000 of a total of 1,264,000). Animosities underpinning the war still resonate in domestic discourse on race relations, states rights, economic production, patriotism and heroic sacrifice.

The explosion of the *USS Maine* during the Cuban rebellion against Spain in 1898 prompted President William McKinley to declare war against Spain. Domestic discourse about the war focused on US moral responsibility to protect oppressed people under Spanish colonial rule. American victory resulted in its acquisition of overseas territories (Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines) and the accompanying accoutrements of an imperialist state, ushering in a new era of American interventionism overseas. President Woodrow Wilson extended the list of American protectorates with military occupations of Haiti in 1915 and Nicaragua in 1916.

Pre-occupied with ensuring stability in the Americas, Wilson initially kept the US out of World War I, seeing “Providence” creating an opportunity for the US to lead a new world order out of the ashes of the war.¹²² During his 1916 election campaign for a second presidential term, Wilson spoke of the US responsibility to “serve the world” in preventing another global war.¹²³ His program for peace was built on “American principles, American policies” that were also the principles “of every modern nation, of every enlightened community. They are the principles of mankind and must prevail.”¹²⁴ Wilson would later consolidate his peace plan into his Fourteen Points address on 8 January 1918, however he failed to win either domestic or international support for it.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected in 1932 during the Great Depression, re-calibrated US interventionism as a ‘Good Neighbour’ policy. However, in 1940, as World War II raged in Europe and Asia, Roosevelt spoke of turning US industrial capacity into “the great arsenal of democracy” whose weapons would be targeted

122. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 399.

123. *Ibid.*, 407–8.

124. Woodrow Wilson, “Address to the Senate of the United States: ”A World League for Peace”, *American Presidency Project*, January 22, 1917,

against the “gang of outlaws” and “evil forces” of the Axis powers.¹²⁵ Japan’s 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbour spurred US retaliation, sending troops to join the Allies’ fight. America’s late entry into the war shielded it from much of the devastation that shattered the European powers when the war ended. America emerged as a great power in the second half of the 20th century with the exceptionalism/manifest destiny myth featuring heavily in public justifications for America leading multilateral developments including Bretton-Woods, the UN and NATO. The exceptionalism/manifest destiny myth helped legitimise policies promoting world peace through democracy,¹²⁶ as well as spreading human rights and ‘American values’ as a national security interest.¹²⁷

Fulfilling American destiny and leading the world in pursuing freedom and democracy prompted military interventions to eliminate the Cold War communist threat. In 1947 President Harry Truman argued the US had “great responsibilities” to lead the free peoples of the world. Presidents Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and George H. W. Bush used the rhetoric of exceptionalism and moral purpose to help justify the Korean and Vietnam Wars, as well as interventions in Dominican Republic (1965-1966), Cambodia (1969-75), Laos (1971-73), Chile (1973), El Salvador (1981-1992), Beirut (1982-1984), Grenada (1983-84), Libya (1986) and Panama (1989).¹²⁸ Rather than framing these wars exclusively in terms of existential threat, Cold War presidents felt compelled to incorporate moral responsibility in their justifications.

The second, anti-imperialist part of the exceptionalism myth is as much about distinguishing US foreign policy from that of the empires that dominated the pre-20th century international order, as it is about justifying America’s significant global military footprint. Despite claims of anti-imperialism, a number of scholars interpret US foreign policy and its military interventions as consistent with the behaviour of

125. Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat,” *American Presidency Project*, December 29, 1940,

126. Beate Jahn, “The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part II),” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 2 (2007): 211–29.

127. Matthew Levinger, “A Core National Security Interest: Framing Atrocities Prevention,” *Politics and Governance* 3, no. 4 (2015): 26; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 537.

128. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*.

an empire.¹²⁹ The discursive power of a non-imperialist US was particularly apparent after the end of the Cold War, when the idea of non-imperialist intervention and America's moral responsibility to catalyse democratic transformation allowed the manifest destiny/exceptionalism myth to assume a meliorist hue, what Dan Cox refers to as 'liberal imperialism'.¹³⁰ Successive US administrations constructed the Cold War as more than an existential battle between the US and the Soviet Union; it was a quest for supremacy between opposing world views.¹³¹ US leaders could thus construe America's Cold War victory as vindicating its world view, validating exceptionalist perceptions and supporting claims the US has a responsibility to lead global transformation.¹³² Crafting legitimate foreign policy in the post-Cold War world thus requires the US to rhetorically and militarily defend principles considered to have 'won' the Cold War and created America's exceptionalism.¹³³

At the same time, however, constructing the US as a global defender of the moral good and promoter of democratic institutions also constrains US foreign policy, especially in the post-Cold War era. US military operations are particularly sensitive to charges of neo-imperialism.¹³⁴ By contrast Jennifer Sterling-Folker notes there is no similar rejection of using the terms 'hegemon' or 'great power' to describe the US.¹³⁵ Behaviour that might be associated with empires—for example, occupying foreign countries, military operations facilitating resource extraction, the interests of American capital defended through military force—are denied, re-framed or eschewed. To underscore the anti-imperialist nature of its interventions, the US also often seeks

129. The US actions in invading Iraq in 2003 prompted much of the recent scholarly literature on this question: Tony Smith, "From Woodrow Wilson in 1902 to the Bush Doctrine in 2002: Democracy Promotion as Imperialism," *International Politics* 48, nos. 2-3 (2011): 229–50.

130. Dan G. Cox, "The Age of Liberal Imperialism: Twenty-Five Years of a Flawed U.S. Foreign Policy," *Orbis* 57, no. 4 (2013): 643–52.

131. Paul A. Chilton, *Security Metaphors: Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common House, Conflict and Consciousness*, vol. 2 (New York: P. Lang, 1996).

132. Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 35–68.

133. It is also possible to link this idea of exceptionalism and the moral responsibilities that come with post-Cold War hegemony to the work of those scholars who argue that global powers like the US, UK and France have 'special responsibilities'. See: Mlada Bukovansky et al., *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

134. G. John Ikenberry, "Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 4 (2004).

135. Sterling-Folker, "The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots," 321.

approval from legitimising institutions like the UNSC and ‘coalition partners’. At other times, the US is willing to bypass collective decision-making bodies, justifying unilateral action on the basis it is acting for the common good.

Not only is there a collective belief among American citizens that a moral responsibility to ‘do the right thing’ motivates US foreign policy, but this ‘right thing’ requires helping others develop political and economic institutions like America’s.¹³⁶ At the same time, anti-imperialism requires America not keep troops in place for longer than absolutely necessary to secure these objectives; US military power should enable a target country to realise its potential and spearhead its own social transformation. Emancipation, not occupation, is key.

While American Presidents may not always explicitly state their nation is ‘exceptional’, they frequently reference the myth by employing frames referencing the founding fathers, defending freedom, democracy, promoting human rights, the desirability of the American model and the uniqueness of American institutions. Refusing to talk about America as exceptional also draws criticism, as President Obama experienced when he dared suggest that nations other than the US also consider themselves special.¹³⁷ The manifest destiny/exceptionalism myth is especially robust in domestic discourse about war and peace. The exceptionalism myth *requires* the US President act morally when conducting wars.¹³⁸ The myth has significant bearing on the believable justifications US Presidents can craft about American participation in humanitarian interventions.

136. Beasley, “Politics, Discourse, and American Society,” 26.

137. Greg Jaffe, “Obama’s New Patriotism: How Obama has used his Presidency to Redefine ‘American Exceptionalism’,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2015,

138. Haberski, “‘A Theology of American Exceptionalism’? Iraq, Civil Religion and American Public Morality.”

3.4.3 ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ wars

The US manifest destiny/exceptionalism myth informs another political myth in US foreign policy discourse: how America’s ‘good’ wars are fought and won. Dominant narratives of World War II (WWII) and the Vietnam War shape ideas about an ideal American approach to war. The ‘mythic history’ of these two wars contain tropes about American military power¹³⁹ and frame domestic debates about the legitimate use of force. In singling out these two wars I do not intend to argue other military experiences did not also affect American narrative frameworks and ideas about war-fighting. Others have written on the role the frontier wars, War of Independence, American Civil War and Cold War, have had in shaping US strategic culture and collective identity.¹⁴⁰ My argument, however, is WWII and the Vietnam War occupy an especially relevant position when looking at public discourse about ending humanitarian interventions. This is because when US presidents conjure the dominant collective memories of WWII and Vietnam, they reference moral claims about these wars as well as the victory and exit strategy ‘lessons’ the wars are thought to yield.

WWII is framed in contemporary US public imagination as the archetypal ‘good’ war, despite evidence a more nuanced judgement of US actions is required. Peter Schrijvers, for example, identifies a number of incidents undermining unequivocal statements about WWII’s inherent ‘goodness’ or ‘righteousness’, including US and allied forces air strikes causing civilian casualties and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Schrijvers suggests it is more accurate to consider WWII a good cause rather than a good war. He also notes scholarship questioning the legitimacy of the good war characterisation has failed to temper the dominant narrative of a war in which the US fought against a manifest evil and won decisively.¹⁴¹

139. Geoffrey M. White, “Mythic History and National Memory: The Pearl Harbor Anniversary,” *Culture & Psychology* 3, no. 1 (1997): 63–88.

140. Gray, “National Style in Strategy: The American Example”; Carney and Stuckey, “The World as the American Frontier”; Secunda and Moran, *Selling War to America*.

141. Peter Schrijvers, “War against Evil: The Second World War,” in *Heroism and the Changing Character of War: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 76–92.

According to this dominant narrative of WWII, US actions materially contributed to dismantling fascism in Europe, quashing German expansionism and ending the war with the ultimate weapon. It provided ‘proof’ overwhelming force and commitment to decisive victory is required to neutralise evil dictators. The deaths of thousands of American soldiers in the Pacific and on battlefields in Europe also represents the pinnacle of heroic death uniquely achievable in war time: these lives were worthily sacrificed to end the great evil of the Holocaust, defend against attacks on American soil, and preserve ‘the American way of life’.¹⁴²

The Marshall Plan, a massive financial injection to rebuild Western Europe, followed WWII. The plan was part of America’s Cold War strategy of Soviet containment and promoting US economic growth. This strategy underpinned other foreign policies such as building and expanding NATO to keep Western Europe within the American rather than Soviet sphere of influence. The dominant narrative of WWII dovetailed with the manifest destiny myth because it framed American triumph as part of the wider justification for a US-led transformation of the international order. Two world wars had decimated Europe’s economic base and signalled the end of a world order characterised by empires. The horrors of the concentration camps on the UK’s and France’s doorstep also undermined these old empires’ moral authority. The US could thus step in and fill the global moral vacuum, taking its place as the rightful world leader.

Increasing public awareness of avoidable civilian deaths, the debatable need to have deployed atomic weapons to end the war, and the ongoing effects of soldiers suffering trauma, undermined the moral clarity presupposed by the WWII good war narrative. But the appeal of transforming WWII into a morally uncomplicated story is understandable when juxtaposed against the moral ambiguities of Vietnam War where US actions proved less amenable to exoneration. In fact, the resurgence of the WWII ‘good war’ narrative in popular American discourse coincides with sober assessments of the Vietnam War in the 1980s. Studs Terkel published *The*

142. Edward W. Wood, *Worshipping the Myths of World War II: Reflections on America’s Dedication to War*, 1st ed (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2006).

Good War about WWII in 1984. The following decade Stephen Ambrose's *Citizen Soldiers* discussed the virtues of America's "band of brothers" and was adapted into a television mini-series. Popular *NBC News* anchor Tom Brokaw described the soldiers as America's "greatest generation", and Steven Spielberg released his visceral *Saving Private Ryan*.¹⁴³ Just as WWII tropes came to represent what it means to fight and win a good war, Vietnam War tropes encapsulated a war Americans were best to avoid.

The Vietnam War raised questions in bureaucratic, scholarly and public discourse about difficulties translating battlefield gains into strategic victory. Five American presidents oversaw the war: Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. All wrestled with using military force to support a superficially democratic but otherwise weak and brutal South Vietnamese administration, while simultaneously preventing Chinese/Soviet communist influence growing in Asia, dealing with an insurgency, and addressing domestic American opposition to the war. Ultimately the US struggled to win the war and withdraw its forces. Vietnam birthed the metaphor of the 'quagmire' to describe troops 'bogged down', fighting with indefinite goals and no end in sight.¹⁴⁴

The War also spawned the 'Vietnam Syndrome' trope, referring to the American public's growing wariness to risk soldiers in wars considered unwinnable and not essential to US interests. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga) first coined the term in 1978 and President Ronald Reagan also famously used the term in a speech two years later.¹⁴⁵ Turning the memory of Vietnam into a 'syndrome' rendered it into a nation-wide psychological malaise president George H. W. Bush would declare 'cured' only after

143. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

144. The description of the Vietnam War as a quagmire was first popularised by the 1965 publication of David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, Revised (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), Interestingly, Halberstam argues that even though Vietnam should be a lesson for military planners about starting and waging war, there are good reasons for not withdrawing troops as soon as the war becomes unwinnable.

145. George C. Herring, "The Vietnam Syndrome," in *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, ed. David L. Anderson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 409–30; Ronald Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety" (August 18, 1980); Kenneth J. Campbell, "Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine," *Armed Forces and Society* 24, no. 3 (1998): 357–74.

US victory in the Gulf War in 1991.¹⁴⁶

Efforts by cultural theorists, historians and policy-makers to extract ‘lessons’ from the Vietnam War also helped cement the events into American political myth. The issue of dealing with defeat was central to the power the Vietnam War holds in public political discourse, but its power also rests in the uncomfortable moral questions the war raised. Vietnam challenged the prevailing mythology that America is a moral military actor; it fights wars for the ‘right’ reasons against enemies that deserve to be vanquished. Contributions include James Blight and Janet Lang’s *Fog of War*, the companion book of the acclaimed Errol Morris documentary of the same name;¹⁴⁷ Nixon’s National Security Advisor and later Secretary-of-State Henry Kissinger’s *Ending the Vietnam War*;¹⁴⁸ and John Dumbrell and David Lyon’s *Vietnam in Iraq*.¹⁴⁹ Among the lessons learned was criticism of Kennedy’s early resistance to deploying ground forces, opting instead for ‘limited war’. Kennedy’s approach shifted away from the kind of total war considered necessary in WWII reinforcing the military establishment’s scepticism about limited war’s strategic shortcomings.¹⁵⁰

It was the lessons Reagan’s Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger learned from the Vietnam War, coupled with 241 US soldiers dying in a 1983 operation in Lebanon, that prompted him to set out six ‘tests’ to be met before US forces are committed to combat operations. These tests became known as ‘The Weinberger Doctrine’ and

146. G. L. Simons, *Vietnam Syndrome: Impact on US Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 3; Walter L. Hixson, “Viet Nam and ‘Vietnam’ in American History and Memory,” in *Four Decades on: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War*, ed. Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Alexander Bloom, “‘The Mainspring in This Country Has Been Broken’: America’s Battered Sense of Self and the Emergence of the Vietnam Syndrome,” in *Four Decades on: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War*, ed. Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 58–83.

147. James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang, *The Fog of War: Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

148. Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extermination from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

149. Dumbrell and Ryan, *Vietnam in Iraq*.

150. Although popularised under Kennedy, his predecessors Truman and Eisenhower had also pursued a limited war approach in Korea. Limited war is also associated with the development of nuclear weapons. The strategy has much longer history dating to pre-Napoleon times and was prompted by the cost of replacing relatively expensive weapons and soldiers. R. R. Palmer, “Frederick the Great, Guilbert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 91–122.

include willingness to dedicate sufficient resources for decisive victory, committing to unlimited war if necessary. Combat operations should also be continually assessed to ensure they are in service of a vital national interest and will succeed; if not, troops should be withdrawn.¹⁵¹ General Colin Powell, assistant to Secretary Weinberger and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President George H.W. Bush, continued to expound these six tests, using them to guide the 1991 Gulf War.¹⁵² Powell created his own ‘Powell Doctrine’ by adding his own test to the formulation: America should not commit to combat unless it has an exit strategy to be implemented in a defined time frame.

The Vietnam War arguably directly challenges the American exceptionalism/manifest destiny myth because it illustrates the risks of hubris and the limits of military power. And yet, in the dominant American collective narrative, Vietnam is framed in a way that chimes with rather than contradicts the myth of exceptionalism. Instead of suggesting the US abandon its global transformation goals, Vietnam is employed by political leaders to urge caution about underestimating the political and military commitment required to spread American ideals in overseas operations. American lives lost in the pursuit of the nation’s ideals are only considered wasted insofar as the goals of military operations are not achieved, making it incumbent on leaders to have a plan to win wars convincingly or not bother fighting at all. These Vietnam War lessons continue to be applied in assessments of US military intervention in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.¹⁵³ According to Bernd Greiner, the Vietnam Syndrome “does not stand for dignified reserve, but rather indicates a refusal to accept defeat... a perpetuation of the traditional ‘victory culture’”.¹⁵⁴

151. Caspar Weinberger, “The Uses of Military Power” (November 28, 1984), The other tests for the engagement are: it must be vital to US national interest or that of its allies, it must have clearly defined military and political objectives, it has domestic support, and war is only waged as a last resort.

152. Walter LaFeber, “The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009): 71–93.

153. Eric Schmitt, “The Powell Doctrine Is Looking Pretty Good Again,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1999, Stephen M. Walt, “Applying the 8 Questions of the Powell Doctrine to Syria,” *Foreign Policy*, September 3, 2013, David Rothkopf, “Barack Obama and the Powell Doctrine, Reconsidered,” *Foreign Policy: Voice*, October 15, 2015, Dumbrell and Ryan, *Vietnam in Iraq*.

154. Bernd Greiner, “Heroism and Self-Sacrifice: The Vietnam War as a Case in Point,” in *Heroism and the Changing Character of War: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 118.

The Vietnam War occupies political myth status in the collective American consciousness. Contemporary discursive references suggest the makings of an unsuccessful war effort, worsened by an indefinite end point, waged at significant cost to US lives.¹⁵⁵ Despite efforts to rehabilitate the American people from effects of the Vietnam War on the collective psyche, its discursive power remains,¹⁵⁶ with some scholars arguing the term has been “assimilated rather than transcended” in the dominant American collective narrative.¹⁵⁷

The political myths of WWII and Vietnam have become so assimilated into dominant American foreign policy discourse they provide ripe analogies for presidents. In his book on US elite decision-making during the Vietnam War, Yuen Foong Khong argues analogies are not just policy justification tools in war time, but are cognitive and information-processing tools for decision-making.¹⁵⁸ Much military training and planning is based on drawing comparisons with past operations, identifying lessons and applying them. Analogies have their drawbacks, however, potentially providing fallacious reasoning, encouraging decision-makers to look for similarities where none exist and repeating inappropriate behaviour.¹⁵⁹

Regardless of how accurately they represent reality, dominant American representations of and tropes associated with Vietnam and WWII make claims about wartime victory that place battlefield successes and failures within the context of the political myths about America’s existential purpose and moral duty. The WWII and Vietnam tropes suggest criteria for what constitutes good endings for military operations predicated on decisive victory, defeating evil, force protection and rapid withdrawal.

155. Campbell, “Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine”; Michael T. Klare, *Beyond the “Vietnam Syndrome”: U.S. Interventionism in the 1980s* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981).

156. Herring, “The Vietnam Syndrome”; Andrew Priest, “From Saigon to Baghdad: The Vietnam Syndrome, the Iraq War and American Foreign Policy,” *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 1 (2009): 139–71; Trevor David McCrisken, “The Vietnam Syndrome, American Exceptionalism, and the Use of United States Military Force” (PhD thesis, American University, 1994); Flowerdew, “The Discourse of Colonial Withdrawal: A Case Study in the Creation of Mythic Discourse,” 461–62.

157. Derek Neal Buckaloo, “Fighting the Last War: The ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ as a Constraint on United States Foreign Policy, 1975–1991” (PhD thesis, Emory University, 2002).

158. Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

159. Andrew Mumford, “Parallels, Prescience and the Past: Analogical Reasoning and Contemporary International Politics,” *International Politics* 52, no. 1 (2015): 7.

It is only by interrogating these myths and the way that they operate in American foreign policy decision-making that we can better understand the contours of exit strategies in American humanitarian interventions.

3.4.4 Victory still matters

Scholars disagree about whether the end of the Cold War ushered the US into a ‘post-heroic’ age. In the age of post-heroic warfare, technological advances remove US soldiers from the battlefield, there is a declining proportion of Americans choosing military service, the American public is apparently increasingly ‘casualty averse’, and soldiers are now perceived as victims rather than heroes. Christopher Coker associates these changes with Western countries becoming increasingly risk averse, using technology to displace humans on the battlefield, or, as he sees it, technicians displacing warriors.¹⁶⁰

Rather than seeing an inevitable decline in the American war hero myth, I agree with Sibylle Scheipers there remains enormous discursive power in the idea of heroism in American warfare.¹⁶¹ Heroism is a process shaping and shaped by the social construction and interpretation of soldiers’ behaviour. In America, heroism in war remains intimately tied to the idea of God-given destiny and to the types of war the US is called to fight. The ‘noble cause’—which is as much linked to ‘universal’ concepts of freedom and democracy as it is to the existential survival of the American nation—is necessary to make sense of suffering and justify soldiers’ deaths even in the face of a lost or unwinnable battle; a point echoing the political myths of WWII and Vietnam.¹⁶²

160. Christopher Coker, *Waging War without Warriors? The Changing Culture of Military Conflict*, IISS Studies in International Security (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

161. Sibylle Scheipers, “Introduction: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?,” in *Heroism and the Changing Character of War: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 14.

162. Adam I. P. Smith, “‘On the Altar of the Nation’: Narratives of Heroic Sacrifice in the American Civil War,” in *Heroism and the Changing Character of War: Toward Post-Heroic Warfare?*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 34.

Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler argue it is too simplistic to take current debates about controversial military engagements as evidence the American public is becoming increasingly casualty sensitive. Their research demonstrates Americans are willing to tolerate soldiers dying if they believe the US is fighting war for the ‘right’ reasons and is likely to win.¹⁶³ Although predominantly quantitative studies focusing on opinion poll data, Gelpi and his colleagues’ research provides evidence for a strong connection in American public discourse between ideas of victory and claims of moral purpose in war.

The fact perceptions of military success feature so strongly in the American public’s willingness to support war helps explain why claims to victory have such persuasive force in presidential discourse. It also points to a bigger ideational commitment to winning in the American political community. In his sociological inquiry into the unique place winning has in American public and private life, Francesco Duina attempts to explain why Americans consistently and significantly out-poll citizens of other countries in their positive view of competition and individuals seen as ‘winners’. Duina argues the attraction of winning is as much (and in some case more) about what winning represents rather than the act of winning itself.¹⁶⁴

There are three benefits accruing to winners in competitive environments relevant for humanitarian interventions and war more generally: first, winning allows social actors to differentiate themselves from their peers; in the case of military action, it demonstrates the US is rightfully the most powerful country in the world. Second, winning vindicates or proves one’s view of the world is ‘right’; in the case of hu-

163. Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 7–46; Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

164. A more contemporary example of Duina’s argument can be seen in the populist rhetoric of President Donald Trump whose 2015 Presidential campaign focused on “making America great again”, including by winning more. One of his statements on the subject at a campaign rally in 2015 is worth quoting in full: “That’s right, we don’t win anymore. We wanna win. We don’t win anymore. We’re gonna win a lot. If I get elected, we’re gonna win a lot. We’re gonna win so much...it’s true. We’re gonna win a lot. We’re gonna win a lot. We’re gonna win so much you’re all gonna get sick and tired of winning and you’re gonna say, ”oh no, not again!” Only kidding, you never get tired of winning.” *Donald Trump Campaign Rally, C-Span* (User Uploaded) (Hilton Head, South Carolina, December 30, 2015), accessed December 21, 2017.

manitarian intervention, it justifies using military force to address the humanitarian problem. Third, winning injects ‘value’ into ideas of victory and loss; if we can’t talk about winning in war, this undermines the very idea of victory and the social import attached to intervention as an heroic and honourable pursuit.¹⁶⁵

The connection between winning and manifest destiny is victory provides proof God has enabled US success, divinely anointing the choices made by US leaders.¹⁶⁶ As vindication, therefore, winning also contributes to the idea of a war fought for the ‘right reasons’,¹⁶⁷ bringing the endeavour into line with the WWII ideal. Indeed, part of the reason US defeat in Vietnam had such profound existential consequences is that just as victory proves moral justification, failure indicates beliefs were misplaced. In his survey of six wars from ancient to modern times in which decisive victory was achieved, John David Lewis begins his analysis recognising war is ultimately a “clash of moral purposes”.¹⁶⁸ Victory, therefore, is the triumph of one moral purpose over another. Lewis shows victory is critical for boosting the legitimacy of a moral cause and thus provides motivation for combatants to continue pursuing their cause with violence.¹⁶⁹ Just as victory demonstrates general US moral superiority, the angst of defeat spreads wider than the individual military operation. Winning also brings honour to the victor and can help inure against criticism US soldiers are being put at risk in order to achieve foreign policy objectives.

3.5 Context

My argument about US national role conception as a normative constraint on exit strategies suggests the greatest impact on presidential justifications derives from largely endogenous or domestically-generated impulses. I have focused on discourse

165. Francesco G. Duina, *Winning: Reflections on an American Obsession* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

166. *Ibid.*, 45, 131.

167. *Ibid.*, 40.

168. John Lewis, *Nothing Less than Victory: Decisive Wars and the Lessons of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

169. *Ibid.*, 294.

in my analysis of decision-making because its significant influence has not been matched by a commensurate level of analysis of how it works during humanitarian interventions. While I view discourse as a dominant constitutive force for social action, I also argue discourse represents reality; language is not powerful on its own but as a means for social actors to obtain and use power.¹⁷⁰ As Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl note, discourse affects the scope of imagined possibilities for action but there is a broader ‘context’ of action. This context comprises intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between the presidential discourse of humanitarian intervention and other fields of discourse, as well as extralinguistic institutional frames, and wider sociopolitical and historical issues.¹⁷¹

In my thesis, I acknowledge these constraints but note how the US president discursively engages with and negotiates them. Although my analysis does not consider in great detail the institutional dynamics of discourse (or the discursive operation of institutions),¹⁷² I acknowledge presidents have power to shape institutional approaches to humanitarian intervention through discourse. It is not my intention in this section to provide a comprehensive account of all these relationships, discourse sites or institutional frames here. Instead, I highlight some contextual elements affecting presidential discourse. In my case studies I explain relevant aspects in greater detail.

3.5.1 Domestic institutional framework

A major institutional constraint is the US Constitution’s separation of powers. Despite being the Commander-in-Chief, it is theoretically difficult for the president to unilaterally commit US soldiers to war indefinitely. Until 1950 all major wars in which the US participated were either declared or authorised by Congress.¹⁷³ Congress

170. Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).”

171. *Ibid.*, 89–90, 93.

172. For more on discursive institutionalism see: Vivien A. Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (June 2008): 303–26.

173. Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power*, 3rd (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 189.

has power over the defence budget and can hamstring presidential military action by simply refusing to fund it. Congressional budgetary power does not completely limit the president's ability to fund military operations, however, as activities can be financed through appropriations from other budgets.¹⁷⁴

Amid the Vietnam War controversy, Congress passed the *War Powers Resolution* in 1973. The Resolution requires the president to seek Congressional authority within 48 hours of deploying US forces to an armed conflict. It also prohibits the president from conducting military operations without Congressional approval for longer than 60 days, with an additional 30-day withdrawal period. Robert Turner, among others, argues that the Resolution is unconstitutional because it intrudes on the president's powers as Commander-in-Chief.¹⁷⁵ Others such as Peter Haas argue the Resolution is largely redundant because it has failed to restrict presidential power to unilaterally start military operations.¹⁷⁶

US presidents have pushed against checks and balances on their power since 1950 and especially since the end of the Cold War and Congress has been hesitant in pushing back. In part this is because since the middle of the 19th century American presidents have also been members of the dominant political parties - Republican and Democrat. Consequently the willingness of Congress to challenge the exercise of executive power has also been affected by partisan politics in Congress and which party has had effective control of each House. Louis Fisher suggests 'presidential war powers' have emerged, directly counter to the intentions of America's Constitution drafters.¹⁷⁷ Arguments about constitutional action aside, US presidents have exercised a great deal of autonomy and unilateral decision-making power with respect to humanitarian interventions because they are military operations about which there is no settled

174. Banks and Straussman, "A New Imperial Presidency? Insights from US Involvement in Bosnia."

175. Robert F. Turner, "The War Powers Resolution at 40: Still an Unconstitutional, Unnecessary and Fraud That Contributed Directly to the 9/11 Attacks," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 45, no. 1 (2012): 109–43.

176. Peter Haas, "Does It Even Work? A Theoretical and Practical Evaluation of the War Powers Resolution," *Congress & the Presidency* 44, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 235–58.

177. Louis Fisher, "Presidents Who Initiate Wars," in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, Sixth edition, ed. James M. McCormick (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2012), 189–208; Fisher, *Presidential War Power*.

construction under the *War Powers Resolution*.

In addition to Congress, other notable constraints on the US president's ability to start and end humanitarian interventions are domestic media in both its traditional and new/social forms, which reflect and shape public opinion on foreign policy issues. The main body of scholarly literature examining the power of news media is 'agenda-setting theory'.¹⁷⁸ This power was particularly acute over the period covered by my study (1990s-2000s) with the so-called 'CNN-effect', that is, the impact of 24-hour television cable news broadcasting and media coverage of military operations.¹⁷⁹ Eytan Gilboa argues the evidence of a causal effect between media coverage of foreign affairs and public opinion is not conclusive¹⁸⁰ Michael Baum, however, notes despite declining cable news viewership, Americans continue to use 'soft news' formats such as talk shows to inform their opinions on foreign affairs.¹⁸¹ Similarly Robert Entman shows how the US president and members of his administration compete with mass media and other public discourse actors to shape the frames that ultimately affect public opinion.¹⁸² The interest Americans take in their government's foreign policy and overseas military operations matters because ultimately the president and Congress are subject to the electoral cycle. The challenges of crafting electorally palatable foreign policy responses have become more marked as partisanship both within Congress and the general community has grown.¹⁸³

178. David Weiss, "Agenda-Setting Theory," in *The Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009), 32–34; *Agenda-Setting*, in *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2014), 49–53, by Thomas König and Dirk Junge.

179. Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (London: Psychology Press, 2002).

180. Eytan Gilboa, "Global Television News and Foreign Policy: Debating the CNN Effect," *International Studies Perspectives* 6 (2005): 325–41.

181. Matthew A Baum, *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

182. Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Studies in Communication, Media, and Public Opinion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); See also Teena Gabrielson, "Obstacles and Opportunities: Factors That Constrain Elected Officials' Ability to Frame Political Issues," in *Framing American Politics*, ed. Karen Callaghan and Frauke Schnell (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 76–102.

183. Sarah A. Binder and Thomas E. Mann, *Constraints on Leadership in Washington*, Issues in Governance Studies 41 (Washington DC: Brookings, July 2011), 6–8.

3.5.2 International context

Much has been written about the changing character of war and the impact on how military commanders and their civilian leaders choose to fight wars. Themes in this literature highlight material and normative constraints developed during the time period of my thesis. First, there are technological changes in warfare, including enhanced conventional weapons' targeting capabilities and increasing use of remotely controlled weapons systems.¹⁸⁴ Successive US Administrations have argued these changes make contemporary Western warfare inherently more ethical than earlier wars. Modern warfare is said to better satisfy just war criteria of discrimination and proportionality because weapons are more 'precise' and better able to limit civilian casualties by mitigating human error and 'friction'.¹⁸⁵ These changes make soldiers less likely to be killed on the battlefield but also much more expensive investments (in terms of training and equipment costs).

Despite ongoing improvements to the targeting and killing abilities of weapons technology, there are limitations beyond ethical considerations on the usability of such weapons.¹⁸⁶ David Koplow identifies a current revolution in military affairs with the US military developing weapons that do not necessarily prioritise lethality but instead support "more restrained and partial versions of international combat".¹⁸⁷ Koplow provides eight reasons for this shift in approach to military operations: loss of faith in deterrence, civilian/non-combatant casualty aversion, mission expansion to include unconventional operations or operations other than war, asymmetric warfare (particularly counterinsurgency), effects-based operations, limited budgets, the law

184. Thomas G. Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

185. Harold Hongju Koh, "The Obama Administration and International Law," in *Speech* (Washington D.C.: US Department of State, March 25, 2010); Brian Glyn Williams, *Predators: The CIA's Drone War on Al Qaeda* (ebook: Potomac Books, July 1, 2013), 169–204.

186. For an overview of some of these considerations with respect to precision-guided munitions and unmanned aerial vehicles see: Sarah Kreps and John Kaag, "The Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in Contemporary Conflict: A Legal and Ethical Analysis," *Polity* 44, no. 2 (2012): 260–85; James E. Hickey, *Precision-Guided Munitions and Human Suffering in War*, Military and Defence Ethics (Burlington: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2012).

187. David A. Koplow, *Death by Moderation: The U.S. Military's Quest for Useable Weapons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 219.

of armed conflict requirement of proportionality, and ongoing faith in the power of technology to deliver clean, casualty-free warfare.¹⁸⁸ In humanitarian interventions, the moral and emancipatory impetus for intervention arguably requires paying attention to balancing battlefield effectiveness against minimising civilian casualties when choosing weapons and tactics. Related to this is the influence of international humanitarian law as providing a moral standard against which wars are expected to be conducted, especially by countries like the US that are expected to be standard bearers of the international liberal world order.

At the same time, as I noted in section 2.2, the UN has encouraged states to pay greater attention to humanitarian issues in peacekeeping and combat operations. Despite its challenges and critics, the UNSC continues to occupy a unique place in providing international legitimacy for military operations. America's European allies also place pressure on the US to fulfil NATO alliance obligations, witnessed in manoeuvring at the UNSC where France and the United Kingdom hold veto power alongside the US. NATO members that are also members of the European Union (EU), for example, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy, need to consider how to fulfil their EU human rights law obligations when conducting NATO military operations. Such concerns about 'legal interoperability' affect how the US conducts its humanitarian interventions when acting with NATO allies.¹⁸⁹ It is also worth noting other regional organisations such as the Organisation of American States (OAS), ECOWAS can also influence humanitarian interventions, in some instances making representations directly to the US or to the UNSC regarding military operations.

188. Koplow, *Death by Moderation*, 220–29.

189. Kirby Abbott, "A Brief Overview of Legal Interoperability Challenges for NATO Arising from the Interrelationship between IHL and IHRL in Light of the European Convention on Human Rights," *International Review of the Red Cross* 96, no. 893 (March 2014): 107–37.

3.5.3 Presidential agency

The relationship between US presidents, discourse and the domestic and international institutional context raises the question of individual agency.¹⁹⁰ In my earlier discussion of discourse theory I noted the office of the president is discursively constituted. At the same time, one reason presidential discourse merits investigation is the continuity and divergences within and between discourses individual presidents employ. I explore these differences and similarities across my four case studies. As I noted previously, the president can, through the discursive power of their office, shape experiences and articulations of ‘reality’. Exactly how presidents articulate and shape reality is affected by their particular backgrounds, perceptions and leadership styles as well the historical context within which they govern.

In her work on American presidents’ decisions to intervene in foreign military conflicts Elizabeth Saunders looks at leaders holding substantively different beliefs about the origin of threats. Saunders creates a typology of leaders distinguishing between those who are “internally”- and “externally”-focused, noting differences in the “policy investments” leaders are willing to make in responding to perceived threats. She notes leaders “do not necessarily have the luxury of choosing their intervention opportunities”, observing domestic and international audiences often provide “political imperatives to intervene *somewhere*”.¹⁹¹ Of the three presidents she studies in detail—Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson—Saunders finds leaders’ threat perceptions remain relatively consistent before they take office and through their presidential terms. Saunders notes her conclusions are more useful for judging initial decisions to intervene rather than assessing decisions during interventions because these may be shaped by battlefield conditions and other considerations. I agree it is difficult to judge motivations during military intervention. I suggest, however, it is possible to look to discourse as a signal of changes (if any) in perceptions and

190. Soumitra Chatterjee, “Presidential Beliefs, Advisors’ Capacities and the Formulation of Intervention Policy” (PhD thesis, University of California, 2019).

191. Elizabeth N Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 7, emphasis in original.

judgments about intervention as it progresses and to map these against external changes and other factors that may affect decision-making.

Although presidential predilections are themselves discursively constituted, I agree with Robert Jervis that leadership does matter but so too does the environment within which those leaders are created and govern, which includes normative expectations as constraints on action.¹⁹² By mapping presidential discourse against normative expectations, I argue researchers can assess the extent to which individual presidents can push the boundaries of dominant discursive frames and in which directions; what I refer to as “room for rhetorical manoeuvre”.

What I call rhetorical manoeuvre, Alistar Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin and Laura Roselle incorporate in their definition of ‘strategic narrative’. Theirs is a much wider approach to narrative than Fisher’s narrative framework theory and focuses on the active steps taken by political actors “to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors”.¹⁹³ O’Loughlin supports the approach of discourse studies for revealing narrative frameworks in public justifications for political action and how these frameworks serve to constrain behaviour. However he argues whenever there is a “moment when [a social actor] must decide”, this is where we “find intention and strategy”, for “craft and creativity” in constructing discourse.¹⁹⁴

192. Robert Jervis, “Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 153–79.

193. Alistar Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, eds., *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 6; See also: Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Papers 379 (London: Routledge, 2006), 22–27, 73–95; George Dimitriu, Beatrice De Graaf, and Jens Ringsmose, *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War* (London: Routledge, 2015); George Dimitriu and Beatrice De Graaf, “Fighting the War at Home: Strategic Narratives, Elite Responsiveness, and the Dutch Mission in Afghanistan, 2006–2010,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2014, 1–22; Thomas Elkjer Nissen, “Narrative Led Operations,” *Militaert Tidsskrift* 141, no. 4 (2013): 67–77; Pamment looks at the way in which the US government employs strategic narratives as part of its public diplomacy: James Pamment, “Strategic Narratives in US Public Diplomacy: A Critical Geopolitics,” *Popular Communication* 12, no. 1 (2014): 48–64.

194. Ben O’Loughlin, “Strategic Narratives: Methods and Ethics,” in *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, ed. Alistar Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 37.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated the benefits of using foreign policy discourse theory, particularly public justification theory, to move beyond inadequate existing explanations of exit strategy formation and implementation in humanitarian interventions. I argued there is a collective narrative framing public discussions of foreign policy in the US that sets normative standards of behaviour for foreign policy action including using military force. These normative expectations are based on a dominant national role conception informed by political myths about US exceptionalism, good war/bad war archetypes, and the importance of winning. These taken-for-granted ideas shape normative expectations about US behaviour in humanitarian interventions, including options for exit. To that end, humanitarian interventions should be consistent with expectations they will fulfil America's moral responsibilities to defend human rights, defeat evil and promote political transformation. Humanitarian interventions should also have a clear exit strategy to ensure troops are not stuck in a quagmire. As military operations humanitarian interventions should also be won; US troops must succeed in their endeavour or risk undermining the wider collective narrative framework about how and why America uses military force overseas. In the following chapter I provide more detail about how I arrived at this analytical framework for my thesis by explaining my research method in greater detail.

CHAPTER 4

Method, Data and Research Findings

4.1 Method

My investigation method is grounded in the discourse-historical approach (DHA) outlined by prominent DHA scholars Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak,¹ combined with normative concepts analysis (NOCA) and discourse tracing. I used an eight-step method to analyse presidents' public justifications for decisions about their exit strategies across four humanitarian interventions over a twenty year period from 1991-2011.

DHA's critical orientation coupled with its scholars' interest in political justification, argumentation strategies, and changes in discourse over time, makes DHA a sound choice for examining presidents' exit strategies over time. Content-related argumentation analysis in DHA centres on identifying and analysing *topoi*. Within DHA I use normative concepts analysis (NOCA) principles and discourse tracing promoted by Uriel Abulof specifically for studying public political thought and public justification.² I also adopt Marianne LeGreco and Sarah J. Tracy's discourse tracing

1. Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)."

2. Abulof and Kornprobst, "Introduction"; Abulof and Kornprobst, "Unpacking Public Justification"; Abulof, "Normative Concepts Analysis."

principles.³ Critical discourse scholars acknowledge DHA, NOCA and discourse tracing methods are complementary approaches for analysing argumentation.⁴

Although I explain some of my findings with deductive reasoning, my approach is predominantly abductive and iterative.⁵ It is a process of identifying the key ideas, concepts and tropes imbued with moral meaning shaping the imagined possibilities and language of exit strategy justification in humanitarian interventions. Having identified these concepts I also identify how their meaning and employment changes over time.

Table 4.1 summarises the research method I adopted. The table shows how I integrated the steps involved in DHA, NOCA and discourse tracing to arrive at my approach to analysing exit strategies in US humanitarian interventions.

Table 4.1: Method

Research steps	Discourse-historical approach ^a	Normative concepts analysis ^b	Discourse tracing ^c
1. Conduct literature review	Activate and consult preceding theoretical knowledge.		Review literature to outline potential research directions.
2. Collect data	Include context information.		
3. Prepare data	Downsize data according to relevant criteria.	Selecting texts, giving prominence to ideationally/materially powerful agents.	Order data chronologically.

3. Marianne LeGreco and Sarah J. Tracy, “Discourse Tracing as Qualitative Practice,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 15, no. 9 (2009): 1516–43.

4. Abulof, “Normative Concepts Analysis”; Wodak and Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology.”

5. Igor Douven, “Abduction,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (online: Stanford University, 2017); Karen Locke, “Abduction,” in *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, ed. Albert Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2010).

Table 4.1: Method

Research steps	Discourse-historical approach ^a	Normative concepts analysis ^b	Discourse tracing ^c
4. Formulate research questions	Specify research question and formulate assumptions. Based on literature review and first skimming of data.	Identify normative concepts based on literature and skimming of data. Core question: “what do social actors believe legitimates politics?”	Define case using rupture/turning points. Read data for emergent themes and issues. Detect main strategies of legitimation. Create structured questions based on literature and emergent themes.
5. Conduct qualitative pilot analysis	Test categories of analysis and identify <i>topoi</i> .	Test and refine normative concepts.	Apply structured questions to the data.
6. Conduct detailed case studies	Analysis is primarily qualitative but also quantitative.	Conduct data analysis along three axes: (a) Sort (types of legitimation); (b) Scale (<i>topoi</i> of normative concepts); (c) Scope (how often normative concepts are used and in what way to determine salience and resonance).	Identify how arguments relate to one another and change over time as well as socio-political context. Explore matrix of justificatory beliefs, establishing links between strategies, their evolution and context. Discover normative concepts and how they relate to each other as justificatory beliefs.
7. Formulate critique	Interpret results taking into account relevant context.		Write case study based on answers to structured questions with focus on formation, interpretation and appropriation of discursive practices.
8. Apply results	Identify prospects for future research.		Address theoretical conclusions of the case/s. Develop practical implications and recommendations.

^aReisigl & Wodak 2009^bAbulof 2015^cLeGreco & Tracy 2009; Abulof 2015

Having decided to focus on US presidential discourse I collected all US presidential statements on every humanitarian intervention conducted between 1991 and 2011: verbal and written, prepared and unprepared, public and (initially) private. I

drew primary texts from the *American Presidency Project*, a digitised collection of all publicly available documents of every US President since 1789.⁶ The Project's integrity as a reference source is widely acknowledged.⁷ Where required, I also used presidential documents held at the US Library of Congress and presidential libraries. For contextual information, I used secondary sources as well as collected reports, opinion pieces and editorials from leading US print media sources—*The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*—covering the same time period and cases.⁸ I entered and catalogued my data using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program Dedoose,⁹ which gave me an initial overview of my data.

I took the following steps to refine my data to arrive at a final corpus of 713 texts:

- (a) I chose to focus on US experiences in four humanitarian interventions that scholars agree meet the definition of humanitarian intervention outlined in Section 2.2: northern Iraq, Somalia, Kosovo and Libya. These are all interventions in which the US played a leading role. In each case the US deployed its troops into hostile foreign territory, without the request of the host government (to the extent that there was a government available for negotiations), with

6. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "The American Presidency Project," 1999–2017.

7. Shari Laster, "The American Presidency Project," *Reference Reviews* 27, no. 7 (September 16, 2013): 23–24; A. I. Fritz, "The American Presidency Project," *Choice* 52, no. 12 (2015): 2000; Komalsingh Rambaree and Elisabeth Faxelid, "Considering Abductive Thematic Network Analysis with ATLAS-Ti 6.2," in *Advancing Research Methods with New Technologies*, ed. Natalie Sappleton, Premier Reference Source (Hershey: Information Science Reference, 2013).

8. Pew Research Centre, *Newspapers Fact Sheet: Analysis based on Alliance for Audited Media data*, research report (Pew Research Centre, 2018), I appreciate that particularly for more recent humanitarian interventions, online media has played an increasingly important role in shaping the public discourse on intervention. I chose not to incorporate online publications or casting services such as *Twitter* because to do so would require an exponentially greater degree of time and resources, and this was ultimately not the focus of my investigation. That said, even while these forms of new media surged in popularity, the print and television sources identified above remained pillars of mainstream media and continued to be read by large sections of the US public. During the time period covered by my case studies, American newspaper circulation reached its peak and then proceeded to decline. A Newspaper Association of America survey conducted in 2013 showed that 69 per cent of Americans read a newspaper at least once a week or accessed a newspaper website at least once a month. "Across Platforms, 7 in 10 Adults Access Content from Newspaper Media Each Week," March 25, 2013, In 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* were the two most popular newspapers in the United States with a weekday circulation of 2.4 million and 1.9 million respectively. While *The Washington Post* had a circulation of almost half a million during that same period, it is still considered an "agenda-setting paper". These three newspapers also have online editions that mirror their print editions. Accessed September 22, 2014.

9. <http://www.dedoose.com>

the primary (but not exclusive) aim of protecting civilians from actual or anticipated human rights atrocities. It was not material to my case selection that each of these interventions be recognised or authorised by the UNSC as humanitarian interventions, only that they met the criteria for humanitarian interventions I set out in Section 2.2.

- (b) I only include texts comprising US presidential public discourse, that is verbal statements made to the American people via scripted speeches, responses to interview questions and off-the-cuff remarks.¹⁰
- (c) I limited texts to presidential public speech directed at the American people allowing me to focus more directly on the the phenomenon of exit strategies in humanitarian interventions as it is the domestic audience to whom such policy justifications are most frequently directed.¹¹
- (d) I selected all recorded public statements by each US president beginning from the time that the humanitarian crisis emerged and intervention was mooted through to a short period after the withdrawal of troops, or, where troops were not withdrawn, to the point where the president no longer publicly discussed the intervention.
- (e) In each of my cases I divided the corpus of presidential communications into five categories (or ‘genres’):¹² statements; press conferences/interviews; letters/memos; executive orders/proclamations; and speeches/remarks (with no questions).

Next I formulated the primary research question for this thesis:

How do US presidents justify to the American people decisions to withdraw troops and end humanitarian interventions?

10. Consistent with work on the rhetorical presidency and public justification: Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, See also my discussion in Chapter 3; Abulof, “Normative Concepts Analysis”; Abulof and Kornprobst, “Introduction”; Abulof and Kornprobst, “Unpacking Public Justification.”

11. Consistent with the approach in: Reisigl and Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA),” 90.

12. Ibid.

I then developed the following subsidiary research questions:

- (a) How do US presidents frame normative considerations relating to exit strategies and withdrawing troops from humanitarian interventions? Do these considerations change over time?
- (b) What is the relationship between normative expectations regarding exit and how do they connect with normative grounds for initiating intervention?
- (c) Are normative expectations for exit strategies ever in conflict? If so, how do presidents balance between or prioritise competing normative considerations?
- (d) Do normative expectations constrain imagined possibilities for exit strategies?
- (e) Is it possible to develop a typology of presidential justification strategies?
- (f) Can presidential discourse provide insights into why exit strategies in humanitarian interventions have traditionally not been successfully implemented?
- (g) How do contextual differences between interventions feature in presidential justifications for exit strategies? For example do external shocks like 9-11 or major intervening wars affect their justifications? Are there differences based on a president's political affiliation (Democrat versus Republican) or whether it is an intervention early or later in a political career (for example, Bush in northern Iraq and Somalia, or Clinton in Iraq, Somalia and Kosovo)?
- (h) To what extent can and do presidents shape a strategic narrative for exit strategies?

Next I established a series of normative concepts and justification practices observable in presidential speech. These normative concepts contribute to the “scale” and “scope” requirements for NOCA. These following concepts derive from the dominant narrative framework underpinning US military action and setting expectations for justifiable

behaviour:

- (a) The political myth of US exceptionalism/manifest destiny imposes particular responsibilities and requirements on US foreign policy action to stop atrocities, champion human rights and create societies in the US image, or at least acquiescent to the US-led international order.
- (b) Winning wars vindicates the moral purpose of military action.
- (c) Humanitarian interventions should be just wars supporting human rights and creating societal transformation.
- (d) US troops should not be occupiers but only stay as long as necessary to prevent atrocities, protect victims and help communities take charge of their own transformation.
- (e) Humanitarian interventions should be conducted at limited cost to the American people.
- (f) Humanitarian interventions should be ‘good’ wars, fought nobly for the ‘right’ reasons, won decisively, and with viable exit strategies.

I developed typologies of justification practices that I could potentially observe in presidential speech for the “sort” category of analysis in the NOCA approach. I adapted and extended the categories in rhetoric analysis¹³ as well as Theo van Leeuwen’s¹⁴ and Anthony Reyes’¹⁵ typologies of legitimation strategies creating the following categories:

13. Lordan, *Case for Combat: How Presidents Persuade Americans to Go to War*.

14. Theo van Leeuwen, “Three Models of Interdisciplinarity,” in *New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis : Theory, Methodology and Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Paul A. Chilton, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture ; v. 13 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), 3–19; van Leeuwen, “Legitimation in Discourse and Communication”; See also: Roderick P. Hart, ed., *Political Keywords: Using Language That Uses Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

15. Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions.”

- (a) *Legitimacy through emotions*—referred to in rhetoric analysis as ‘*pathos*’. The strategy is used to justify US action to right a wrong based on innate notions of moral/motivational superiority and rightness of purpose and being, which is contrasted by the absence of these characteristics on the part of the ‘other’.¹⁶
- (b) *Legitimacy through moral evaluation and altruism*—*ethos* in rhetoric analysis. This strategy resonates with the American exceptionalism myth and the normative basis of humanitarian interventions.
- (c) *Legitimacy through rationality and voices of expertise*¹⁷—*logos* in rhetoric analysis. Until very recently the US president has been considered, by virtue of the office, to be an expert on matters of war policy and national security. His or her authority and legitimacy is enhanced by reference to advice received from other experts to support his or her decisions. Presidential statements are accorded additional legitimacy if they are perceived as rational in the particular social context; in political discourse the decision is “presented as neither rushed, nor taken lightly, and therefore the right way to proceed”.¹⁸
- (d) *Legitimacy through a hypothetical future and analogical bridging* is evident in conditional statements about the future demanding immediate action. The feared hypothetical future, which may or may not be real or as dangerous as perceived, becomes more acute through repetition. These hypothetical futures are also believable because they are based on the collective memory of past events and efforts to draw parallels between the presumed similarities of past event and the present circumstance.¹⁹ This practice is known as ‘analogical bridging’, a term used most notably by Jeffrey Alexander to explain how the memory of the Holocaust in World War II has been transformed into a

16. Wodak et al., *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*; Lordan, *Case for Combat: How Presidents Persuade Americans to Go to War*, 12.

17. Reyes treats these as separate strategies but in my view they are better understood as being closely related with each strategy being used to reinforce the other.

18. Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions,” 800; Zarefsky, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition.”

19. This is not a legitimisation strategy identified by Reyes or van Leeuwen but my research shows it is observable in presidential discourse on intervention conduct and exit strategies.

universal, global symbol of evil and atrocity.²⁰ In humanitarian interventions, the president may construct hypothetical futures around the political and humanitarian disaster that would ensue if US troops withdraw. Analogical bridging may also occur when the president refers to collective memories of past military operations. Analogies are used to justify policies in war but are also cognitive and information-processing tools for decision-making.²¹ By referring to past intervention experiences as blueprints for future action, the president contributes to institutionalising particular memories of intervention, enhancing their power for future analogical bridging justifications.²²

I conducted a close reading of all the texts for this case. Rather than adopting a rigid line-by-line or word-by-word approach, I followed Ronald Chenail's suggestion of dividing each text into "meaningful undivided units", depending on the text.²³ In the main, these units were sentences, although at times individual words, sub-clauses or short paragraphs were units. The size of my units was determined by what was sufficient to indicate the president referring to a normative concept. I used the Dedoose software to apply codes based on the normative concepts outlined above. I reflexively switched back and forth between my data and the theoretical frameworks I outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

Although DHA scholars use *topoi* to triangulate their findings, I share Igor Žagar's criticism of the predominant DHA focus on literary *topoi* as failing to reveal anything about connections between arguments and conclusions.²⁴ Instead, I use the Aristotelian concept of *topoi* as adapted by Cicero into *loci* and Stephen Toulmin

20. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 46–49; Other writers have also noted the role of analogical thinking on political decision-making, for example: Davis B. Bobrow, "Stories Remembered and Forgotten," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 2 (1989): Davis Bobrow argues that lessons learned from certain experiences are transformed into 'maxims' that are to be applied in future supposedly similar situations.

21. Khong, *Analogies at War*.

22. Thomas Olesen, "Global Injustice Memories: The 1994 Rwanda Genocide," *International Political Sociology* 6 (2012): 373–89.

23. R. J. Chenail, "Conducting Qualitative Data Analysis: Reading Line-by-Line, but Analyzing by Meaningful Qualitative Units," *The Qualitative Report* 17, no. 1 (2012): 266.

24. Igor Žagar, "Topoi in Critical Discourse Analysis," *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 6, no. 1 (2010).

into *warrants*.²⁵ Instead of using ‘pre-determined’ *topoi*, I looked to how the president discursively relates conclusions, evidence and justifications regarding exit strategy.

Toulmin defines a *warrant* as the general, unstated proposition allowing a speaker and her audience to move from *data* to a *claim*. Sometimes the *warrant* is a shared assumption between speaker and audience and is thus not apparent from a superficial reading of the text, but it can be revealed through looking at *backing* (support for the warrant), *qualifiers* (words that limit the statement), and *conditions of rebuttal* (exceptions).²⁶ In Toulmin’s words:

[Warrants] may normally be written very briefly (in the form If D [data], then C [claim]); but, for candour’s sake, they can profitably be expanded, and made more explicit: ‘Data such as D entitle one to draw conclusions, or make claims, such as C,’ or alternatively ‘Given data D, one may take it that C’.²⁷

My detailed case analysis can be found in the following case study chapters. Based on my pilot analysis, I refined my coding of normative concepts for my full data set. Table 4.2 details these normative concepts and the lexical identifiers with which they were most commonly associated; a task that satisfied the “scope” aspect of NOCA. Because of the way these concepts were represented in the texts as either grounded in or giving rise to specific expectations about how an intervention should be conducted, I re-framed the normative concepts in this table and my subsequent analysis as ‘normative expectations’. I also provided example excerpts for each code from my Iraq pilot study, noting that in a number of cases I applied multiple codes to these units of text.

The reader will note that in each group of lexical triggers I include individual words and specific phrases as well as broader, referential sub-concepts that do not require specific words in a precise order. Presidents are orators and thus it is not always possible, or necessarily useful, to use a single word or phrase as the basis for analysing humanitarian interventions. To focus exclusively on the use of terms like ‘exit’ or ‘exit strategy’ or even ‘humanitarian intervention’ would be an interesting project but distinct from my investigation. In my thesis, such an approach would give a

25. Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Žagar, “Topoi in Critical Discourse Analysis,” 23.

26. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*; James E. Warren, “Taming the Warrant in Toulmin’s Model of Argument,” *The English Journal* 99, no. 6 (2010): 41–46.

27. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 91.

misleading impression about the extent to which intervention exit issues are broached by the US President and the manner in which this occurs. It would also make it more difficult to identify connections observable through informed judgments about sentence constructions, turns of phrase, metaphors and image construction.

The reader will also observe some lexical identifiers are included in more than one category. This does not amount to ‘double-counting’ but rather reflects the fact that individual words or phrases can have more than one meaning/connotation depending on the context.

Table 4.2: Lexical identifiers for normative expectations for humanitarian interventions

Normative expectation for intervention	Lexical identifiers	Example
Consistent with American exceptionalism and manifest density	(manifest) destiny; Founding Fathers; responsibility; (defending/promoting) freedom; (defending/promoting) democracy; institution-building; blessed (by God); American values; reliance (of other countries on the US); American example; American leadership; countries looking to America; success; prosperity; responsibility; duty; (intervention is) right/just/moral; other countries relying on the US; consistency with international law; UN Security Council Resolutions; NATO allies (supporting); Marshall Plan; legitimacy; international community sanctioning	<i>We learned that the United States alone – it’s only the United States that can mobilise the international community and then lead it through such efforts.</i> (Bush speech 9 July 1991)
Fighting evil	war crime; atrocity; mass violence; murder; massacre; killing; repression; persecution; oppression; aggression; dictator; uncaring/indifferent leaders; (WWII) Holocaust; torture; militia; genocide; (comparing perpetrators to) Hitler; malicious; undemocratic; torture; (lack of) freedom; authoritarian (leader); human rights abuses; suffering; appeasement; sacrifice; brave men and women	<i>And the United States is in lockstep with Europe in terms of our approach to helping these unfortunate people that are being victimised by this brutal dictator in Baghdad.</i> (Bush press conf. 11 April 1991)

Atrocities stopped with aid/disaster relief or providing protection	war crime; atrocity; mass violence; murder; massacre; killing; repression; persecution; oppression; aggression; dictator; uncaring/indifferent leaders; Holocaust; torture; genocide; chemical weapons; weapons of mass destruction; victims, especially women and children, protesters, unarmed civilians; suffering; disaster; catastrophe; humanitarian emergency; responsibility to protect (R2P); protection; saving	<i>Now do we hurt when Kurdish people are hurt and killed and brutalised?</i> (Bush press conf. 4 April 1991)
Failed state redeemed	ethnic tensions; authoritarian (leadership); dictatorship; (indiscriminate) violence; refugees; poverty; unresolved historical grievances; economic problems; crime; loss of legitimacy (of country that is the target of intervention)	<i>But what we don't care about is helping protect a regime that has lost all credibility and lost all chance of running the country because of the brutality.</i> (Bush press conf. 3 April 1991)
Just war prosecuted	(situation is a) threat to international peace and security; (stopping) aggression; humanitarian intervention; save; protect; moral duty; responsibility; evil (being fought/contained); seeking peace/diplomatic solution failed; UNSC resolutions (supporting intervention); international law (supporting intervention); legitimacy; international community supporting action; stopping atrocities; just war; (stopping) genocide; (innocent) victims; (presence of) civilian targets of violence; women and children (targeted/affected by violence); indiscriminate violence; war crime; (target country is a) failed state; government violence (perpetrated in target country); imminent attacks (on civilians in target country); (intervention complies with) Geneva Conventions; (intervention to stop) massacres; (situation in target country causing) refugees; Holocaust; Rwanda; Bosnia; World War II; chemical weapons (used in the conflict)	<i>Such an undertaking was made necessary by the terrible human tragedy unfolding in and around Iraq as a result of Saddam Hussein's brutal treatment of Iraqi citizens.</i> (Bush press conf. 16 April 1991)
Victory secured	(continue until) job is done; stay the course; defeat (aggressor, evil, enemy); achieve objectives; victory; Gulf War; (not a) quagmire: World War II; defeating Hitler; defeating Saddam Hussein; winning	<i>And the determination of the United States in dealing with the problem of Iraq should not be underestimated.</i> (Clinton speech 11 September 1996)
Costs limited	no (American) ground troops; (fighting in) coalition; peacekeeping; (participating in) international force; (predominantly/only) airstrikes; few deaths; reference to (American) casualties	<i>I just want to say, again, that we are going to do everything we can to make sure our own pilots are safe, that they can fly their missions in safety.</i> (Clinton speech 11 September 1996)

Exit embedded in operational approach	(troop) withdrawal; bring troops home; come home; return home; exit strategy; timetable; benchmarks; achievable objectives; mission creep; (avoiding) Somalia; (avoiding) quagmire; (not being) bogged down; (avoiding) Vietnam Syndrome; (avoiding) Black Hawk Down; (avoiding) Battle of Mogadishu; (contrast with) Afghanistan (2001-); (contrast with) Iraq (2003-2014); restriction to aerial operation	<i>And we are committed to seeing every American soldier and every allied POW home soon...</i> (Bush speech 2 March 1991)
Exit assured through UN handover	handover to UN; responsibility of international community; timetable; benchmarks; achievable objectives	<i>We intend to turn over the administration of and security for these sites as soon as possible to the United Nations...</i> (Bush press conf. 16 April 1991)
Exit assured through transition to local authorities after transformation	handover to locals; autonomy; self-determination; timetable; benchmarks; achievable objectives; elections; institution building	<i>And we must work to reintegrate Iraq and its people into the region once the Iraqi people choose new leadership.</i> (Bush press conf. 2 August 1991)

I tried to improve the reliability of my findings in three ways: first, I was the only researcher involved in this study so risk of inter-coder inconsistencies was eliminated; second, I used a comparatively large number of texts to help guard against selection bias; and finally, my causation explanations are consistent with the logic of abduction.²⁸

4.2 Data overview

I examined a total of 713 transcripts of verbal texts across four humanitarian interventions. Table 4.3 sets out all these texts divided according to each phase of intervention, which I based on the changing nature of US involvement over the course

28. Jo Reichertz, "Abduction: The Logic of Discovery of Grounded Theory," in *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (London: SAGE, 2007), 214–29; Megan Woods, Rob Macklin, and Gemma K. Lewis, "Researcher Reflexivity: Exploring the Impacts of CAQDAS Use," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 19, no. 4 (2016): 396; Benjamin Banta, "Analysing Discourse as a Causal Mechanism," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2013): 379–402.

of the intervention. I provide more detail on each phase in the subsequent chapters.

Table 4.3: Texts analysed

Intervention	Phase	Date	Nature of US intervention	President	Total texts
NORTHERN IRAQ 3 APRIL 1991–31 DECEMBER 1996 296 TEXTS	Pre-intervention	1 March 1991–2 April 1991	US withdrawing from Gulf War	George H.W. Bush	18
	<i>Provide Comfort</i> no-fly zone	3 April 1991–15 April 1991	Enforcement of no-fly zone and aerial aid delivery; support for UN and existing aid agency missions	George H.W. Bush	8
	<i>Provide Comfort</i> ground troops	16 April 1991–24 July 1991	US ground troops deliver aid directly, repatriate refugees and establish ‘safe havens’ for the Kurds	George H.W. Bush	53
	<i>Provide Comfort II</i>	25 July 1991–31 December 1996	US responsible for preventing future Iraqi government attacks on Kurds as well as providing ongoing protection and guaranteeing safety. UN responsible for safe zones	George H.W. Bush Bill Clinton	91 124
	Post-intervention	1 January 1997–28 February 1997	US begins <i>Northern Watch</i> to enforce no-fly zone, transitioned into <i>Operation Iraqi Freedom</i> in 2003	Bill Clinton	2

Table 4.3: Texts analysed

Intervention	Phase	Date	Nature of US intervention	President	Total texts
SOMALIA 15 AUGUST 1992–25 MARCH 1995 120 TEXTS	Pre-intervention/ <i>Provide Relief</i>	15 August–3 December 1992	Airlifting relief supplies, transporting UN peacekeepers into Somalia	George H.W. Bush	6
	<i>Restore Hope</i>	4 December 1992–3 May 1993	Contribution to UNITAF; establishing security to facilitate aid delivery	George H.W. Bush Bill Clinton	21 6
	<i>Continue Hope</i> before the Battle of Mogadishu	4 May 1993–2 October 1993	Contribution of Quick Reaction Force to UNOSOM II to support state-building, policing, searching for General Aidid	Bill Clinton	23
	Continue Hope after the Battle of Mogadishu	3 October 1993–25 March 1995	Troop surge and preparing for troop withdrawal	Bill Clinton	51
	Post-intervention	26 March 1995–31 December 1996	All troops withdrawn from Somalia	Bill Clinton	13

Table 4.3: Texts analysed

Intervention	Phase	Date	Nature of US intervention	President	Total texts
KOSOVO 24 MARCH 1999– 242 TEXTS	Pre-intervention	4 February–23 March 1999	US troops stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina & Macedonia	Bill Clinton	25
	<i>Noble Anvil</i>	24 March–9 June 1999	Contribution to NATO's <i>Allied Force</i> mission; airstrikes initially against Serbian military installations followed by civilian infrastructure	Bill Clinton	87
	<i>Joint Guardian</i>	10 June 1999–	Establishing security; preventing recurrence of atrocities; contributing to nation-building activities	Bill Clinton George W. Bush Barack Obama	81 37 12

Table 4.3: Texts analysed

Intervention	Phase	Date	Nature of US intervention	President	Total texts
LIBYA 19 MARCH 2011–31 OCTOBER 2011 57 TEXTS	Pre-intervention	5 February 2011-18 March 2011	US rhetorical support for Arab Spring	Barack Obama	8
	<i>Odyssey Dawn</i>	19 March 2011–31 March 2011	Airstrikes on Libyan military installations	Barack Obama	15
	<i>Unified Protector</i>	1 April 2011–31 October 2011	Contribution to NATO operation; airstrikes on Libyan military installations; regime change	Barack Obama	19
	Post-intervention	1 November 2011–31 December 2011	US troops withdrawn	Barack Obama	15

^a*Restore Hope* did not officially start until 9 December 1992 but Bush's major announcements about the operation began on 4 December. For analytical consistency I have included the 4 December texts in this phase.

4.3 Analytical framework for research findings

For the purposes of explaining how I used my method, in this section I foreshadow the three main findings comprising my analytical framework. First I linked the normative expectations of intervention found in presidential discourse with the implications they have for presidential decision-making about exit strategies. In this way, I could show how the normative expectations functioned as Toulmin’s “data”, and the exit strategy frames as “conclusions”. Table 4.4 details these connections.

Table 4.4: Normative concepts and exit strategy implications

Normative expectation for intervention	Normative expectation explained	Expectations for framing exit strategies
Consistent with American exceptionalism and manifest destiny; Failed state redeemed	America is a successful nation because it has been chosen by God and it has a duty to help other countries follow the US example; Consistent with national role conception of US as a moral foreign policy actor and US vision for a ‘good war’; Country subject to intervention is a failed state and the US has a responsibility to help build a better state	US troops will leave when country has been transformed in a manner consistent with American ideals, values and interests but US will not be an occupying power; handover to local authorities or UN; US troops will leave if heroism questioned
Fighting evil	America is fighting to defeat an identifiable evil	US troops will leave when evil enemy forces have been defeated
Stopping/preventing atrocities	Parties to conflict are committing (or will commit) extreme acts of violence and human rights abuses that require US intervention	US troops will leave when atrocities have stopped and will not resume
Just war prosecuted	America is fighting a just war sanctioned by the international community and its exit strategy is consistent with international obligations	Exit strategy should accord with the requirements of necessity, proportionality, right intention, <i>jus ex bello</i> possibilities for exit without victory or keeping troops to prevent greater injustice
Victory	American victory will vindicate President’s decision to use military force	US troops will leave when all objectives are achieved and enemy is neutralised

Costs limited	Limit the risk to American troops and reduce potential American casualty numbers	US troops will leave when the risk to American lives becomes unacceptably high
Exit assured	Every sensible military operation should have an exit strategy; US government has an exit strategy and it is being implemented; this intervention is not like other operations where a successful exit strategy was not implemented	Timetable for US troop withdrawal demonstrating US soldiers will not be occupiers and costs will be limited

Continuing with Toulmin's approach, I found those conclusions revealed a series of warrants about an American audience's normative expectations for an exit in humanitarian interventions. These three warrants are:

- (a) Victory achieved.
- (b) Moral duty fulfilled.
- (c) Troop withdrawal assured.

I re-framed the three warrants as *exit strategy expectations*. The warrants/exit strategy expectations highlight the assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas underpinning presidential exit strategy justifications. Through the course of my analysis it became clear that these exit strategy expectations are difficult to fulfil simultaneously. At the same time, not meeting these expectations is beyond the realm of imagined possibilities for foreign policy action. To not meet these expectations has consequences for the narrative about the humanitarian intervention and the collective narrative about how the US uses military force. It can potentially undermine the legitimacy, and assessment of the wisdom of a humanitarian intervention. It also challenges the collective belief systems of the American body politic, threatening a collective cognitive dissonance. Figure 4.3 represents these connections. It shows that if any one of these groups of normative expectations are not met, questions about the moral rightness and legitimacy of the humanitarian intervention arise.

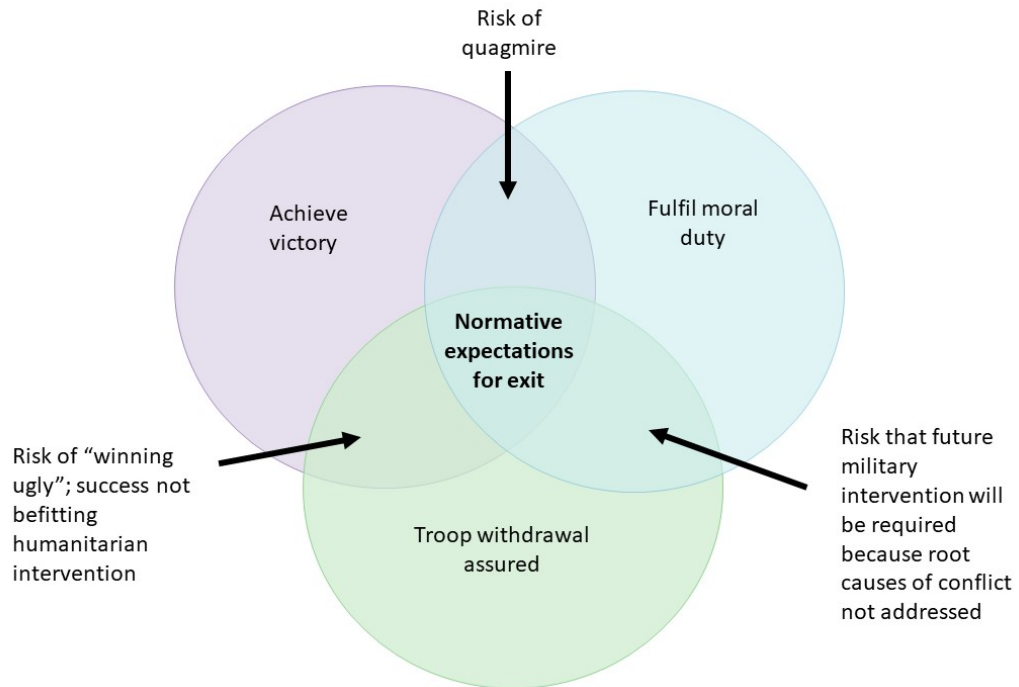


Figure 4.1: Expectations for a publicly justifiable exit strategy

When it comes to implementing an exit strategy in humanitarian interventions, presidential rhetoric about exit is self-reinforcing and constraining but not always determinative. In each case there are examples of presidents engaging in rhetorical manoeuvring; presidents craft strategic narratives, attempting to reshape the meaning of normative expectations. Table 4.5 shows the space presidents have for rhetorical manoeuvre; to make strategic narrative choices. In the case study chapters that follow I demonstrate the relationships between normative concepts, exit strategy requirements and strategic narratives in presidential justifications for withdrawing troops.

Table 4.5: Presidential justifications for exit strategies

Exit strategy expectations	Normative expectations for intervention	Strategic narrative choices to meet exit strategy expectations
Fulfil moral duty	<p>American exceptionalism; manifest destiny; redeeming failed state</p> <p>Fight evil</p> <p>Stop/ prevent atrocities</p> <p>Prosecute a just war</p>	<p>How far and for how long does the US responsibility last? What counts as transformation in intervention country? Democratic elections? Removal of dictator? Liberal institutions? Security of civilian populations?</p> <p>What does it mean to defeat the enemy? Is deterrence sufficient? Is regime change required? Is a peace settlement required or is transition to civilian, peaceable, democratic government needed?</p> <p>How long should the period of peace last before US will be held responsible for any resurgence in violence? How many people should be saved? How many people are intervention forces permitted to kill in order to justify saving other lives? Should US troops only stop currently occurring or impending atrocities or should the threat of atrocities be eliminated?</p> <p>How many people should be saved? How many people are intervention forces permitted to kill in order to justify saving other lives? What kinds of operational approaches and tactics are permissible? What risks should US soldiers be asked to bear? Is regime change permissible?</p>
Achieve victory	<p>Win</p> <p>Limit cost</p>	<p>What does it mean to win a humanitarian operation? How many civilians can be justifiably killed? How much damage to infrastructure is justifiable? Is regime change required?</p> <p>How much risk is reasonable to expect US soldiers and the American public to bear? How can American lives be balanced against lives of those to be saved?</p>
Troop withdrawal assured	Exit in operational approach, assured through handover or transition	How specific should the timetable be? Should there be dates or benchmarks? Can transition to the UN or NATO be classified as an exit if US forces remain engaged?

4.4 Conclusion

In my thesis I examine how US presidents have justified their decisions to terminate humanitarian interventions since the end of the Cold War, noting in the majority of instances, the president must justify decisions *not* to terminate an intervention in the manner proposed at the outset of the troop deployment. My research approach follows discourse-historical approach (DHA) and the related methods of normative concepts analysis (NOCA) and discourse tracing.

My thesis is the first comparative discourse study of public justifications for exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. I demonstrate that although not a complete explanation for the process of exiting intervention, discourse is a necessary component in understanding the challenges of exit strategy development, articulation and implementation. Consequently it adds a new perspective on intervention exit strategy development and implementation that should be incorporated into future research on humanitarian intervention and the dynamics of end state planning.

My research contributes to the development of normative concepts analysis for exploring public justification and strategic narrative practices of US presidents including during military operations. My research also expands the study of the rhetorical presidency using these methods beyond justifications for starting wars to include the conduct and conclusion of military operations. More specifically, my study is the first comparative discursive analysis of exit strategies in armed humanitarian interventions, further demonstrating the utility of discourse analysis for understanding questions of decision-making in war time.

In the following chapter I apply the methodology I outlined in this chapter to the first US humanitarian intervention following the end of the Cold War: the intervention to assist the Kurds in northern Iraq following the 1991 US Gulf War.

CHAPTER 5

Providing Comfort in Northern Iraq (1991–1996)

Q. You said before that you didn't like the idea of a protected enclave within Iraq itself. But doesn't this, in effect, establish for months and the foreseeable future the United States military protecting Kurdish refugees in that area? And do you want to continue to leave it ambiguous what the US would do in case there is any effort by the Iraqis against the Kurdish refugees?

PRESIDENT BUSH. I hope we're not talking about a long-term effort.

White House press conference
16 April 1991

5.1 Introduction

Scholars generally do not consider America's 41st president George Herbert Walker Bush to be a particularly coherent orator, let alone an inspiring one.¹ The former congressman, ambassador, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and vice-president eschewed advisors' efforts to tailor messaging or craft public relations

1. Wynton C. Hall, "Reflections of Yesterday": George H. W. Bush's Instrumental Use of Research in Presidential Discourse," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2002): 540.

strategies.² Bush was suspicious of scripted speech-making as disingenuous. While he did not avoid the press, he preferred ‘plain-speaking’ to making visionary pronouncements.³ And yet as America’s first post-Cold War president, Bush had to explain how America should navigate the post-Cold War world. It was up to Bush to demonstrate how the US, as the world’s only superpower in the final decade of the 20th century, would continue meeting the normative expectations for its foreign policy behaviour.⁴

As is often the case for American presidents, a war defined Bush’s presidency and his foreign policy legacy.⁵ No sooner was the Cold War over when Bush launched the Gulf War on 2 August 1990. The US led 35 countries in a UN-authorized mission to force Iraq to withdraw its military forces from neighbouring Kuwait. The spectacular military victory delivered predominantly by US forces was followed by humanitarian crises across Iraq, spreading into neighbouring Iran and Turkey.

Bush initially resisted sending troops to Iraq. His arguments ran counter to the foreign policy expectations of fulfilling moral responsibility I outlined in Chapter 3 as well as Bush’s own commitment to defeat evil and fulfil the demands of American exceptionalism. Bush then reluctantly commenced what would become the first humanitarian intervention of the post-Cold War era: Operation *Provide Comfort* to assist the Kurds in northern Iraq. The intervention began in April 1991 as an exclusively air operation enforcing a no-fly zone (NFZ) and dropping aid parcels to stranded refugees. A few weeks later, Bush deployed ground troops to build and protect a safe haven for the Kurds inside Iraq. Four months later responsibility for the intervention was formally handed over to the UN but rather than ending the intervention, Bush moved US troops across the border to Turkey. He maintained

2. James Addison Baker and Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995).

3. Bush’s press secretary Marlin Fitzwater and deputy chief-of-staff Andy Corin quoted in Hall, “‘Reflections of Yesterday’: George H. W. Bush’s Instrumental Use of Research in Presidential Discourse,” 531–33.

4. Jeffrey A. Engel, “When George Bush Believed the Cold War Ended and Why That Mattered,” in *Inside the Presidency of George H. W. Bush*, ed. Michael Nelson and Barbara A. Perry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 100–122.

5. Tucker Spencer, *US Leadership in Wartime: Clashes, Controversy and Compromise* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 905.

patrols of Iraqi airspace and committed US soldiers to responding militarily if the Iraqi government resumed attacking the Kurds.

The story of *Provide Comfort* is often recounted as a humanitarian intervention that helped save the lives of millions of Kurds;⁶ the first UNSC-authorized foreign military operation to successfully halt a mass atrocity within the borders of a sovereign state. These narratives often ignore the reality that *Provide Comfort* ended in name only.⁷ Despite ostensibly ‘handing over’ the operation to the UN and Bush’s hope the mission would not be “a long-term effort”, US intervention in northern Iraq lasted five-and-a-half years and was gradually subsumed into wider US military operations in Iraq conducted for almost a quarter of a century. Conventional narratives also focus on the legality and practicalities of conducting the intervention. By contrast, in this chapter I draw attention to the discursive framework affecting how the Commanders-in-Chief imagined intervention possibilities and expectations and how this in turn constrained strategic narrative choices for exit strategies.⁸

I tell a story about how Bush and his successor Bill Clinton justified their exit strategies for *Provide Comfort* to the American people. Mine is an attempt to understand how Bush, despite his fears of a Vietnam War-style quagmire, deployed US soldiers in an open-ended operation to protect the Kurdish people in northern Iraq. I explain how Bush set aside his commitment to only begin operations involving US troops when victory and rapid withdrawal was assured; how he ended up justifying an exit strategy that was ultimately not an exit strategy at all, but a series of undertakings progressively deepening and widening US obligations to the Kurdish people. Even though the presidency changed hands and parties from Republican Bush to Democrat Clinton, I show how Bush’s rhetorical parameters constrained

6. Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 2004); James L. Jones, “Operation Provide Comfort: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 75, no. 11 (1991): 98–107; Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*; Philip A. Meek, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Case Study in Humanitarian Relief and Foreign Assistance,” *Air Force Law Review* 37 (1994): 225–39.

7. Michael E. Harrington, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Perspective in International Law,” *Connecticut Journal of International Law* 8 (1992–1993): 188.

8. *Ibid.*, 636.

Clinton's imagined exit strategy options.

I begin with an overview of the rhetorical context and the humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq. I divide the rest of the chapter into each of the three phases of the intervention: *Provide Comfort* as a no-fly zone (NFZ) with aid drops; *Provide Comfort* involving ground troops; and *Provide Comfort II*. This case study is important because as the first post-Cold War humanitarian intervention, Iraq became the template for future interventions. Bush also introduced the idea of a UN transition as an exit strategy; an option adopted in subsequent interventions. In addition, the Iraq case demonstrates the power of moral responsibilities to constrain intervention exit strategies. Bush and Clinton emphasised America's moral duty to the Kurds throughout the intervention and this defined victory. Paradoxically, both presidents expanded the scope of America's moral duty to achieve victory, but in so doing, made it more difficult for the intervention to be 'won' or to place a time limit on US troop deployment.

5.2 The rhetorical context

5.2.1 The end of the Cold War and the new world order

For the US the end of the Cold War was an historical moment readily assimilated into the national collective narrative about American exceptionalism and manifest destiny. In mainstream public discourse the Cold War did not 'end' so much as the US 'triumphed' over its Soviet adversaries. In the year following fall of the Berlin Wall, leading elite press outlets *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* collectively published more than 30 editorials and opinion pieces about America's Cold War 'victory'.⁹

9. *Factiva database search* (November 5, 2018).

When talking about American foreign policy motivations Bush was forced to address the demise of America's main enemy of the previous 50 years. Following in the footsteps of Presidents Roosevelt, Nixon, Carter and Reagan, Bush used the concept of a 'new world order' in February 1990 to describe the post-Cold War landscape and America's role within it.¹⁰ Bush used the phrase more frequently than his predecessors, mentioning it 92 times in public statements over the course of his four-year presidency. Although Bush provided greater detail each time he used the term, he maintained its core tenet elucidated in his 11 September 1990 address to a joint session of Congress:

Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective—a new world order—can emerge: a new era—free from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world... can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavour. Today that new world is struggling to be born... A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognise the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.¹¹

Conjuring an image of a new world "struggling to be born" Bush argued the new global order would not arise organically; the US had to fight for and build it. Bush appealed to his domestic audience's association of the US with the virtuous elements of this new world; his definition positioned America on the side of freedom, peace and justice, protecting the oppressed and vanquishing evil, using frames reflecting

10. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Address for Navy and Total Defense Day*, ed. Address for Navy and Total Defense Day, October 27, 1941, In 1941 Franklin D. Roosevelt described Adolf Hitler's "plans for conquest" during the Second World War as an attempt to create a new world order: Richard Nixon, *Toasts of the President and Premier Chou En-lai of China at a Banquet Honoring the Premier in Peking*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 25, 1972, Richard Nixon used it to refer to the emerging rapprochement between the US and the then-communist China in 1972–1973: Richard Nixon, *Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 3, 1973; Jimmy Carter, *Visit of Lieutenant General Obasanjo of Nigeria Toasts of the President and Lieutenant General Obasanjo at a Dinner Honoring the Nigerian Head of State*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 11, 1977, Jimmy Carter used it in 1977 to describe a "more just world economic system": Jimmy Carter, *Visit of President Perez of Venezuela Toasts of the President and President Perez at a Dinner Honoring the Venezuelan President*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 28, 1977; Ronald Reagan, *Toasts of President Reagan and President Soeharto of Indonesia at the State Dinner*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 12, 1982, Ronald Reagan adopted the term in 1982 to refer to the work incumbent on the US to "achieve an overall improvement in the inequalities in the world... which guarantees political justice, economic justice and social justice":

11. George H. W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 11, 1990.

normative ideas of American exceptionalism/manifest destiny and fighting evil. As Jeffrey Engel points out, Bush knew the end of the Cold War removed the most stabilising part of the post-World War II international system and this rhetorical vacuum needed filling. As the Cold War was brought to a dramatic end, Bush reminded his US allies they required a new enemy on which to base their alliances and “this new enemy was instability”.¹²

In his speech on 11 September 1990, Bush framed the Gulf War, then in its pre-combat phase as Operation *Desert Shield* as a response to the “first assault on the new world that we seek.”¹³ Winning the Gulf War would thus vindicate the power and necessity of American global leadership, reinforcing the normative ideas central to American foreign policy narratives. Bush thus tied American actions in Iraq to America’s moral responsibilities to shape the post-Cold War order.

5.2.2 The Gulf War, moral duty and the Vietnam Syndrome

The Gulf War—Operation *Desert Storm*—launched on 16 January 1991 and was the first widely-publicised, inter-state war of the post-Cold War era.¹⁴ Bush ended the Gulf War on 27 February 1991 following a swift and powerful air and ground campaign targeting Iraqi positions in Kuwait.¹⁵ Proponents considered the war a tactical and strategic victory. Iraqi forces were pushed out of Kuwait with many soldiers surrendering to coalition troops. In a war mobilising over 950,000 coalition troops—including 500,000 from the US—only 147 of a total 382 coalition soldiers who died during the war were killed by hostile fire. Coalition ground forces did not pursue Iraqi troops deep into Iraqi territory but its aerial campaign resulted in widespread destruction of Iraq’s military and civilian infrastructure and an estimated

12. Engel, “When George Bush Believed the Cold War Ended and Why That Mattered,” 118.

13. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit*.

14. For more on Bush’s decision-making process in the lead-up to war see H. W. Brands, “George Bush and the Gulf War of 1991,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2004): 113–32.

15. Spencer, *US Leadership in Wartime: Clashes, Controversy and Compromise*, 779–888.

death toll of 205,500.¹⁶

The US ultimately enjoyed military victory but the idea of defending Kuwait and safeguarding American oil supplies was inadequate for mobilising domestic American enthusiasm for the war.¹⁷ Without a motivating Cold War narrative, Bush framed the Gulf War in equally stark terms: Iraqi forces were committing atrocities in Kuwait and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was as evil as Hitler. Bush talked of the “rape” of Kuwait and recounted the (false) story of Iraqi soldiers killing staff and premature babies in incubators at a Kuwaiti hospital.¹⁸ Bush frequently referred to Hussein as “brutal”¹⁹ and “evil”,²⁰ describing Iraqi forces as Hussein’s “henchmen” committing “horrible crimes and tortures” that were “an affront to mankind and a challenge to freedom of all”.²¹

These images recalled normative expectations of US moral responsibility to prevent atrocities and fight evil. Bush presented the Gulf War as more than a just cause; it was analogous to WWII, the archetypal ‘good’ war. Bush’s framing choices transformed the Gulf War from a strategic encounter into a “moral imperative”²² in which victory demonstrated America’s military strength, commitment to vanquishing evil and realising its divinely ordained post-Cold War vision: “the kind of blessing that enables good people to accomplish great deeds”.²³ Bush proclaimed a ‘National

16. Human Rights Watch, *Needless Deaths in the Gulf War: Civilian Casualties during the Air Campaign and Violations of the Laws of War* (Human Rights Watch, June 1, 1991), accessed July 27, 2014; Beth Osborne Daponte, “A Case Study in Estimating Casualties from War and Its Aftermath: The 1991 Persian Gulf War,” *The PSR Quarterly Review* 3, no. 2 (1993): 65.

17. Steven Hurst, “The Rhetorical Strategy of George H. W. Bush during the Persian Gulf Crisis 1990–91: How to Help Lose a War You Won,” *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 384.

18. Ben-Porath, “Rhetoric of Atrocities: The Place of Horrific Human Rights Abuses in Presidential Persuasion Efforts,” 189.

19. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 1, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Interview With Middle Eastern Journalists*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 8, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Bethesda, Maryland*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 27, 1991.

20. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*; George H. W. Bush, *Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 2, 1991.

21. George H. W. Bush, *Address to the Nation Announcing Allied Military Action in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, January 16, 1991.

22. Bush, *Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region*.

23. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Community Welcome for Returning Troops in Sumter, South Carolina*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 17, 1991.

Day of Prayer’ during the Gulf War²⁴ and on 7 March 1991 he decreed 4, 5, and 7 April ‘National Days of Thanksgiving’ to celebrate the God-given victory.²⁵ Kjell Lejon has commented on the religious and moral overtones of Bush’s communications during the Gulf War arguing Bush saw the normative idea of a ‘just war’, “as a powerful instrument of legitimation in US policy”.²⁶ For Bush, defeating evil in the Gulf War was both a “moral and ontological battle”.²⁷

With repeated references to the Vietnam War throughout February and March 1991²⁸ Bush addressed lurking domestic fears America’s military deployments inevitably become longer, costly and more fraught. Bush argued the Gulf War exorcised America’s Vietnam Syndrome demons,²⁹ “bur[y]ing the spectre of Vietnam. . . forever in the desert sands of the Arabian Peninsula”.³⁰ Without ever admitting US failures in Vietnam, Bush framed the Gulf War as the better example for understanding US military activity as a redemptive force at home and abroad, with victory achieved at low cost to US soldiers. Speaking before US troops returning from the Gulf Bush told them:

You helped this country liberate itself from old ghosts and doubts. And when you left, it was still fashionable to question America’s decency, America’s courage, America’s resolve. No one, no one in the whole world doubts us any more. What you did, you helped us revive the America of our old hopes and dreams.³¹

The Gulf War became a critical plot point in Bush’s post-Cold War narrative of a new world order where America defeated evildoers without being haunted by the ghosts of Vietnam. The extent to which Bush could convincingly claim Americans had “kicked” the Vietnam Syndrome,³² however, relied on more than trouncing a weaker foe on

24. George H. W. Bush, *Proclamation 6243—For a National Day of Prayer, February 3, 1991*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 1, 1991.

25. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Commemorating the National Days of Thanksgiving in Houston, Texas*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 7, 1991, This proclamation was called for by a joint resolution of Congress on 28 Mar 1991.

26. Kjell Lejon, *George H.W. Bush : Faith, Presidency, and Public Theology* (Frankfurt: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2014), 189.

27. *Ibid.*, 180.

28. *Ibid.*, 169.

29. Simons, *Vietnam Syndrome*.

30. Bush, *Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region*.

31. Bush, *Remarks at the Community Welcome for Returning Troops in Sumter, South Carolina*.

32. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks to the American Legislative Exchange Council*, ed. Gerhard

the battlefield, it required a demonstrated exit strategy; the war should be clearly ‘over’ with US soldiers seen returning home. But instead of withdrawing troops in March 1991, Bush found himself confronting a humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq and pressured to respond with a humanitarian intervention. This situation raised uncomfortable questions about the decisiveness of America’s Gulf War victory, the scope of America’s moral responsibilities to the Iraqi people, and the viability of the US exit strategy.

5.3 Talking about exit before intervention

During Gulf War ceasefire negotiations in the first week of March 1991 and with US troops withdrawing after Operation *Desert Strike*, Iraqis staged protests against their national government. Localised protests developed into larger uprisings across thirteen cities. The unrest began in southern Iraq led by the Shiite population. Not long after, the Peshmerga led their Kurdish compatriots in northern Iraq in armed rebellion.³³ The Peshmerga have waged an ongoing struggle for an independent Kurdistan since the 1920s and used Bush’s call for Iraqis to rise up against Saddam Hussein as motivation for their latest rebellion. Iraq’s military deployed helicopter gunships to suppress the rebels and attack civilian populations in rebel strongholds.³⁴ Western media outlets reported Iraqi troops using chemical weapons³⁵ and conducting mass, summary executions.³⁶

Peters and John T. Woolley, March 1, 1991.

33. For more on the history of the Kurdish struggle and the role of this particular uprising see: Howard Adelman, “Humanitarian Intervention: The Case of the Kurds,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 4, no. 1 (1992): 5–9; Harrington, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Perspective in International Law,” 638–39; Peter Malanczuk, “The Kurdish Crisis and Allied Intervention in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War,” *European Journal of International Law* 2 (1991): 114–35; Robert Olson, “Five stages of Kurdish nationalism:1880–1980,” *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 12, no. 2 (1991): 391–409.

34. Dan Balz and John M. Goshko, “Situation in Iraq ‘Murky’; Rebels Claim Progress in North; Army Seen Gaining South,” *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), March 20, 1991, a01.

35. Patrick E. Tyler, “After the War: US Juggling Iraq Policy,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 1991,

36. Nora Boustany, “A Trail of Death in Iraq; Shiite Refugees Tell of Atrocities by Republican Guard,” *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), March 26, 1991, a01.

The violence of the uprisings and the brutal government response led 40,000–100,000 Shiite refugees to flee across the border into Iran with a further 37,000 arriving in Saudi Arabia. More than 1.4 million Kurds entered Iran with a further 450,000 travelling towards the mountainous regions between Iraq and Turkey.³⁷ By 18 March 1991, Iraqi state media carried reports the uprising in the south were crushed,³⁸ however Western media continued featuring reports of massacres by the Iraqi military in the north and south of the country.³⁹

In this section I outline how Bush's Gulf War rhetoric, because it was based on constructing a particular relationship between moral responsibility, victory and exit strategy justifications, affected exit strategy options in the subsequent humanitarian intervention. In particular, the deteriorating human rights situation in Iraq undermined Bush's framing of the Gulf War as a combined battlefield and moral triumph. The Iraqi government committing atrocities against the Kurds created domestic pressure on Bush to gird his Gulf War victory by keeping troops in Iraq to deal with the humanitarian crisis rather than withdrawing them as initially promised.

Despite the worsening humanitarian crisis in March 1991, Bush's public statements about American foreign policy in Iraq were preoccupied with Gulf War victory justifying American troop withdrawal. America's Gulf War victory was a boon for Bush's domestic popularity. On the day Bush declared the war officially over, his Gallup presidential job approval rating was 86 percent,⁴⁰ up from 58 percent immediately prior to the war.⁴¹ Almost a third (30 percent) of Bush's comments about Iraq in March 1991 were about the US winning the Gulf War and he used the word 'victory' 14 times in 18 verbal texts during this time. Bush declared

37. Peter W. Galbraith, *Refugees from War in Iraq: What Happened in 1991 and What May Happen in 2003*, MPI Policy Brief 2 (Migration Policy Institute, February 2003).

38. Jonathan C Randal, "Kurds Report Uprising in Northern Iraq; Arab Leaders Meet in Damascus," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1991, Jonathan C Randal, "Iraq Says Rebellion Toll High; Papers Print Photos of Bodies, Damage in Southern Cities," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 1991, Dan Balz, "Bush Criticizes Iraq's Use of Helicopters on Rebels; President, Mitterrand Confer in Martinique," *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), March 15, 1991, a37.

39. Nora Boustany, "Refugees Tell of Turmoil in Iraq; Troops Recount Allied Onslaught," *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), March 4, 1991, a01.

40. Gallup News Poll, "Presidential Job Approval Rating Interactive Chart," August 9, 2018.

41. *Ibid.*

unequivocally America “won the war”,⁴² and “crush[ed] Saddam’s war machine”.⁴³ Bush gained political capital from the perceived success of the Gulf War creating opportunities to pursue other aspects of his foreign policy agenda, such as the Middle East peace process. Preserving the integrity of Gulf War victory was also important for Bush’s reputation as he headed into the 1992 presidential election campaigning season.

Bush framed US victory as important for its own sake but also because it was consistent with other US foreign policy expectations of exceptionalism and fighting evil. Bush focused on Saddam Hussein’s abject evilness,⁴⁴ contrasting it with American righteousness evident in Bush’s willingness to defend innocents from tyranny. Hussein was a “villain”,⁴⁵ “the village bully”⁴⁶ who had committed “war crimes”,⁴⁷ “tortures and insidious crimes”⁴⁸ in Kuwait that were “just sickening”⁴⁹ and “threatened the future of our children and the entire world”.⁵⁰ By contrast the US was a “humble nation”,⁵¹ a “beacon for democracy”⁵² and a “lamp of liberty”.⁵³ Americans had “selflessly confront[ed] evil for the sake of good in a land so far away”,⁵⁴ “lift[ing] the yoke of aggression and tyranny from a small country that many Americans had never even heard of, and we ask nothing in return”,⁵⁵ acting

42. George H. W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 6, 1991.

43. Bush, *Remarks at the Community Welcome for Returning Troops in Sumter, South Carolina*.

44. Lordan, *Case for Combat: How Presidents Persuade Americans to Go to War*, 240; Hurst, “The Rhetorical Strategy of George H. W. Bush during the Persian Gulf Crisis 1990–91: How to Help Lose a War You Won,” 381–82.

45. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict*.

46. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*; Bush, *Interview With Middle Eastern Journalists*, See also.

47. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*.

48. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*; Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Bethesda, Maryland*, See also.

49. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*.

50. Bush, *Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region*.

51. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks to Veterans Service Organizations*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 4, 1991.

52. Bush, *Interview With Middle Eastern Journalists*.

53. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Bethesda, Maryland*.

54. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict*.

55. *Ibid.*

“without arrogance”⁵⁶ and “not gloating”.⁵⁷ Bush unambiguously framed the Gulf War as a case of ‘us versus him’:

It’s right and wrong. It’s good and evil. He’s evil; our cause is right.⁵⁸

Having argued America’s actions in the Gulf ensured Winston Churchill’s vision had come to pass, a new world order where “the principles of justice and fair play... protect the weak against the strong”,⁵⁹ it was difficult for Bush to justify America not having a responsibility to the Iraqi people suffering under Hussein’s tyranny. The deteriorating human rights situation threatened to undermine Bush’s Gulf War victory and with it the president’s argument the new world order had “passed the first test”.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in March 1991 Bush argued *against* a US military response to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq because it risked a quagmire. Analogising with the Vietnam War, Bush justified non-intervention on the grounds US troops would be “sucked into the internal civil war inside Iraq”.⁶¹ More than three-quarters of Bush’s comments about his exit strategy were thus about US troops withdrawing from Iraq (78 percent). Maintaining the integrity of America’s Gulf War victory as a symbol of the viability and virtue of the new world order, however required America to respond to war crimes perpetrated under the noses of US soldiers. Bush’s Gulf War discourse focused on the moral rightness of the war and this constrained the options he had to implement his planned exit strategy. Keen to avoid a Vietnam Syndrome relapse, Bush paradoxically risked triggering one: now military victory in Iraq had been achieved without a morally clear outcome.

Bush’s unwillingness to support Hussein’s latest victims raised doubts in the wider public discourse about America’s commitment and ability to defeat evil. In the aftermath of the Gulf War we can see the rhetorical tension Bush experienced between sticking to his exit strategy based on military victory and fulfilling America’s other

56. Bush, *Remarks at the Community Welcome for Returning Troops in Sumter, South Carolina*.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Bush, *Interview With Middle Eastern Journalists*.

59. George H. W. Bush, *Proclamation 6257—For National Days of Thanksgiving, April 5-7, 1991*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 7, 1991.

60. Bush, *Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region*.

61. George H. W. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 3, 1991.

moral responsibility expectations. While Bush talked of US “accomplishment”,⁶² other contributors to American domestic discourse had different ideas about what it meant to ‘get the job done’ in Iraq. Elite media commentators echoed Bush’s view the Vietnam Syndrome was now “buried in the Persian Gulf”.⁶³ *The New York Times*, for example, published 53 opinion pieces and editorials in March 1991 about the Gulf War victory and what it meant for future US foreign policy, 32 after Bush announced the US ceasefire and seven of which dealt predominantly with the Vietnam Syndrome. For its part *The Washington Post* published ten opinion/editorial pieces and *The Wall Street Journal* five articles on the topic over the same period. However media commentators disagreed with Bush that the US should not “interfere in the internal matters of Iraq”.⁶⁴ The overwhelming view was moral consistency demanded America help Iraqis rising up against Hussein.⁶⁵ Even commentators such as Leslie Gelb who, together with his *Times*’ editors, initially opposed US involvement in Iraq,⁶⁶ changed their views by the beginning of April 1991. Gelb argued intervention was potentially disastrous but failure to help the Kurds was worse.⁶⁷

Commentators in the *Post* and *Journal* were similarly unconvinced the attacks on Iraqi rebels were beyond US interest or responsibility given Bush’s demands for Hussein’s removal, as well as the fact US forces controlled a fifth of Iraq’s airspace and had previously established a protected area for Shiites in southern Iraq.⁶⁸ *Journal* editors called for Bush to keep US forces in Iraq “until his work is done”, which they

62. Bush, *The President’s News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict*.

63. Doy S. Zakheim, “The Gulf War’s Aftermath Is the Vietnam Syndrome Dead?; Happily, It’s Buried In the Gulf,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1991, See also Leslie H. Gelb, “Policy Monotheism,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 1991, Editorial, “A Mean Army, Made Leaner,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 1991,

64. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan in Newport Beach, California*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 4, 1991.

65. A. M. Rosenthal, “A Second US Victory,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 1991, William Safire, “Follow the Kurds to Save Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 1991, Flora Lewis, “America Deserts the Rebels Cynically,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1991, Tom Wicker, “A Confused Strategy,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 1991,

66. Leslie H. Gelb, “A Unified, Weak Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 1991, Editorial, “The Quicksand in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 1991,

67. Leslie H. Gelb, “Iraq: Drawing the Line,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1991,

68. Paul A. Gigot, “Bush’s ‘Stability’ not so Appealing if You’re a Kurd,” *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), March 29, 1991, 10; David A. Korn, “Don’t Ignore Iraq’s Kurds; It’s Wrong, and It’s Shortsighted Policy,” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1991, a23; Mary McGrory, “Bush’s Peace Problems,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 1991, a02; Jim Hoagland, “Monumental Folly,” *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1991,

defined as securing Iraq and the stability of the Middle East.⁶⁹ Although these were more expansive obligations than Bush had initially set out for the *military* operation, they were consistent with Bush's narrative about the Gulf War as an example of American moral authority shaping the post-Cold War order. Despite ostensibly 'winning' the Gulf War, Bush's domestic audience was increasingly unwilling to accept the operation was 'over', let alone just and morally uncomplicated. Bush's response to the Iraq crisis was a matter of political interest to his constituents. A *Pew* poll published on 19 March 1991 revealed 72 percent of Americans were closely watching the Gulf War aftermath.⁷⁰ Having earlier legitimised the Gulf War using emotions and moral evaluation, it was difficult for Bush to convincingly change tack and legitimise his decision not to intervene in Iraq because rational, 'strategic' considerations like maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity to balance Iran, should now determine US actions in Iraq.

The question here, which also arises in subsequent interventions examined in this thesis, is why Bush was unwilling or unable to exercise the discursive power of his office and alter the narrative in favour of these more 'strategic' considerations. The evidence suggests that these other justifications are not as powerful as those made earlier on the moral grounds, especially when presidents have intensified, doubled-down or hyperbolised those initial moral justifications. Thus in Iraq Bush became constrained by this earlier rhetoric and the normative expectations that underpinned it; these were the standards against which victory and success would be judged.

Mainstream media voices called for intervention as incumbent upon the US but Congress did not similarly pressure the president to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Instead, the House of Representatives and the Senate passed a series of resolutions commending Bush and the US military for their Gulf War victory.⁷¹ Two

69. Editorial, "George Bush's Elbe," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 1991,

70. Times Mirror, "G.O.P. Collects Big War Dividend Survey, Mar, 1991," March 14, 1991, Interviewing conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates 14-19 March 1991 and based on 2, 028 telephone interviews. Accessed August 11, 2018.

71. William S. Bromfield, "H.Res.95 - Commending the President and United States and allied military forces on the success of Operation Desert Storm," Passed/agreed to in House, *102nd Congress*, February 28, 1991, Robert J. Dole, "S.Con.Res.13 - A concurrent resolution commending the President and the Armed Forces for the success of Operation Desert Storm," Agreed to in

resolutions introduced in March 1991 called on the UN to try Hussein and other members of the Iraqi government for war crimes, but these were isolated to alleged crimes committed inside Kuwait, not against the Iraqi people.⁷²

On 2 April, America's NATO ally Turkey closed its border to Kurdish refugees, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.⁷³ On the same day the Turkish Ambassador wrote to the UN Security Council president requesting the Council "adopt necessary measures to put an end to this inhuman repression being carried out on a massive scale",⁷⁴ a direct reference to the Council's Chapter VII powers and mass atrocity prevention language characterising discussion of this and similar crises. Kurdish leaders appealed to the US, Saudi Arabian, UK and French governments for support but most of America's Gulf War allies rejected the idea they had an ongoing moral responsibility in Iraq.⁷⁵ Like his American counterpart, UK Prime Minister John Major devoted much of his post-Gulf War rhetoric to discussing the UK's contribution to victory and emphasising troops would be withdrawn immediately from the region.

Only France attempted, unsuccessfully, on 3 April 1991 to have the UNSC "say something" about the "unjustifiable violence in both the south and the north,

Senate, *102nd Congress*, February 28, 1991, Pete V. Domenici, "S.J.Res.97 - A joint resolution to recognize and honor members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States for their contribution to victory in the Persian Gulf," Passed Senate, *102nd Congress*, March 20, 1991,

72. Jim Ramstad, "H.Con.Res.81 - Calling upon the United Nations to take all appropriate steps to try Saddam Hussein and his subordinates for all war crimes," *102nd Congress*, June 6, 1991, Jim Saxton, "H.Res.100 - To urge the establishment of an international military tribunal to prosecute war crimes arising out of the Persian Gulf conflict," *102nd Congress*, March 18, 1991, John McCain, "S.Res.69 - A resolution calling for the establishment of an international tribunal with jurisdiction to judge and punish the war crimes committed by the political and military leadership of Iraq," *102nd Congress*, February 28, 1991, Areln Specter, "S.Res.71 - A resolution to encourage the President of the United States to confer with the sovereign state of Kuwait, countries of the Coalition or the United Nations to establish an International Criminal Court or an International Military Tribunal to try and punish all individuals, including President Saddam Hussein, involved in the planning or execution of Crimes against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes against Humanity as defined under international law," *102nd Congress*, Introduced 1991, George W. Gekas, "H.R.1336 - War Crimes Act of 1991," Introduced, *102nd Congress*, July 8, 1992,

73. Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 4 (1996): 343-66.

74. United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Security Council: 16 June 1990-15 June 1991. Official Records: Forty-Sixth Session Supplement No. 2 A/48/2* (New York: United Nations Security Council).

75. Malanczuk, "The Kurdish Crisis and Allied Intervention in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War," 119.

where the inhabitants of Kurdish origin have once again been tragically attacked”.⁷⁶ The French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas went so far as to say the international community had a “duty” to intervene.⁷⁷ The US, USSR and China opposed France’s efforts arguing it would set a precedent for UN involvement in a state’s internal affairs.⁷⁸ Instead the UNSC concentrated on codifying the Gulf War ceasefire and demarcating the border between Iraq and Kuwait, as well as requiring Iraq pay reparations and destroy its weapon of mass destruction (WMD) and other military capabilities.⁷⁹ Bush’s view against intervention had initially dominated public discourse but domestic and international pressure on the president to respond more concretely now increased.⁸⁰

On 3 April 1991 *The Washington Post* published an opinion poll in which 55 percent of surveyed Americans thought the US should not have ended the Gulf War with Saddam Hussein still in power.⁸¹ Almost half of those surveyed (45 percent) thought America should help the rebels. Of these, 78 percent favoured targeting helicopters and 68 were in favour of giving the rebels weapons. But while 71 percent wanted to send US military advisers to help the rebels only 42 percent favoured ground troops. On the one hand this indicated some trade-off in the public imagination between fulfilling America’s moral responsibility to the Kurds and protecting American soldiers but it also indicated a willingness to reinforce the Gulf War victory.⁸² On the same day that poll was published, Bush gave a press conference in which he reminded Americans the uprisings were not America’s responsibility because US forces “did not go there to settle all the internal affairs of Iraq” and US soldiers were

76. UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Two Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty-Second Meeting* S/PV.2982 (New York: United Nations Security Council, April 5, 1991), 94.

77. James Cockayne and David Malone, “Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003,” *Security Dialogue* 37 (2006): 129.

78. Malanczuk, “The Kurdish Crisis and Allied Intervention in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War,” 119.

79. UN Security Council, “Resolution 687,” April 3, 1991,

80. Cockayne and Malone, “Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003,” 125.

81. Richard Morin, “Majority in Poll Says U.S. Ended Attack On Iraq Prematurely; No Consensus Found on Aiding Rebel Forces,” *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), April 5, 1991, A14.

82. Ibid.

“not there to intervene”,⁸³ a point he repeated the following day.⁸⁴

Domestic media commentators persisted, labelling US inaction “cynical”,⁸⁵ and a “moral failure”,⁸⁶ deploring US unwillingness to protect the Kurds from “Saddam Hussein’s vengeful butchery”.⁸⁷ NATO issued a statement condemning the violence and Germany’s Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher referred to the attacks on the Kurds as “genocide”.⁸⁸ On 4 April 1991 France again called for the UNSC to discuss the crisis.⁸⁹ As domestic and international opinion shifted, Bush began losing control of his morally righteous narrative about the Gulf War, which in turn threatened to undermine his victory claims and accompanying troop withdrawal strategy.

On 5 April 1991, the Bush administration with France co-sponsored UNSC Resolution 688 about the northern Iraq crisis.⁹⁰ The resolution condemned the violence in Iraq as a “threat to international peace and security” triggering application of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, a basis upon which the UN legitimises using armed force.⁹¹ Although the resolution only authorised delivering humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced people, it represented a significant development in the UNSC’s willingness to apply its Chapter VII powers to a matter within the borders of a state.⁹² Apart from resolutions on South Africa’s apartheid, this was the first time the UN made human rights an issue of international peace and security.⁹³ Resolution

83. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

84. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan in Newport Beach, California*.

85. Lewis, “America Deserts the Rebels Cynically.”

86. William Safire, “Bush’s Bay of Pigs,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1991,

87. Editorial, “The War’s Not Over Yet,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1991,

88. Kathryn Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 110; Marc Fisher, “NATO Condemns Iraq’s ‘Brutal Repression’; German Politician Calls U.S. Position Cynical; Kurds Stage Rallies Throughout Europe,” *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), April 6, 1991, a17.

89. Jean-Marc Rochereau de la Sabliere, “Letter Dated 4 April 1991 from the Charge d’Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council,” April 4, 1991,

90. Harrington, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Perspective in International Law,” 637.

91. UN Security Council, “Resolution 688,” April 5, 1991,

92. Thomas G. Weiss, “Humanitarian Interventions in a New Era,” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 1 (1994): 59.

93. Cockayne and Malone, “Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003,” 126.

688 heralded what Alex Bellamy calls the “humanitarian exception” to the prevailing state sovereignty and non-intervention principles institutionalised at the UN.⁹⁴ The resolution was, however, limited in scope. It stated the threat to international security came from refugee flows, not the Iraqi government’s human rights abuses that caused people to flee in the first place.⁹⁵ Resolution 688 also authorised only aid agencies to conduct operations to alleviate the crisis, technically excluding foreign armed forces.⁹⁶

In supporting Resolution 688, Bush helped align international opinion with what his domestic audience required for justifiable US foreign policy action. Bush’s rhetorical shift in favour of intervention also demonstrated the constraining effect of his moral righteousness narrative about Gulf War victory. Exit was contingent on achieving a successful mission but Bush had also linked victory to discharging moral duty. US troops thus needed to remain in Iraq to defend America’s expectations for a successful military operation as much as to stop the humanitarian crisis.

5.4 Justifying exit in *Provide Comfort*

Bush announced his decision to send 18,285 US military personnel to commence Operation *Provide Comfort* on 5–6 April 1991. Even though he did not use the term, *Provide Comfort* was a humanitarian intervention involving US military aircraft enforcing a NFZ and dropping aid supplies to the Kurds in a potentially hostile operating environment. Resolution 688 did not authorise the NFZ but the Bush administration argued it was necessary to protect its humanitarian operation in Iraq.⁹⁷ His Gulf War exit strategy was now complicated by a new humanitarian mission. Not only did this new operation potentially undermine Bush’s earlier claims

94. Bellamy, “Motives, Outcomes, Intent and the Legitimacy of Humanitarian Interventions,” 218.

95. Bill Frelick, “The False Promise of Operation Provide Comfort: Protecting Refugees or Protecting State Power?,” *Middle East Report*, no. 176 (1992): 26.

96. UN Security Council, “Resolution 688.”

97. Cockayne and Malone, “Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003,” 127.

America had fulfilled its Gulf War moral responsibilities, convincingly defeating the Iraqi government and avoiding a quagmire,⁹⁸ but *Provide Comfort* needed its own exit strategy.

With an exclusively aerial operation, Bush's exit strategy during this phase of *Provide Comfort* was operational disengagement. He justified this strategy by arguing America's moral responsibility to the Kurds was limited to providing disaster relief, a responsibility that could be rapidly discharged and from which US soldiers could exit quickly. In this phase, Bush began weaving an intervention narrative framed by normative expectations of when and how US troops would leave. As he developed his narrative, Bush leaned into expectations of American moral responsibility in a humanitarian crisis, expanding it from providing disaster relief to preventing atrocities against the Kurds by removing the perpetrator, Saddam Hussein. This expanded moral duty, however, conflicted with and undermined Bush's justifications for operational disengagement, making it necessary to intensify rather than reduce America's military commitment. In this phase of intervention Bush's rhetoric therefore reveals a president struggling to balance US moral responsibility with the normative expectations to deliver victory and assured exit for American soldiers.

Bush framed *Provide Comfort* as an aid mission similar to those America conducted in other parts of the world. Bush spoke of US soldiers providing "immediate aid", dropping supplies and "other relief-related items for refugees" to meet "emergency needs".⁹⁹ The US was going to "step that way up".¹⁰⁰ Bush framed America's disaster relief as a deeply moral endeavour, legitimising his decision through moral evaluation and altruism. Thus US soldiers were "helping these unfortunate people",¹⁰¹ and

98. James Jones calls it "another chapter" in Operation *Desert Storm* Jones, "Operation Provide Comfort: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq," 2.

99. George H. W. Bush, *Statement on Aid to Iraqi Refugees*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 5, 1991.

100. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting With Hispanic Business Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Newport Beach, California*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 5, 1991.

101. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Jacques Delors of the European Community Commission and President Jacques Santer of the European Council of Ministers*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 11, 1991.

working to “assist Iraqi refugees”,¹⁰² to “alleviate the plight of the many innocent Iraqis”,¹⁰³ and “save the lives of others”.¹⁰⁴ He cast US soldiers as aid workers and apolitical actors, not there to “interfere in Iraq’s civil war”.¹⁰⁵ Bush’s framing kept *Provide Comfort* within the bounds of UNSC Resolution 688, protecting the military operation’s international legitimacy and, by extension, the Gulf War’s legitimacy.¹⁰⁶ Bush’s executive order authorising the use of Department of Defense resources for Operation *Provide Comfort* explicitly stated they were for the “provision of international disaster assistance.”¹⁰⁷

Framing the moral objectives of *Provide Comfort* in terms of disaster relief preserved the integrity of Gulf War victory and allowed Bush to frame his exclusively aerial humanitarian operation as something other than a military intervention. Bush could thus maintain some semblance of policy consistency and avoid antagonising UNSC members like Russia and China that reluctantly agreed to intervention for aid purposes but would have likely blocked measures permitting foreign military intervention in a civil war. The Iraqi government also opposed US presence in its sovereign territory. US soldiers were not only dropping aid but enforcing a NFZ involving potential combat against hostile Iraqi aircraft. By assisting the Kurds without distinguishing combatants from civilians, the US was getting involved in the civil war, regardless of Bush’s claims he was not prepared to “go in and use this superior military might to try to sort out this civil war”.¹⁰⁸

Bush’s disaster relief frame not only limited the scope of America’s moral responsibility for the Kurds but it created the discursive space for justifying an operational disengagement exit strategy. The focus of Bush’s justification was his operational approach to *Provide Comfort*, which, unlike the Gulf War, was restricted to an

102. Bush, *Statement on Aid to Iraqi Refugees*.

103. Ibid.

104. Bush, *Remarks Commemorating the National Days of Thanksgiving in Houston, Texas*.

105. George H. W. Bush, *Exchange With Reporters on Aid to Iraqi Refugees*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 11, 1991.

106. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 13, 1991.

107. George H. W. Bush, *Presidential Determination No. 91 - 31 - Memorandum on Disaster Assistance in the Persian Gulf Region*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 19, 1991.

108. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

air campaign and did not involve US ground troops. Bush used the difference in military commitments when talking about steps to “remove our forces”,¹⁰⁹ “bring them out”,¹¹⁰ and “take our forces out just as quickly as possible”,¹¹¹ as well as to report US soldiers “coming out”¹¹² and “returning home”¹¹³ from the Gulf War. Bush said America’s Gulf War mission was “completed”,¹¹⁴ and the “objectives, sanctioned by international law have been achieved”.¹¹⁵ In separating the missions, Bush stated that:

We’ve fulfilled our objectives [in the Gulf War] and now what we’ve got to do is fulfil our concerns about the innocents that are suffering... by doing what the United States has always done, trying to be a catalyst for healing the wounds.¹¹⁶

Bush’s operational approach allowed him to maintain he had “no intention of leaving our forces”,¹¹⁷ the presumption being aerial engagements are easier to conclude than ground offensives; Bush could claim an achievable operational disengagement exit because planes can simply return home, “to help there without being bogged down into a ground force action”.¹¹⁸ Avoiding getting ‘bogged down’ was crucial for Bush discursively distinguishing the Gulf War from a Vietnam-style quagmire and minimising the risk to US soldiers. When explaining how committed he was to preventing another Vietnam, Bush used verbs indicating America would not lose control of its Iraq operation. The intervention was measured and deliberate—soldiers

109. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Secretary of State James A. Baker III in Houston, Texas*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 6, 1991.

110. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

111. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Secretary of State James A. Baker III in Houston, Texas*.

112. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico in Houston, Texas*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 7, 1991.

113. Bush, *Remarks Commemorating the National Days of Thanksgiving in Houston, Texas*.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*.

116. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico in Houston, Texas*.

117. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Secretary of State James A. Baker III in Houston, Texas*.

118. George H. W. Bush, *Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 4, 1991.

would not be “thrust into a war”,¹¹⁹ “sucked”,¹²⁰ “shoved”¹²¹ or “pushed into this situation”¹²²—and thus exit implementable. Victory and therefore exit would be easier because it was exclusively an air campaign. Juxtaposing the Gulf War and *Provide Comfort* capitalised on Bush’s narrative of US soldiers quickly winning a conventional war with minimal casualties;¹²³ successfully completing a humanitarian operation would arguably be less difficult and deliver results just as rapidly.

At this point Bush had apparently created an exit strategy satisfying foreign policy normative expectations in humanitarian crises: it promised to discharge America’s limited moral responsibility, succeed with minimal US casualties, and allow for quick troop withdrawal. However, Bush could not resist connecting the Gulf War and *Provide Comfort* to the American exceptionalism myth and the accompanying, bigger moral leadership duties. During this phase of *Provide Comfort* Bush increased his discursive emphasis on US moral responsibilities relative to other topics. Two-thirds of all Bush’s statements (66 percent) focused on America’s moral duties, up from 54 percent prior to intervention.

It wasn’t just that Bush talked more about moral duty; the *way Bush framed moral duty* also expanded from stopping an atrocity with disaster relief to fighting evil. Bush intensified his personal reprobation of Saddam Hussein, labelling him the perpetrator of “brutality”,¹²⁴ “cruelty”,¹²⁵ “savagery”¹²⁶ and “repression of his own people”.¹²⁷

119. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

120. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*; Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan in Newport Beach, California*.

121. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*.

122. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan in Newport Beach, California*.

123. Bush, *Remarks at the Community Welcome for Returning Troops in Sumter, South Carolina*.

124. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*, 4 mentions; Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan in Newport Beach, California*; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Jacques Delors of the European Economic Community and President Jacques Santer of the European Council of Ministers*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 11, 1991; Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*, 2 mentions.

125. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

126. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*.

127. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Jacques Delors of the European Economic Community and President Jacques Santer of the European Council of Ministers*.

According to Bush, Hussein was the “major villain”,¹²⁸ “this brutal dictator”¹²⁹ with a “lack of conscience”.¹³⁰ Employing these images conveyed palpable outrage and disgust, placing the humanitarian intervention in the *barbarism versus civilisation/good versus evil* frames of the Gulf War. If Hussein represented a Cold War legacy of barbarism, the US was at the vanguard of the new world order’s enlightenment with its commitment to the “noble goal”¹³¹ of protecting the Kurds. Bush claimed the US was doing “the heavy lifting”,¹³² it “step[ped] that way up”,¹³³ and “in keeping with our nation’s compassion and concern, [was] massively helping,”¹³⁴ with the “largest relief effort mounted in modern military history”.¹³⁵

America’s actions were also God’s work, which was why Bush led the American people in recognising “it is time to give thanks to God, not for winning the war but for helping us to do what was right”,¹³⁶ to “thank God Almighty for men and women who will risk their lives to save the lives of others.”¹³⁷ Herein lay the difficulty: Bush wasn’t just sending US soldiers to relieve suffering, he committed America to saving lives and protecting the Kurds from a manifest evil. This commitment and the challenge Bush faced in articulating its scope caused problems for Bush as the humanitarian crisis in Iraq showed little sign of abating.

When the US launched Operation *Provide Comfort* only a minority of voices in the domestic mainstream elite media and the international community raised any concerns about the US deployment affecting the likelihood and timing of complete troop withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. Calls for the US to do more to help

128. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

129. Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting With Hispanic Business Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Newport Beach, California*; Bush, *Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Jacques Delors of the European Community Commission and President Jacques Santer of the European Council of Ministers*.

130. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

131. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Secretary of State James A. Baker III in Houston, Texas*.

132. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Hobe Sound, Florida*.

133. Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting With Hispanic Business Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Newport Beach, California*.

134. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*.

135. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Jacques Delors of the European Economic Community and President Jacques Santer of the European Council of Ministers*.

136. Bush, *Remarks Commemorating the National Days of Thanksgiving in Houston, Texas*.

137. *Ibid.*

dominated the public discourse; Bush's domestic and international audience asked him deliver on his rhetoric about America's moral responsibility to prevent atrocities and defeat evil.

It began with Turkish President Turgut Özal suggesting the US and its allies establish "safe havens" or "enclaves" for the Kurds on the Iraqi side of the border.¹³⁸ The Turkish government likely suggested the idea as a convenient means to abdicate responsibility to open its border and provide protection for Kurdish refugees. The White House's official position initially was the US NFZ over northern Iraq was already operating as a "*de facto* safe zone".¹³⁹ Nevertheless the safe haven idea was taken up by the French, UK and German governments, securing European Economic Community (EEC) approval for the proposal.¹⁴⁰ US Defense Secretary Dick Cheney supported the idea as the next logical step for *Provide Comfort*, although he admitted the Bush administration did not know how safe havens could work in northern Iraq.¹⁴¹

To comply with international law, a safe haven in northern Iraq required deliberate US action to permanently carve out Iraqi territory expressly for that purpose, as well as formal Iraqi government approval and ground forces to supplement those already policing the NFZ. It also required all parties to acknowledge there was something akin to a state of war in northern Iraq and the US was an occupying power.¹⁴² The Iraqi government strongly opposed Turkey's safe haven proposal. UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar also responded cautiously, arguing implementation would breach Iraq's sovereignty.

138. Simon Chesterman, *Just War or Just Peace?: Humanitarian Intervention and International Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173.

139. John E. Yang, "Bush: US, Allies Concur On Refugee Zones in Iraq; Accord Stressed After Meeting With EC Leaders," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 1991, John E. Yang, "Bush Defends Non-Intervention in Iraq; President Begins Speech Campaign to Define 'New World Order'," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1991,

140. William Drozdiak and David B. Ottaway, "U.S., Allies Want Refugee Havens Established in Iraq; Europeans Back Protective Zone for Kurds," *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), April 9, 1991, a01.

141. Bill McAllister, "U.N. Buffer Zones In Iraq Suggested; Cheney Offers Idea to Safeguard Refugees," *The Washington Post* (Washington DC), April 8, 1991,

142. International Committee of the Red Cross, "Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949. Commentary of 1958," 1958,

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Kurds remained stranded on the mountain pass between Turkey and Iraq. Aid drops provided immediate relief but had not stopped, let alone reversed the humanitarian crisis. It was not proving easy for Bush to tie up this Gulf War loose end. Every day the humanitarian crisis continued the more it threatened to undermine Bush's narrative about America's Gulf War victory, the new world order, and his decision not to depose Saddam Hussein. It was also unclear how Bush was going to implement an exit strategy for this humanitarian intervention that met normative expectations. Restricting US soldiers to an aerial operation meant troops were assured of quick exit. The fact the Kurds remained in a precarious humanitarian situation, however, demonstrated how difficult it was to succeed in a manner that made this quick exit possible. Rather than resolving this tension between discharging America's moral responsibility, succeeding and exiting quickly Bush exacerbated it. He widened the scope of US moral responsibility beyond disaster relief to include preventing atrocities and fighting evil, making it more difficult to convincingly succeed and exit. This challenge would only deepen when Bush agreed to introduce ground troops into northern Iraq.

5.5 Justifying exit with ground troops deployed

On 16 April 1991 President Bush announced US ground troops would establish safe zones for the Kurds in northern Iraq. *Provide Comfort* was only the second time in more than 50 years a safe area was established to protect civilians in a conflict zone.¹⁴³ Bush called the safe zones "encampments",¹⁴⁴ conjuring images of refugee and other temporary disaster relief camps, rather than protected areas more commonly associated with combat zones like field hospitals or civilian shelters. Bush

143. Harrington, "Operation Provide Comfort: A Perspective in International Law," 637; The first had been established in Sri Lanka by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1990 with the consent of the LTTE separatist movement and the Sri Lankan government. Phil Orchard, "Revisiting Humanitarian Safe Areas for Civilian Protection," *Global Governance* 20 (2014): 3.

144. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 16, 1991.

thus continued framing *Provide Comfort* in terms of disaster relief, even as it became, in his words, “greatly expanded and more ambitious”.¹⁴⁵ In his speech and press conference on 16 April 1991 Bush used the terms “relief” and “humanitarian” a combined total of seventeen times to describe the expanded mission.¹⁴⁶

Talking about *Provide Comfort* in terms of disaster relief did not insulate Bush from the fact American soldiers were effectively occupying Iraq by mid-April 1991. The US safe zone in northern Iraq was never formally negotiated with the Iraqi government. Without what Phil Orchard calls “tactical consent of the belligerents”,¹⁴⁷ US armed forces were required to ensure the zone was indeed safe.

With *Provide Comfort's* operational approach shifting from an aerial mission to one involving ground forces, Bush could no longer rely on his operational disengagement exit strategy. He thus developed a new, UN transition exit strategy. Bush justified this new exit plan as consistent with his expanded scope of American moral responsibility to protect the Kurds, not just alleviate the humanitarian crisis. He also argued the strategy assured exit because American soldiers would not need to wait until the Kurds were fully protected from future Iraqi government attacks; the UN would act in America's stead, fulfilling the moral obligations of US humanitarian intervention. The difficulty, however, was Bush continued connecting exit with victory, and according to him, victory could not be achieved without *America* fulfilling its moral obligation to guarantee Kurdish safety. He also failed to explain when and under what conditions the UN had agreed to take over from America, making US exit even more dependent on meeting protection obligations itself.

During this phase of *Provide Comfort* Bush continued talking about American victory in Iraq but not in the context of the humanitarian intervention. Instead, Bush's rhetoric reinforced his Gulf War victory narrative from which *Provide Comfort* was notably excluded. Bush railed against critics who insisted *Provide Comfort*

145. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

146. *Ibid.*

147. Orchard, “Revisiting Humanitarian Safe Areas for Civilian Protection.”

demonstrated Gulf War victory was overstated, accusing them of “revisionistic thinking (sic)”.¹⁴⁸ Bush reminded the American people of the limited scope of their country’s Gulf War aims: “our objective was to repel aggression, and we did it”,¹⁴⁹ “the objective was to throw [Hussein] out of Kuwait, and boy did our people perform well”,¹⁵⁰ “the goalposts were, aggression will not stand and aggression didn’t stand”.¹⁵¹

Bush’s focus on America winning went beyond discussing the “success”,¹⁵² “victory”¹⁵³ and “triumph”¹⁵⁴ of US soldiers; Bush emphasised winning as a result of

148. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting of the American Defense Preparedness Association*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 9, 1991.

149. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at an Arbor Day Tree-Planting Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 26, 1991.

150. George H. W. Bush, *Interview With Linda Douglas of KNBC, Jim Lampley of KCBS, and Paul Moyer of KABC in Los Angeles, California*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 15, 1991.

151. *Ibid.*

152. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Hassan Gouled Aptidon of Djibouti and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 24, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony in Ann Arbor*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 4, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks to Members of the Defense Community at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 11, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Kennebunkport, Maine*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 29, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medals of Freedom and Presidential Citizen’s Medals*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 3, 1991; Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting of the American Defense Preparedness Association*; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony of the Declaration of the Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander, to General Michel Roquejeoffre in Rambouillet, France*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 14, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Declaration of the Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander, to Sir Peter de la Billiere in London, United Kingdom*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 14, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Turkish President Turgut Ozal in Ankara, Turkey*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 20, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Toast at a State Dinner in Ankara, Turkey*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 20, 1991.

153. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation of a Point of Light Award to the United States Naval Academy/Benjamin Banneker Honors Mathematics and Science Society Partnership in Annapolis, Maryland*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 23, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Yale University Commencement Ceremony in New Haven, Connecticut*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 27, 1991; Bush, *Interview With Linda Douglas of KNBC, Jim Lampley of KCBS, and Paul Moyer of KABC in Los Angeles, California*; Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medals of Freedom and Presidential Citizen’s Medals*; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration in Grand Rapids, Michigan*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 4, 1991; Bush, *Remarks at a Meeting of the American Defense Preparedness Association*; Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Declaration of the Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander, to Sir Peter de la Billiere in London, United Kingdom*; Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony of the Declaration of the Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander, to General Michel Roquejeoffre in Rambouillet, France*.

154. Bush, *Remarks at the Yale University Commencement Ceremony in New Haven, Connecticut*; Bush, *Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medals of Freedom and Presidential Citizen’s Medals*; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at a Dinner Hosted By President Turgut Ozal in Istanbul, Turkey*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 21, 1991.

resisting mission creep, explicitly contrasting the Gulf War with the Vietnam War. Bush acknowledged expanding the *Provide Comfort* mission would invite comparisons to Vietnam, a parallel he explicitly resisted with Vietnam Syndrome language of ‘quagmire’ and troops ‘bogged down’:

All along I have said that the United States is not going to intervene militarily in Iraq’s internal affairs and risk being drawn into a Vietnam-style *quagmire*. This remains the case. Nor will we become an occupying power with US troops patrolling the streets of Baghdad.¹⁵⁵

I don’t want to see us get into a *quagmire* or get further militarily involved with some permanent presence required.¹⁵⁶

I did not want to get *bogged down*.¹⁵⁷

Instead of laying out an exit plan or explaining why troops would not be “bogged down” in northern Iraq, however, Bush virtually stopped talking about exit all together. Of all the statements he made during this phase of the intervention, only four percent were about his exit strategy. The comments Bush did make about exit were imprecise, amounting to little more than reassuring his audience the mission would be short, even if he sounded like he barely believed it himself as the quote at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, as do other statements at the time:

I don’t think it has to be long-term.¹⁵⁸

[US ground troops are an] interim measure designed to meet an immediate, penetrating humanitarian need.¹⁵⁹

We have always looked at this relief effort as limited in duration.¹⁶⁰

And all of us understand this force will not stay permanently.¹⁶¹

When Bush finally mentioned his new exit strategy was a UN transition, he was similarly imprecise about when the UN would take over, if at all:

155. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*, Emphasis added.

156. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Announcing the Resignation of William H. Webster as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 8, 1991.

157. Bush, *Remarks Announcing the Resignation of William H. Webster as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a News Conference*; See further references to not getting ‘bogged down’ George H. W. Bush, *Remarks on the London Economic Summit and an Exchange With Foreign Journalists*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 8, 1991, (Emphasis added).

158. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

159. Ibid.

160. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra of the United Nations*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 9, 1991.

161. Bush, *Remarks at a Dinner Hosted By President Turgut Ozal in Istanbul, Turkey*.

JOURNALIST: How long do you think that it will be before the United Nations forces can take over from the US and other allies?

PRESIDENT BUSH: You mean in this new operation? We don't know that. We don't know that, but clearly the sooner the better. [...] [W]e'll have to see what we do.¹⁶²

Despite Bush's imprecision we can find two main justifications for his new UN transition exit strategy: first, avoiding a Vietnam-style quagmire; and second, fulfilling an even wider moral responsibility to protect the Kurds rather than just providing disaster relief. These justifications supported one another but were also in tension, creating challenges for Bush successfully implementing his exit plan. Bush also failed to explain exactly what the UN transition exit strategy entailed, making the threshold of American victory that would justify exit unclear.

Avoiding another Vietnam-style quagmire meant *withdrawing* troops, not deploying additional soldiers to a more risky operation. To explain this apparent contradiction to his American audience, Bush focused with more intensity on US moral duty, increasing the relative time he spent discussing moral responsibility from two-thirds to almost three-quarters (74 percent) of all statements made during this phase of the intervention. Bush also expanded the scope of America's moral responsibility in Iraq widened from providing disaster relief to include defeating evil and protecting Kurds from future attacks and atrocities.

Bush continued describing US soldiers as "taking care of these people",¹⁶³ and "toil[ing] on behalf of suffering Kurds",¹⁶⁴ but now he argued America had a responsibility to "do everything in our power to save innocent life",¹⁶⁵ to do "what we ought to do".¹⁶⁶ Bush committed America to delivering the Kurds from oppression and

162. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

163. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks on Signing the Federal Energy Management Executive Order*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 17, 1991.

164. Bush, *Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony in Ann Arbor*.

165. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*; For another mention of "saving lives" see: George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the United States Air Force Academy Commencement Ceremony in Colorado Springs, Colorado*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 29, 1991; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the Annual Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, Georgia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 6, 1991.

166. Bush, *Remarks at the United States Air Force Academy Commencement Ceremony in Colorado Springs, Colorado*.

protecting them inside Iraq, arguing this was a logical part of America's moral duty in intervention:

Our long-term objective remains the same: for the Iraqi Kurds and, indeed, for all Iraqi refugees, wherever they are, to return home and to live in peace, free from repression, free to live their lives.¹⁶⁷

We'll be able to protect not only our own people but we'll be able to protect the people that we're setting out to protect, which is these refugees.¹⁶⁸

... these people will be protected.¹⁶⁹

[W]e're prepared if any force should be used against these helpless people in the refugee camps.¹⁷⁰

We are not going to say to them, "Come down from the mountains; you will be protected", and then not protect them.¹⁷¹

Bush framed America providing Kurdish protection as morally incumbent throughout the rest of April-May 1991. No longer was Kurdish repression an internal Iraqi issue of no interest to the US:

[W]e want these people's lives to be protected against this violence that's been wrought on them for many, many years.¹⁷²

[W]e're responding to another challenge too: the need to protect and care for tens of thousands of refugees who fled home and hearth to escape the brutality of one man, Saddam Hussein.¹⁷³

While it may be true *Provide Comfort* was still "motivated by humanitarian concerns",¹⁷⁴ its success now hinged on US forces adequately protecting the Kurds in safe havens from renewed attacks. Fulfilling this moral responsibility thus became part of Bush's exit strategy justification; it was the marker of victory that would justify exit:

[US troops are] going to stay there as long as it takes to be sure that these ~~refugees are taken care of, and not a minute longer.~~¹⁷⁵

167. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*; Repeated: Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra of the United Nations*.

168. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

169. *Ibid.*

170. *Ibid.*

171. *Ibid.*

172. Bush, *Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One*.

173. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra of the United Nations*.

174. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

175. Bush, *Remarks at an Arbor Day Tree-Planting Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters*.

However this effort to “keep our commitment to be sure that these people are safe”¹⁷⁶—to fulfil America’s moral responsibility—challenged Bush’s other promise not to involve the US in in a drawn-out military engagement, a point he acknowledged:

And the only little difficulty now in terms of coming home is that we have a responsibility to do what we can to help these refugees.¹⁷⁷

The claim the American people had a responsibility to protect the Kurds, while self-imposed, was not easy to shirk. Having placed the Gulf War in the pantheon of US military victories, Bush argued America had to live up to “the responsibility imposed by [its] successes”,¹⁷⁸ because “never before has the world looked more to the American example”.¹⁷⁹ The Gulf War was part of Bush’s new world order “quest” “to keep the dangers of disorder at bay”.¹⁸⁰ The president foregrounded the moral bases for foreign policy action in Iraq and elsewhere arguing:

This nation’s foreign policy has always been more than simply an expression of American interests; it’s an extension of American ideals. This moral dimension of American policy requires us to remain active, engaged in the world.¹⁸¹

Bush’s protection goal in Iraq was consistent with domestic American discourse and the demands of US allies. Bush’s assessment appeared correct: there was indeed “a lot of understanding” about his expanding *Provide Comfort* mission and shifting exit strategies.¹⁸² So long as Bush demonstrated he was discharging America’s moral duty to the Kurds, he received bipartisan Congressional support and relatively little comment. To the extent Congress members criticised US ground troop deployment, it was on the basis the US was still not doing enough to secure ‘long-term’ protection for the Kurds. Senator Joe Lieberman (D-Connecticut), for example, commended Bush’s expanded operation but called for a deeper commitment, apparently willing to sacrifice the prospect of quick American troop withdrawal for ongoing Kurdish protection:

176. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

177. *Ibid.*

178. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Hassan Gouled Aptidon of Djibouti and an Exchange With Reporters*.

179. Bush, *Remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base War College in Montgomery, Alabama*.

180. *Ibid.*

181. Bush, *Remarks at the Yale University Commencement Ceremony in New Haven, Connecticut*.

182. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

We need to plan for the security of the Kurds over the long term. We cannot simply set up tent cities, move the Kurds in, and then leave without in some way safeguarding their lives against a renewed murderous rampage by Iraqi forces.¹⁸³

Here Lieberman is saying the level of victory to be achieved before troops withdraw requires this longer-term moral obligation to be fulfilled.

The humanitarian situation undoubtedly improved in northern Iraq. With little effective Iraqi government resistance the safe zone grew, covering almost 4200 square kilometres.¹⁸⁴ Encouraged by the foreign military presence Kurds began resettling in the safe zone. Coalition forces and non-government organisations (NGOs) improved housing, sanitation facilities, hospitals, roads, bridges and airfields. While the Iraqi government maintained its public opposition to the foreign intervention, there were only a handful of small-scale clashes between coalition and Iraqi soldiers.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, using ground troops posed greater risk to US soldiers than the earlier aerial operation.

Successfully fulfilling America's moral responsibility to protect the Kurds was also only assured with US troops present to effectively deter attacks, especially as the Iraq government remained unchanged. Bush's commitment to protect the Kurds for "as long as it takes"¹⁸⁶ and send "a strong, unmistakable signal to Saddam Hussein",¹⁸⁷ challenged the wisdom of not forcibly removing Hussein, especially as Bush maintained US humanitarian intervention was "a clear case of evil versus good – and [Hussein's] the evil in this one".¹⁸⁸ Avoiding a quagmire meant not leaving US troops in an endless operation, but it also meant leaving after victory. As American troops cemented their position in northern Iraq, and Hussein remained in power, Bush talked openly about how regime change would create the level of success that

183. Joe Lieberman, "The Plight of the Kurds," in *Congressional Record 102nd Congress (1991–1992)* (April 25, 1991), S5321.

184. Jones, "Operation Provide Comfort: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq."

185. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991*, 107–28.

186. Bush, *Remarks at an Arbor Day Tree-Planting Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters*.

187. Bush, *Remarks at a Dinner Hosted By President Turgut Ozal in Istanbul, Turkey*.

188. Bush, *The President's News Conference With Turkish President Turgut Ozal in Ankara, Turkey*.

would justify exit because now the Kurds would be sustainably protected without the need for US troops:

Do I think the answer is now for Saddam Hussein to be kicked out? Absolutely.¹⁸⁹

I'll tell you what's the most important thing, however, and that is to get Saddam Hussein out of there.¹⁹⁰

There will not be normalised relations with the United States—and I think this is true for most coalition partners—until Saddam Hussein is out of there.¹⁹¹

We want him out of there so badly.¹⁹²

I'd like to see him out of there – Saddam Hussein.¹⁹³

Regime change became a bipartisan issue with soon-to-be Democratic vice-presidential candidate, Senator Al Gore calling for US troops in Iraq to be “organised and orchestrated toward the objective of removing Saddam Hussein from power, and removing his government from power in Iraq”.¹⁹⁴

For all the calls for Hussein to quit, however, the Bush administration was unwilling to directly engineer Hussein's demise. Bush's demonising of Saddam Hussein had made the option of negotiating with the Iraqi government to stop its attacks politically unpalatable. Even if negotiations were an option, they would move the US further away from being a 'purely' humanitarian actor to a political player. US forces had already increased the Kurds' standard of living relative to the rest of the Iraqi population attempting post-war reconstruction under sanctions.

The difficulty of delivering protection such that Bush could point to a moment of clear victory complicated his exit strategy implementation. While Bush had devoted significant time to justify his reasons for *not* withdrawing troops, he had done so at the expense of talking about how his UN transition exit would work. With a presidential election approaching, and Bush's popularity declining, he could not

189. Bush, *Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference*.

190. *Ibid.*

191. *Ibid.*

192. *Ibid.*

193. Bush, *The President's News Conference With Turkish President Turgut Ozal in Ankara, Turkey*.

194. Al Gore, “Recent Events in Iraq,” in *102nd Congress (1991–1992) Senate Congressional Record p S4720* (April 18, 1991).

afford his Gulf War public relations coup potentially tainted by an unresolved or disastrous aftermath. Bush needed a convincing justification for how he was going to implement his UN transition exit strategy for US forces.

Following his meeting with the UNSG on 9 May 1991, Bush acknowledged an ongoing foreign presence was required to achieve America's protection objectives. Withdrawing US troops from northern Iraq could only justifiably occur if they were replaced by UN forces picking up where America left off:

[W]e are building temporary camps to encourage these people to come down from the mountains into the camps and, ultimately, to their own villages and towns. We are now in the process of turning these efforts over to the United Nations, and we look forward to working with the UN to hasten the day when all these refugees can return home, free from fear, free to live in peace.¹⁹⁵

Apart from saying he was working to see *Provide Comfort* "internationalised",¹⁹⁶ Bush made no further attempts to publicly discuss this UN transition exit. The only references to the strategy were in letters from the Bush administration to Congress stating the US government intended:

to turn over the administration and security for these temporary sites as soon as possible to the United Nations (a process that has already begun), and to complete our total withdrawal from Iraq.¹⁹⁷

Bush framed his transition exit in terms of UN peacekeepers taking over from the US, analogising with the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) "Blue Helmets on the scene"¹⁹⁸ in southern Iraq. The comparison, however, was inaccurate. The UNSC tasked UNIKOM on 9 April 1991 with monitoring the demilitarised zone (DMZ) along the Iraq-Kuwait border.¹⁹⁹ UNIKOM peacekeepers also had no civilian protection obligations and were not even authorised to respond

195. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra of the United Nations*.

196. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Robert M. Gates To Be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 14, 1991.

197. George H. W. Bush, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Situation in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 17, 1991.

198. Bush, *Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra of the United Nations*.

199. UN Security Council, "Resolution 687."

with force to border incursions or violations of the DMZ.²⁰⁰

Prerequisites for UN peacekeeping operations include host government invitation. The US intervention in northern Iraq, however, was proceeding without Iraqi government permission.²⁰¹ Handing over *Provide Comfort* to the UN thus required either the Iraqi government reversing its objections to foreign intervention or a new UNSC Resolution authorising military intervention. A UNSC resolution required the Security Council turning peacekeepers into peace enforcers, installed and acting against the wishes of a sovereign member state. The UN continuing what the US started would therefore represent the first such mission in UN peacekeeping history, potentially beyond UN peacekeepers' capabilities and prevailing interpretation of their mandate. Even if veto-holders Russia and China could be convinced and the Iraqi government agreed to this type of foreign intervention, UN peacekeepers needed an enforceable, protection mandate, a hard sell for a UNSC still suspicious about widening exceptions to state sovereignty and the legitimacy of America's action in Iraq. The transition exit strategy Bush presented to the American people was basically impossible to implement in the way he suggested.

5.6 UN transition exit strategy not an exit

US requests for UN peacekeepers to replace American troops were not met because neither a new UNSC resolution nor permission from the Iraqi government was forthcoming. Instead the Iraqi government agreed 500 'UN security police' could be stationed in northern Iraq to protect UNHCR and NGO personnel. These UN police were unarmed and without authority to engage in combat to defend the Kurdish population.²⁰² These facts remained publicly unremarked upon by the US

200. UNIKOM's mandate was expanded on 5 February 1993 by UNSC Resolution 806 allowing peacekeepers to "take physical action to prevent or redress" violations of the DMZ or other border incursions. UN Security Council, "Resolution 706," August 15, 1991,

201. Meek, "Operation Provide Comfort: A Case Study in Humanitarian Relief and Foreign Assistance," 237.

202. Cockayne and Malone, "Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003," 128.

president. US-led forces formally handed over primary responsibility for humanitarian operations in the safe zone to the UNHCR on 13 May 1991.²⁰³ On 15 June 1991, 12,316 US personnel and another 11,000 coalition troops began their month long withdrawal from northern Iraq.²⁰⁴ However by 24 July 1991, only 271 UN police had arrived to support 169 UNHCR and other relief agency staff.²⁰⁵

Replacing US troops with UN police without the ability or mandate to provide the same degree of protection to the Kurds as the Americans raised questions about whether the US had fulfilled its obligations sufficiently to claim *Provide Comfort* was a success. Bush initially ignored this issue but could not maintain this discursive position for long. The lack of a clear victory, and in particular, Bush's failure to meet the moral responsibilities he laid out throughout the mission, contributed to Bush choosing not to fully implement his exit strategy, instead justifying why US troops, despite this opportunity to exit, would not be leaving and would instead remain in and around Iraq.

During the early days of the UN transition, Bush made one of only two public mentions of exit strategy in a letter to Congress. He argued *Provide Comfort* was a success, even though its objectives were only partially achieved, but also that this victory was by no means decisive; instead, moral responsibilities remained outstanding:

Countless lives were saved. Through American leadership, spearheaded so well by the military, 650,000 Iraqi refugees and displaced persons have left the inhospitable mountains and travelled to or through relief camps we built. Most are now returning to their homes. The last mountain camp has closed. *The task of responding to this human tragedy is not over*, but we can be grateful for what has been accomplished by the United States, the United Nations, and the international community.²⁰⁶ (Emphasis added.)

203. Cockayne and Malone, "Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003," 132.

204. Jones, "Operation Provide Comfort: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq," 105–7.

205. Gordon W. Rudd, "The 24th MEU(SOC) and Operation Provide Comfort: A Second Look," *Marine Corps Gazette* 77, no. 2 (1993): 225.

206. George H. W. Bush, *Statement on Signing the Bill Providing Humanitarian Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and Displaced Persons*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 13, 1991.

The US had ‘accomplished’ most of its mission but this argument that partial success was sufficient to justify exit did not convince Bush’s audience. Steven Hurst shows there was “growing public disillusion about the outcome” of the Gulf War.²⁰⁷ In June 1991 polls showed only 8 percent of Americans felt US actions in the Gulf had been successful.²⁰⁸ There was a 20 percent decline in the number of people who thought the war had been worth fighting.²⁰⁹ *The Wall Street Journal* editors argued the US troops’ “rapid withdrawal” reflected a mistaken belief Washington’s task had been “adequately accomplished” given the security of the Kurds “remains precarious”.²¹⁰ The *Journal’s* counterparts at *The New York Times* agreed troop withdrawal would “remove the shield that now protects the Kurds”, leaving them in a weak negotiating position with President Saddam Hussein.²¹¹ A problematic aftermath and not wholly living up to normative expectations of America’s foreign policy response to crisis reduced Bush’s Gulf War victory dividend. Withdrawing troops became unimaginable because it would occur without victory or fulfilling America’s moral responsibilities and therefore there was normative pressure on Bush not to withdraw US troops.

On the same day Bush ended Operation *Provide Comfort* he started Operation *Provide Comfort II*.²¹² In addition to policing the NFZ, US soldiers in *Provide Comfort II* continued delivering humanitarian aid via air to the Kurdish safe zone, their presence deterring renewed Iraqi aggression against the Kurds.²¹³ 3000 US ground troops also remained in Turkey in Combined Task Force *Poised Hammer* “to guard against a repeat of horribly brutal events in the north [of Iraq]”.²¹⁴ Bush

207. Hurst, “The Rhetorical Strategy of George H. W. Bush during the Persian Gulf Crisis 1990–91: How to Help Lose a War You Won.”

208. John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 277.

209. *Ibid.*, 214.

210. Editorial, “Hammer or Wrench?,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 1991,

211. Editorial, “A Critical Juncture,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 1991,

212. John Murray Brown, “Allies Finish N. Iraq Withdrawal; Baghdad Warned To Keep Distance,” *The Washington Post*, July 16, 1991,

213. Daniel Haulman, “Crisis in Iraq: Operation Provide Comfort,” in *Short of War: Major USAF Contingency Operations 1947-1997*, ed. A. Timothy Warnock (Air Force History and Museums Program in association with Air University Press, 2000), 182.

214. Bush, *The President’s News Conference With Turkish President Turgut Ozal in Ankara, Turkey*; Rudd, “The 24th MEU(SOC) and Operation Provide Comfort: A Second Look,” 216.

(re)committed America to guaranteeing Kurdish safety and security against the ever-present threat posed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Bush's justification for keeping US troops involved in a humanitarian intervention, can be found in a handful of statements he made assessing the humanitarian intervention in the months following formal UN transition. In these statements Bush undermined the victory and fulfilled moral responsibility intervention narrative by admitting he chose to withdraw troops from northern Iraq knowing their mission was incomplete. For example, in his letter to Congress on 16 July 1991 Bush justified the transition exit on the grounds the mission succeeded but not sufficiently to warrant withdrawing all US soldiers because without a US presence, a return to violence was foreseeable. Victory was not sustainable:

Having succeeded in providing safe conditions for the return of Kurdish refugees from the mountainous border areas, US forces have now withdrawn from northern Iraq. However, we have informed the Iraqi Government that we will continue to monitor carefully its treatment of its citizens, and that *we remain prepared to take appropriate steps if the situation requires*. To this end, the coalition *plans to maintain an appropriate level of forces in the region for as long as required by the situation in Iraq*.²¹⁵ (Emphasis added.)

Rather than predicate exit on victory, statements like this confirmed Bush had 'ended' *Provide Comfort* knowing America's job was incomplete because America's moral duty was unfulfilled. The idea US troops could all withdraw was only a possibility, therefore, if Bush was also willing to admit that victory in this intervention would not be achieved.

Concern the US presence in *Provide Comfort* had only paused rather than stopped government repression in northern Iraq was well-founded. The end of *Provide Comfort* did not soften Iraqi government threats against the Kurds. Instead Saddam Hussein's son-in-law Hussein Kamil warned repression was only on hold until US troops left Iraq: "How long will the US stay? One year? Two years? Five years? They'll go and then we'll know how to take care of you".²¹⁶

215. George H. W. Bush, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Situation in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 16, 1991.

216. Quoted in Laurie Mylroie, "Planning Saddam's Ouster," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 27,

We can see, therefore, how even as *Provide Comfort* ended, Bush's commitment to guarantee the Kurdish safety and protection became a major inhibitor to implementing an exit strategy with *all* foreign soldiers leaving northern Iraq. The normative expectations of how a humanitarian intervention should proceed contributed to Bush turning the American operation in northern Iraq into an open-ended, military commitment.

5.7 Justifying exit in *Provide Comfort II*

In October 1991 Iraqi forces withdrew from Kurdish areas in northern Iraq creating a *de facto* autonomous zone. The Kurds held parliamentary elections there in 1992. US presidential elections were held on 3 November 1992. While Bush's foreign policy achievements boosted his popularity, in general the electorate was sanguine about America's place in the international community and preferred to focus on domestic concerns. Bush was comparatively weak on issues like the economy and was unable to translate his incumbency and foreign policy wins into electoral success, losing to Democrat Bill Clinton. To the extent Clinton addressed foreign policy issues in his presidential campaign, he maintained support for much of the program Bush implemented. This was particularly true in the case of Iraq.²¹⁷ Even though *Provide Comfort II* lasted longer than *Provide Comfort I*, and therefore Clinton was responsible for the humanitarian intervention in Iraq longer than Bush, it was Bush's intervention narrative that provided the rhetorical framework Clinton maintained, including the scope of US moral responsibilities and success metrics and the justifications for withdrawing troops. Bush's rhetorical choices thus continued to constrain Clinton's imagined possibilities for exit.

For the first five months of *Provide Comfort II* Bush did not once publicly discuss his exit strategy. When Clinton assumed office in January 1993 he too did not detail

1992,

217. Aubrey W. Jewett and Marc D. Turetzky, "Stability and Change in President Clinton's Foreign Policy Beliefs, 1993-96," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1998): 649.

a plan for troop withdrawal. In fact, explicit presidential public statements about exit strategy across both presidents were almost entirely absent for the four-and-a-half years of *Provide Comfort II*, comprising only one percent of all statements made about Iraq during that time. As the intervention had once again become primarily aerial in its approach—enforcing a NFZ—Bush and then Clinton returned to the initial operational disengagement exit strategy. Victory was achieved because America had fulfilled its moral responsibilities and this remained the justification for exit. However, Bush and Clinton once again re-calibrated the scope of America’s moral responsibility in Iraq and thus the conditions to be satisfied before the mission would be considered successful enough for US troops to leave.

Although Bush and then Clinton tasked *Provide Comfort II* troops with protecting the Kurds, the extent to which protection was still the main objective of American soldiers was unclear, as was the type of threat sufficient to trigger a US military response. In August 1991 Bush outlined the reasons why “our task in Iraq has not ended” arguing US forces must remain engaged, not to prevent an atrocity, as was the earlier justification in *Provide Comfort I*, but because America had to disarm and politically transform Iraq:

We must ensure that Iraq complies fully with all UN resolutions and eliminates weapons of mass destruction. And we must work to reintegrate Iraq and its people into the region once the Iraqi people choose new leadership.²¹⁸

Clinton was especially fond of referencing normative expectations to prevent atrocities (see Chapters 6 and 7) but this was not central to his discourse on Iraq. Clinton used human rights violations in Iraq as part of his overall explanation for America’s interest in the region, but he discussed human rights in the abstract not linking them to US soldiers’ work in the Gulf.²¹⁹ Instead, Clinton followed Bush’s lead and rested America’s exit strategy not on safeguarding the Kurds, but ensuring Iraq complied with the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) weapons

218. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 2, 1991.

219. William J. Clinton, *Teleconference Remarks With B’nai B’rith*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 24, 1994.

inspections.

The UNSCOM weapons inspections were not new, having started in April 1991 under UNSC Resolution 687. The Iraqi government's compliance was patchy, frequently obstructing UN inspectors or providing incomplete information. Although America was a major proponent of the inspections, Bush had generally separated discussion of the inspections from his discussion of America's humanitarian intervention. As *Provide Comfort II* started, however, Bush incorporated US interest in Iraqi disarmament into his justifications for the humanitarian intervention. Disarmament became part of America's moral responsibility in Iraq and wider American presence in the region and thus a new measure of the humanitarian intervention's success.²²⁰ For the remainder of his term in office, Bush talked of America's responsibility to get Iraq to "comply" with disarmament resolutions 45 times; Clinton used the word a further 30 times, noting America's duty to "enforce" the UN resolutions because it reflected "the will of the international community".²²¹

Disarmament was key to fighting America's foreign policy objectives in Iraq, but so too was regime change. Clinton adopted Bush's language of America not "having normal relations" with Iraq until Saddam Hussein was removed from office.²²² Clinton also followed Bush's rhetorical move in shifting regime change away from the objective of preventing atrocities and towards the objective of fighting against the Iraq regime. This was a subtle but important difference because it altered the character of America's humanitarian intervention away from a predominantly civilian protection mission to a more traditional military operation, albeit with a just war focus. Although troops could theoretically be withdrawn at any time, winning became an even more important prerequisite for exit.

220. Bush, *The President's News Conference*.

221. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tansu Ciller of Turkey*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 15, 1993; William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the Return of the United States Delegation to Haiti*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 16, 1994.

222. William J. Clinton, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/218797>, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 29, 1993.

The shift away from civilian protection occurred in practice as well as rhetorically. When Turkey conducted cross-border military operations against the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party) (PKK) in northern Iraq in October 1992 Bush did not use *Provide Comfort II*'s mandate to protect civilians from the actions of America's NATO ally. Clinton behaved similarly when Turkey repeated its action in March 1994.²²³ Fighting in 1994–1995 between rival Kurdish political groups—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and its breakaway faction the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—resulted in around 2300 people killed.²²⁴ Again Clinton did not authorise US soldiers to intervene to limit the violence. The UN security police also did not respond. However, when Clinton uncovered an Iraqi plot to assassinate George H. W. Bush on 26 June 1993, Clinton authorised unilateral attacks on Iraqi intelligence installations, without UNSC authority.²²⁵

In August 1996, at the KDP's request, 40,000 Iraqi troops entered northern Iraq and captured the city of Irbil.²²⁶ This time Clinton responded with Operation *Desert Strike* bombing air defence systems in Iraq's *south* from 31 August to 4 September 1996 and extending the southern NFZ to just outside Baghdad.²²⁷ Clinton presented *Desert Strike* as an extension of the US humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq, justifying the choice of bombing targets on the basis:

... the United States cannot be in the position after years and years and years of dealing with Saddam Hussein in which it's obvious that he's always pushing the envelope of saying 'don't do this' and then have him do it and we did nothing.²²⁸

Again, US attacks were more focused on crippling Iraq's military infrastructure than directly stopping atrocities. The French government considered that *Desert Strike*

223. Frelick, "The False Promise of Operation Provide Comfort: Protecting Refugees or Protecting State Power?," 27.

224. Louise Fawcett, "Down but Not out? The Kurds in International Politics.," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 117; Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

225. Jewett and Turetzky, "Stability and Change in President Clinton's Foreign Policy Beliefs, 1993-96," 649.

226. Haulman, "Crisis in Iraq: Operation Provide Comfort," 185.

227. Alison Mitchell, "US Launches Further Strike against Iraq after Clinton Vows He Will Extract 'Price'," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1996, White, "Mythic History and National Memory."

228. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Announcing Pension Portability Regulations and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 17, 1996.

undermined the humanitarian nature of the US-led intervention in northern Iraq and officially withdrew its support for *Provide Comfort II* in September 1996.²²⁹

Even though Clinton considered the Iraqi incursion into Kurdish areas serious enough to warrant bombing raids, Kurdish safety was not significant enough to defend with US ground forces because of the potential risk to American troops:

the action we took was appropriate because it would not have been appropriate for the United States to send ground forces into northern Iraq to try to throw Saddam out of northern Iraq. We could have done that, of course, but it would have been at a very high price. It was inappropriate. . .²³⁰

It is possible Clinton was especially casualty averse having lost troops in Somalia in addition to five soldiers already killed in Iraq in a friendly fire incident in April 1994.²³¹ This reticence was clear in the repetition of his commitment to “do whatever we have to do in the future to protect our pilots”,²³² to “take an action which would show our resolve and would protect our planes”.²³³ Nevertheless, Clinton’s actions were not consistent with America’s protection mandate and further complicated the basis upon which US troops would exit.

The only time Clinton was asked by a journalist about his exit strategy for *Provide Comfort II* occurred in the wake of the friendly fire incident. Clinton refused to outline an exit strategy but nevertheless argued the operation had been successful, which is why it should continue indefinitely:

I think [Provide Comfort II] has performed a very valuable function, not only in saving the lives of the Kurds but in permitting them to continue to live in northern Iraq and relieving Turkey of a very serious potential refugee problem. There is no question in my mind that it has been a very successful and a very

229. Cockayne and Malone, “Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003,” 130.

230. William J. Clinton, *The President’s Radio Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 14, 1996.

231. Dawn R. Eflein, “A Case Study of Rules of Engagement in Joint Operations: The Air Force Shootdown of Army Helicopters in Operation Provide Comfort,” *The Air Force Law Review* 44 (1998): 33–74.

232. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the Missile Strikes on Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 4, 1996.

233. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Announcing a Missile Strike on Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 3, 1996.

important mission. . . . our policy is sound, and I believe it should continue.²³⁴

Here Clinton argued victory was simultaneously a criteria for withdrawing troops as well as keeping them there, if only to ensure that victory is sustained, even if the timeframe is undefined. Despite the actions of US troops in Iraq countering the primacy of America's protection responsibility, the power of normative expectations for the intervention remained, evidenced in Clinton's strangely paradoxical exit justifications.

Operation *Provide Comfort II* finally ended on 31 December 1996 at the Turkish government's request. The date was marked with relatively little fanfare. Clinton immediately replaced *Provide Comfort II* with an even smaller Operation *Northern Watch* to continue enforcing the northern NFZ.²³⁵ Operation *Northern Watch* was superseded by the US-led Operation *Iraqi Liberation* invasion on 19 March 2003 (later renamed Operation *Iraqi Freedom*).²³⁶ Just as in *Provide Comfort I*, *Provide Comfort II* ended in name only. US troops remained in Iraq until 2015.

5.8 Conclusion

Both Presidents Bush and Clinton failed to implement full exit strategies for US troops from America's first post-Cold War humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq. In this case, there was indeed mission creep of the kind Adam Siegel described.²³⁷ There was task accretion and mission shift in *Provide Comfort* as Bush required US forces to undertake additional activities in order to protect the Kurds from ongoing human rights abuses perpetrated by the Iraqi government. *Provide Comfort II* was an example of mission transition as US soldiers moved from defending Kurds, to engaging in nation-building activities, to creating the conditions under which Kurds

234. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the American Helicopter Tragedy in Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 15, 1994.

235. Haulman, "Crisis in Iraq: Operation Provide Comfort," 186.

236. *Northern Watch* did not officially end until 1 May 2003.

237. Siegel, "Mission Creep or Mission Misunderstood?"

could enjoy freedom from central government oppression. When *Provide Comfort II* ended there was a mission leap as US soldiers took on the role of guaranteeing Kurdish safety and security, but within the wider objectives of restricting the Iraqi government's military capabilities and promoting regime change.

Each of these mission changes formed the basis for Bush and Clinton to justify why they were unable to completely withdraw American soldiers from Iraq and bring an end to the intervention. But these discursive difficulties did not arise because Bush and Clinton did not have exit strategies in place throughout the intervention. As my analysis shows, Bush and Clinton repeatedly communicated their personal commitments to withdrawing troops to the American people throughout the intervention. The problem, rather, was the exit strategies themselves as well as the efforts required to implement them, were constrained by expectations of the moral responsibilities America had to the Kurds and the type of victory that would make exit a justifiable proposition. Exit from the humanitarian intervention required success but success required America's moral responsibilities to be fulfilled. At the same time, what it meant to succeed widened moral responsibilities, which were in turn difficult to achieve, thus making exit almost impossible.

Within these expectation constraints, both presidents had limited room for rhetorical manoeuvre. Bush's strategic narrative choices also affected Clinton's options for crafting and implementing a viable exit strategy. Despite being from different political parties, Clinton followed the narrative parameters Bush set. Thus Clinton did not resile from the expectations that constrained Bush's exit strategy justifications; if anything, Clinton reinforced these expectations and the victory criteria they gave rise to, protracting the intervention years after its promised exit date.

There were two main ways in which normative expectations and the two presidents rhetorical choices in response to those expectations affected their exit strategy decisions. First, Bush and Clinton's intervention narrative framework centred on American moral responsibilities and this construction was difficult to abandon without

simultaneously undermining the moral legitimization dividend of the intervention's success. Bush's discursive emphasis on moral duty reflected his domestic audience's and his international allies' normative expectations of US behaviour after the Gulf War. Bush also expanded America's moral duty as a way to balance this normative expectation with other expectations of ensuring when troops left, they did so as victors. However, as Bush and then Clinton moved their definition of US moral responsibility from disaster relief, to preventing future attacks on the Kurds, to eroding Iraq's military capabilities and ultimately to removing the Iraqi president, it became harder for either president to demonstrate victory or set a timetable for winning that would justify troops withdrawal.

The underlying difficulty here for Bush and Clinton was not simply settling on a clear scope for America's moral responsibility, it was deciding how any limitations on America's moral responsibility would influence the president's ability to claim a degree of victory sufficient enough to justify withdrawing troops. Because victory was ultimately defined as ensuring the Kurds were indeed protected from Iraqi government oppression it was not conceivable to justify withdrawing troops until this objective had been achieved. Withdrawing troops short of victory was beyond the realm of Bush and Clinton's imagined possibilities, thus in each intervention phase they can be observed explaining troops could not leave because the Kurds were not sufficiently protected.

Bush and Clinton could have left the Kurds to their own devices (which is arguably what happened in the latter days of *Provide Comfort II*) but if the humanitarian crisis recurred, this would have brought the justification for the humanitarian intervention as well as the Gulf War that preceded it into question. It is thus difficult for a US president to *avoid* framing their justifications for using military force in moral terms. Once a decision to intervene is justified as consistent with America's role conception and foreign policy expectations, it is very difficult to abandon this narrative when making other operational decisions including deciding when to withdraw troops.

Provide Comfort illustrates how a president's decision to deepen America's moral responsibilities over the course of an intervention is a function of expectations of what it means to be victorious in a humanitarian intervention and the tension between winning, fulfilling moral responsibilities and guaranteeing exit. As contemplated by *jus ex bello* theorists, prolonging a military engagement may be required to address the 'root causes' of a humanitarian crisis or ensure a humanitarian response is sustainable. In some instances, deepening moral responsibility, for example, with regime change, is one way to also ensure a demonstrable victory sufficient to justify exit. At the same time, the president may find it difficult to advocate for a 'light touch' intervention to guarantee these goals are delivered. A more intensive intervention—for example in this case removing President Hussein from power—could have fulfilled America's moral responsibilities but may not have resulted in ongoing Kurdish safety and security. The Iraq case demonstrates why protection objectives are very difficult to deliver rapidly. It is a problem all presidents in this thesis experience in their humanitarian interventions.

Moral responsibility frames don't just constrain exit strategy options, they can be powerful enough to transform a humanitarian intervention into a predominantly non-humanitarian one, which is arguably what occurred in the latter stages of *Provide Comfort II*. Maintaining wide moral responsibilities can benefit other US foreign policy objectives, in this case limiting the Iraqi government's military capabilities. At the same time adhering to moral responsibilities can also result in outcomes that directly contradict other US foreign policy objectives. For example, despite presidential commitments not to interfere in the conflict between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, promoting the 'Balkanisation' of Iraq or supporting Kurdish independence, policing the NFZ and the safe zones resulted in the creation of a *de facto* Kurdish state.²³⁸

The second way normative expectations constrain exit strategy decisions and presidential justifications relates to the importance of demonstrating a military operation

238. Cockayne and Malone, "Creeping Unilateralism: How Operation Provide Comfort and the No-Fly Zones in 1991 and 1992 Paved the Way for the Iraq Crisis of 2003."

will not become a quagmire for American soldiers. To the extent Bush succeeded in burying the Vietnam Syndrome in the Gulf War, it was only in a shallow grave. But while the Vietnam Syndrome remained discursively powerful, as Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler argue, audiences are willing to endure long engagements so long as they believe victory is likely and the costs are limited.²³⁹ I suggest the Gulf War's victory dividend was so significant, it allowed greater audience tolerance for the subsequent humanitarian intervention to be extended as winning against an already defeated foe seemed achievable. I take Gelpi et al's conclusions further however, suggesting the Iraq case shows long engagements can also be publicly tolerated so long as the moral justifications for not withdrawing troops remain convincingly consistent with the wider expectations of humanitarian intervention.

Framing exit strategies in terms of their likelihood to avoid a quagmire also affects operational decisions, and operational limitations justify failures to implement an exit strategy. This issue is observable in the northern Iraq intervention and recurs in subsequent American humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Kosovo and Libya. Specifically, restricting an intervention to an aerial operation can be used to justify continuing troop presence because of the associated presumption that aerial operations can be rapidly ended, achieving military objectives while keeping American troops safely above the fray. It helps explain, curiously, why Clinton was able to avoid talking about his Iraq exit strategy even after he had hastily exited from America's disastrous humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1994 (see Chapter 6).

But the Iraq case also shows an aerial operation, while satisfying expectations for a rapidly implementable exit strategy, exists in tension with expectations an intervention will meet moral obligations to protect civilians and prevent atrocities. Bush found intensifying America's military footprint by deploying ground forces to northern Iraq—even if it raised the spectre of a quagmire—was necessary for the mission to succeed, a problem he would encounter again in Somalia and Clinton

239. Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War*.

would experience in Kosovo. While President Obama attempted to resist the pressure to deploy ground forces in Libya, his decision came at the cost of his humanitarian intervention being considered a success.

In Iraq we see Bush pioneering a UN transition exit strategy as a way of balancing the competing expectations for a humanitarian intervention of meeting moral responsibilities, achieving victory and ensuring exit. The transition exit provides justification for withdrawing troops before they fully discharge America's moral obligations and to redefine the boundaries of victory. Bush, Clinton and Obama would all use a transition exit strategy to justify at least one of their exit strategies in each intervention after Iraq. All three presidents struggled to effectively respond to the problems Clinton experienced in northern Iraq in implementing this exit strategy. To work the strategy requires replacement forces able and willing to meet the same standards of moral responsibility the US assumed at the beginning of the intervention, or otherwise America risks losing control of the intervention as well as being held responsible for its shortcomings. This is quite apart from the fact that it is questionable whether a transition exit strategy can be accurately labelled an exit strategy if follow-on forces are mostly comprised of US soldiers, a point I will return to in the cases of Somalia, Kosovo and Libya.

In the middle of US humanitarian intervention in Iraq, Bush commenced another intervention in Somalia, which I turn to in the following chapter. Bush used the supposed 'successful' completion of the Iraq mission to justify the Somali intervention, despite the fact *Provide Comfort* would not end until well after US troops were withdrawn from Somalia. Presenting the Iraq intervention as 'over' when US soldiers remained actively engaged in intervention activities highlights just how powerful the claimed experiences of short, successful, *completed* missions are to presidential justifications for starting new interventions. It also highlights the malleability of the notion of a US military 'exit' in the context of humanitarian intervention.

CHAPTER 6

Providing Relief in Somalia (1992–1995)

It may have been naïve for anyone to seriously assert in the beginning that you could go into a situation as politically and militarily charged as that one, give people food, turn around and leave, and expect everything to be hunky dory.

Bill Clinton
15 October 1993

6.1 Introduction

America's humanitarian intervention in Somalia revealed the promises and challenges of using military force to pursue human rights outcomes. In the wake of the World Trade Centre attacks in September 2001, another significant event affecting US foreign policy, Hollywood released *Black Hawk Down*, revisiting America's Somali intervention. The blockbuster movie viscerally reenacts US Task Force Ranger's experiences in the 'Battle of Mogadishu' on 3–4 October 1993. The film's narrative frame is the bravery of American soldiers trying to 'do their job' in an anarchic battlefield environment rife with tribalism and inexplicable local hostility to foreign forces. After the infamous firefight in which 18 US soldiers died, Eversman, a Task Force Ranger member discusses America's imminent departure from Somalia with

fellow soldier, Blackburn. Trying to understand why Washington bureaucrats have suddenly decided to withdraw troops, Blackburn asks, “What changed?” to which Eversman replies “Nothing” adding *sotto voce*, “That’s not true either, I think everything’s changed; I know I’ve changed”.¹

Eversman gives voice to the conventional wisdom that the brutal deaths of US soldiers in the Battle of Mogadishu was the most important event precipitating President Clinton’s decision to withdraw troops from Somalia. Not all scholars have been as simplistic in their interpretation of America’s exit strategy but they tend to focus predominantly on exit plans after Mogadishu. Explanations for withdrawal variously include: successive presidents’ failure to understand the mission or have clear strategic goals;² a casualty averse American public and Congress;³ ‘mission creep’ without a viable exit strategy;⁴ or some combination of all three, the American public losing patience with a mission costing lives without understandable or achievable objectives.⁵ The story I tell in this chapter takes a longer view of exit strategy dynamics and acknowledges both President George H. W. Bush and his successor Bill Clinton were eager to prevent US troops getting stuck in a Somali quagmire.

In the previous chapter on US intervention in northern Iraq I noted Bush and Clinton centred their exit strategy justifications on normative expectations of US foreign policy response to humanitarian crisis. Both presidents made exit contingent on discharging an ever-expanding moral duty to the Kurds. This responsibility was increasingly difficult to fulfil, and, when coupled with presidential commitments to persist until the mission succeeded, contributed to repeated decisions *not* to withdraw

1. Ken Nolan, directed by Ridley Scott, *Black Hawk Down*, DVD, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001.

2. John G. Fox, “Approaching Humanitarian Intervention Strategically: The Case of Somalia,” *SAIS Review* 21, no. 1 (2001): 147–58; John Stupart, “Just Ad Bellum and Intervention in Somalia: Why a Military Response Can Still Work,” *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies* 39, no. 2 (2011): 76–98; United States Institute of Peace, *Restoring Hope: The Real Lessons of Somalia for the Future of Intervention* (Washington D.C.: USIP, 1994).

3. Glenn M. Harned, *Stability Operations in Somalia 1992-1993: A Case Study*, PKSOI Paper (Carlisle Barracks, P.A.: United States Army War College Press, 2016), 77; Sebastian Kaempf, “US Warfare in Somalia and the Trade-off between Casualty-Aversion and Civilian Protection,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (2012): 388–413.

4. John R. Bolton, “Wrong Turn in Somalia,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (1994): 56–66.

5. Delaney, “Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?”

troops. In Somalia we see a more complex discursive relationship developing between exit strategy, mission success and moral responsibility. The term ‘exit strategy’ entered popular discourse during the humanitarian intervention in Somalia. Both presidents used their exit strategies to argue mission success in Somalia was achievable. At the same time, however, the first two exit strategies Bush and Clinton forwarded—operational disengagement, then UN transition—were predicated on victory that was in turn dependent on fulfilling America’s moral responsibilities in Somalia. Thus both presidents struggled to determine when a sufficient degree of victory had been achieved to justify exit, especially as it became increasingly difficult for a limited troop engagement to satisfy America’s protection responsibilities to the Somali people. As the possibility of success without significantly more investment evaporated, so too did the intervention’s moral rightness. Bush and then Clinton expanded the humanitarian intervention, deepening America’s moral responsibilities, which in turn made achieving victory harder and the prospects of exit more remote. Paradoxically, perhaps, as local hostility to the intervention increased, Clinton intensified his rhetoric about the importance of America’s moral responsibility in Somalia, which in turn made the idea of withdrawing troops unimaginable.

Clinton did not resolve the tensions between the competing expectations of intervention. Instead, after the Battle of Mogadishu, Clinton shifted his exit strategy to operational disengagement and local transition with a hard deadline for withdrawing troops. To justify this new exit, rather than countenancing failure, Clinton reframed both America’s moral responsibility and success in Somalia, crafting a narrative that positioned US troops as ‘victors’ withdrawing with their honour intact. Exploring the interplay of normative expectations in Somalia reveals the difficulties of defining success in a humanitarian intervention and setting temporal limits of American moral responsibility in humanitarian interventions. Ultimately, the US experience in Somalia directly contributed to changing US military doctrine making exit strategy and mission success prerequisites for commencing all future American military operations, not just humanitarian interventions.

In unpicking the connections between success, moral responsibility and exit strategies in this humanitarian intervention, I first outline the intervention's rhetorical context focusing on the humanitarian crisis in Somalia and the UNSC's willingness to expand the legitimacy bases for humanitarian intervention, both of which presented America with global transformation opportunities. I organise my subsequent analysis of presidential exit strategy justifications according to each phase of the intervention: Operation *Provide Relief*, Operation *Restore Hope* and Operation *Continue Hope* before and after the Battle of Mogadishu.

6.2 The rhetorical context

6.2.1 Humanitarian crisis in Somalia

As the US humanitarian intervention proceeded in northern Iraq, another humanitarian disaster was brewing in the Horn of Africa. During the Cold War, the US provided military and economic support for a number of national governments as anti-communist bulwarks in Africa, including President Mohamed Siad Barre's dictatorship in Somalia.⁶ The US no longer considered this investment necessary after the Cold War and began withdrawing its support for Barre's government, making him vulnerable to challenge. An armed rebellion ousted Barre in January 1991 and the Somali National Army disbanded.⁷ Civil war ensued with opposition groups competing for power and Barre eventually forced into exile. Two factions of the United Somali Congress (USC) led by commanders General Ali Mahdi Mohamed and General Mohamed Farah Aidid were among the most prominent armed groups fighting for control of Somalia. Armed clashes centred on the capital Mogadishu but also spread to other parts of the country. Most foreigners were evacuated from

6. Mary Harper, "Somalia: Whose Country Is It, Anyway?," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 37, no. 1 (2013): 161–68.

7. Richard W. Stewart, *The United States Army in Somalia 1992-1994* CMH Pub 70-81-1 (US Army Center of Military History, 2002), 6.

Mogadishu by the end of 1991. The US Ambassador was forced to flee the most expensive US embassy in sub-Saharan Africa by helicopter as armed guerrillas and civilians scaled the walls.⁸

The civil war caused widespread death and destruction throughout Somalia. Bandits and militias attacked civilian populations, looted and burned villages.⁹ 500,000 Somalis fled to neighbouring countries and a further 500,000 were internally displaced. The war exacerbated the drought occurring simultaneously in the Horn of Africa. More than half the Somali population—4.5 million people—faced starvation and malnutrition-related disease. By November 1991 the UN estimated the conflict and famine had killed approximately 300,000 people.¹⁰ The deteriorating political and security situation also adversely affected humanitarian operations. Aid convoys were often hijacked and relief supplies extorted. Some aid agencies feared they could not adequately protect their workers from the violence and others hired local militiamen as security guards.¹¹

6.2.2 Expanding the ‘humanitarian exception’ to nonintervention

On 23 January 1992 the UNSC unanimously labelled the situation in Somalia a “threat to international peace and security” calling for more humanitarian assistance, an arms embargo and a ceasefire to enable humanitarian assistance to be delivered.¹²

On 3 March 1992, UNSG Boutros Boutros-Ghali, together with the Organisation of

8. Scott Peterson, *Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda, A Journalist Reports from the Battlefields of Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 16; For a comprehensive overview of the domestic and international pressures that arguably led to the civil war and attendant humanitarian disaster, see Karin Von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kenneth D. Bush, “When Two Anarchies Meet: International Intervention in Somalia,” *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 17, no. 1 (1997): 4–6; Samuel M. Makinda, *Seeking Peace from Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993); Nina J. Fitzgerald, *Somalia: Issues, History, and Bibliography* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2002).

9. Peterson, *Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda, A Journalist Reports from the Battlefields of Africa*.

10. Jonathan Stevenson, “Hope Restored in Somalia?,” *Foreign Policy* 91 (1993): 138–39.

11. MSF, *Somalia 1991–1993: Civil War, Famine Alert and UN “Military Humanitarian” Intervention*, research report (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2013).

12. UN Security Council, *Resolution 733*, January 23, 1992.

African Unity (OAU), the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) secured an “Agreement on the Implementation of a Ceasefire” between civil war leaders Generals Ali Mahdi and Aidid. Two weeks later the UNSC passed Resolution 746 calling on all parties to abide by the terms of the ceasefire agreement and to facilitate aid delivery.¹³

On 24 April 1992 the UNSC unanimously established the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNOSOM), a small intervention force mandated to monitor Somalia’s ceasefire agreement.¹⁴ The UNSC did so on Boutros-Ghali’s recommendation, which was supported by African regional organisations. Although the UNSC did not formally debate UNOSOM’s establishment, the language of the resolution echoed previous resolutions authorising America’s humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq.¹⁵ In Iraq the UNSC argued the Kurdish refugee crisis was a threat to international peace and security. In Somalia, the UNSC found the humanitarian situation *within* Somali state borders constituted a threat to international peace and security, activating the UNSC’s Chapter VII powers authorising the use of force.¹⁶ Although the UNSC authorised armed intervention only to facilitate the “unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance”;¹⁷ the resolutions nevertheless widened the ‘humanitarian exception’ to the international prohibition against foreign intervention.

Looking at the Secretary General’s recommendations leading to UNOSOM, it is evident America’s northern Iraq intervention helped create the discursive space for foreign military intervention in Somalia. Based on the requests of NGOs and the US State Department¹⁸ the UNSG called for “corridors”, “zones of peace” or “preventative zones” to facilitate aid delivery.¹⁹ Humanitarian corridors have

13. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 746*, March 17, 1992.

14. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 751*, April 24, 1992.

15. Benedetto Conforti, *The Law and Practice of the United Nations* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005), 180–85, accessed September 17, 2018.

16. UN Security Council, *Resolution 733*; United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 746*; United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 751*.

17. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 746*.

18. Stefano Recchia, “Pragmatism over Principle: US Intervention and Burden Shifting in Somalia, 1992–1993,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2018, 6, accessed September 25, 2018; Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992–March 1994* (Washington DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2005), 10.

19. United Nations Secretary-General, *The Situation in Somalia: Report of the Secretary-*

traditionally been an option in ceasefire agreements but in this instance the UNSG's label recalled the 'safe zones' America and its allies created in northern Iraq. The UNSG requested "United Nations security personnel", not peacekeepers, be deployed to guarantee the safety of the Somali humanitarian corridors;²⁰ language reflecting the 'UN security police' in northern Iraq. Despite their title, UN security personnel would be part of a foreign *military* intervention in Somalia. The UNSG asked member states to contribute individuals with "military skills and training" to provide a "sufficiently strong military escort to deter attack and to fire effectively in self-defence".²¹

The UN had previously used foreign military officers for ceasefire monitoring duties but Somalia was the first time the UNSC agreed to use military personnel to help deliver humanitarian assistance. In Somalia there was no government exercising sovereign control across large sections of the country where the humanitarian crisis was particularly acute. It was therefore not possible to obtain effective state authorisation for the UN or other foreign intervention force to operate. America's recent activities in northern Iraq, however, demonstrated it was possible to insert foreign ground troops for a humanitarian intervention absent government support and with no immediately apparent significant domestic or international resistance.

6.2.3 The new world order's transformative potential

Both UNSG Boutros-Ghali and his predecessor, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, advised the UNSC on desirable UN action in Somalia that went beyond aid delivery and ceasefire monitoring. de Cuéllar called for international support for economic recovery and rehabilitation programs in Somalia. He noted poor government and physical infrastructure, as well as banditry and general lawlessness caused by weak public institutions, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and complicated efforts to halt the civil war. de Cuéllar argued restoring these institutions was central to sustainably

General S/24480 (New York: United Nations Security Council, August 24, 1992).

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, paras 27-28.

solving Somalia's humanitarian problems and should therefore be part of the UN mandate in Somalia.²²

Boutros-Ghali showed similar enthusiasm for expanding the scope of UN peacekeeping work to include state-building. Boutros-Ghali released his *Agenda for Peace* in June 1992 in which he identified preventative diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking as necessary for global conflict prevention and resolution. Among the tasks of peacemaking was state-building with member states "rebuilding institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife" as well as "address[ing] the deepest causes of conflict: economic and social injustice and political oppression".²³

The idea the international community should be responsible for supporting state-building activities coincided with US President George H. W. Bush's framing of America's role in the post-Cold War world. In Chapter 5 I showed how Bush argued America's Cold War 'victory' was consistent with ideas of American exceptionalism/manifest destiny, demonstrating the inherent superiority of liberal democratic ideals distinguishing America from its Cold War enemies. Bush used the phrase 'new world order' to characterise the changing geopolitical landscape primed for America to shape in its own image and interests. Bush's new world order required American global leadership to politically and economically transform former communist and failed states, and commit to continue fighting the new evils replacing communism. In talking about US responsibilities, Bush analogised with the narrative of America leading post-World War II reconstruction, using this example of America pursuing a global transformation agenda to argue his new world order plans continued an American tradition:

After vanquishing the dictators of Japan and Germany and Italy, America's war generation helped those countries rebuild and grow strong in the exercise of democracy and free enterprise... to create and nurture international organisations aimed at protecting human rights, collective security, and economic

22. United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Somalia* S.24343 (New York: United Nations Security Council, July 22, 1992), para 56.

23. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*, Report of the Secretary-General A/47/277-S/24111 (United Nations, 1992), para 15.

growth.²⁴

Bush's recounting of this historical period positioned America as a benevolent leader acting altruistically, downplaying America's economic and military power motivations for supporting vanquished nations and establishing international institutions.

Bush was confident in the American model's wide applicability calling for a "Pax Universalis built upon shared responsibilities and aspirations",²⁵ where the (American) "blessings of liberty some day might extend to all peoples".²⁶ In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 23 September 1991, Bush repeatedly asserted history was "resuming" and being "renewed",²⁷ bringing the world ever closer to realising what Americans "have always dreamed of[,] the day democracy and freedom will triumph in every corner of the world, in every captive nation and closed society".²⁸ Bush's comments conveyed a feeling of inevitability in the historical trajectory towards a liberal democratic peak, with America spearheading Francis Fukuyama's portended 'end of history'.²⁹

In practical terms Bush called on the UN to join America in helping all nations achieve standards "of human decency", reinvigorating state "institutions of freedom [that] have lain dormant".³⁰ Bush argued this type of state-building played "a crucial role in our quest for a new world order",³¹ co-opting the UN into America's global transformation mission. As I noted in earlier chapters, Bush's claims to promote democracy and liberal state institutions across the world were not new; such claims featured in US foreign policy decision-making since the founding of the republic. What was novel was Bush arguing the end of the Cold War provided new opportunities for America, having emerged as the world's only superpower, to deliver on these global

24. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association in Honolulu, Hawaii*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 7, 1991.

25. George H. W. Bush, *Address to the 46th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 23, 1991.

26. Bush, *Remarks to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association in Honolulu, Hawaii*.

27. Bush, *Address to the 46th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*.

28. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 9, 1991.

29. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

30. Bush, *Address to the 46th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*.

31. *Ibid.*

transformative objectives. While the UNSC legitimised foreign military intervention in Somalia, the humanitarian crisis also provided another opportunity for Bush to demonstrate American leadership and transformational potential by reforming a failed state and bringing it into the democratic community of nations.

6.3 Justifying exit in *Provide Relief*

It took more than two months after Resolution 751 passed for the first contingent of 50 United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNOSOM) officers to arrive in Somalia on 23 June 1992, with an additional 500 UN officers beginning work on 15 August 1992. The Bush administration provided in-principle support but did not contribute American military personnel to UNOSOM. Instead, Bush launched a parallel military mission, Operation *Provide Relief* on 12 August 1992 to transport soldiers from other countries who were part of UNOSOM.³² *Provide Relief* also delivered food and other relief supplies from Kenya to remote parts of Somalia outside the command of UNOSOM.³³ Bush explained his decision to launch *Provide Relief* by focusing on the tragedy of the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, describing Americans as “grieved by the suffering”³⁴ in a “conflict [that] claims innocent lives”.³⁵ Bush’s rhetoric acknowledged the normative expectation to respond to the crisis but he also limited America’s moral responsibility to providing disaster relief.³⁶

Bush only mentioned Somalia in passing in press conferences more substantively about his Iraq intervention exit plans and prospective US involvement in the developing Bosnian conflict. Bush presented an operational disengagement exit strategy for US troops in *Provide Relief*; as an exclusively aerial mission soldiers could be

32. United Nations Secretary-General, *The Situation in Somalia: Report of the Secretary-General*.

33. George H. W. Bush, *Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Military Airlift for Humanitarian Aid to Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 13, 1992.

34. George H. W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference in Kennebunkport, Maine*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 8, 1992; George H. W. Bush, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 21, 1992.

35. Bush, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*.

36. Jon Western, “Sources of Humanitarian Intervention: Beliefs, Information and Advocacy in the US Decisions on Somalia and Bosnia,” *International Security* 26, no. 4 (2002): 117–18.

easily and rapidly extracted as soon as they completed their airlift and aid delivery responsibilities. Walter Poole notes Bush's National Security Council (NSC) was similarly focused on the aerial mission providing a means for rapidly declaring victory and withdrawing troops by 25 January 1993.³⁷ Bush used the Vietnam War trope of soldiers "bogged down" to justify his decision not to deploy ground troops in Somalia, arguing he was committed to only launch military operations with assured exit strategies implemented after achieving victory, conveniently ignoring his failure to manage this in northern Iraq.

I vowed something, because I learned something from Vietnam: I am not going to commit US forces until I know what the mission is, until the military tell me that it can be completed, until I know how they can come out. . . . It is America that's in the lead in helping with humanitarian relief for Somalia. But when you go to put somebody else's son or daughter into war, I think you've got to be a little bit careful, and you have to be sure that there's a military plan that can do this.³⁸

Despite America and the UN "helping" the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate in Somalia and UNOSOM troops were besieged at the airport, unable to leave.³⁹ Still Bush resisted deploying US soldiers, not because he was concerned about the risk of American casualties but because he could not guarantee quick victory. Bush argued America's moral obligation in Somalia did not extend to sending US ground forces into intractable "tribal wars"; an aerial disaster relief operation was sufficient:⁴⁰

[Y]ou've got almost anarchy over there. You have warlords controlling the ports. They're armed. They go—and they're shooting up the United Nations forces. We were very active in the United Nations to get UN forces on the ground. But they're having difficulty separating these warlords one from the other. We're sending our supplies in there. We are helping. . . . And maybe you can say, well you never do enough. But then you've got to look at the situation on the ground. There's anarchy there. It's a terrible thing. Once the Siad government went out, you've got all these factions shooting, fighting, killing. Seventeen-year-olds with weapons from the former Soviet empire just shooting it up on the port, stealing the relief supplies, and taking them for

37. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992-March 1994*, 9.

38. George H. W. Bush, *Presidential Debate in St. Louis*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 11, 1992.

39. Peterson, *Me against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda, A Journalist Reports from the Battlefields of Africa*, 47.

40. Bush, *Presidential Debate in St. Louis*.

their families and leaving these kids starving. It is tough.⁴¹

Although troubled by “ghastly pictures of those starving kids”⁴² with “the little skinny arms”⁴³ and wanting “to help these little starving kids in Somalia”,⁴⁴ Bush was also arguing that America’s moral responsibility was nonetheless limited because Somalia was yet another intractable African problem, which even the US, enormous military force notwithstanding, would be powerless to fix.

Bush could also convincingly argue for limited US moral responsibility in Somalia because through most of 1992 there was little domestic pressure to do otherwise. Congress did not dedicate significant time to discussing Somalia or providing Bush with much guidance for an American response. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas) was one of the few representatives demanding more robust US and UN action in Somalia. She succeeded in passing a Senate resolution on 26 June 1991 calling on the UN to make the crisis a “high priority item”,⁴⁵ but Congress did not discuss the issue again for another year. When UNOSOM started, Kassebaum convinced both houses of Congress on 11 August 1992 to agree the president should “work with the UNSC to deploy [UNOSOM] security guards immediately, *with or without the consent of the Somali factions* to assure that humanitarian relief gets to those most in need”.⁴⁶ The resolution’s wording was strong enough to authorise military intervention but it also left room for Bush to comply with Congress’ request without committing US ground forces to UNOSOM.⁴⁷

41. George H. W. Bush, *Question-and-Answer Session in Grand Rapids*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 29, 1992.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. George H. W. Bush, *Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 15, 1992.

45. Nancy Landon Kassebaum, “S.Res.115 - A Resolution Expressing the Sense of the Senate Regarding the Emergency Humanitarian and Political Situation in Somalia,” *102nd Congress (1991-1992) Resolution (Agreed to in Senate 1991)*.

46. Nancy Landon Kassebaum, “S.Con.Res.132 - A Concurrent Resolution Expressing the Sense of the Congress Regarding the Desperate Humanitarian Crisis in Somalia and Urging the Deployment of United Nations Security Guards to Assure That Humanitarian Relief Gets to Those Most in Need,” *102nd Congress (1991-1992) Concurrent resolution (Agreed to in House 1992)*: Emphasis added.

47. See also John Lewis, “H.Con.Res.370 - Concerning the Humanitarian Crisis in Somalia,” *102nd Congress (1991-1992) Concurrent resolution (Agreed to in Senate 1992)*.

Congressional sidelining of Somalia matched the views of an American constituency inundated by presidential election campaign coverage focused more on domestic issues than foreign policy concerns. A Pew poll conducted from 10–13 September 1992 showed almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) were not following news about the civil war and famine in Somalia.⁴⁸ It has almost become conventional wisdom that US media coverage of the humanitarian crisis in Somalia from August–November 1992 drove Bush to involve the US more deeply in the conflict. Jonathan Mermin has demonstrated, however, that elite media coverage followed rather than preceded the Bush administration’s interest in Somalia.⁴⁹ Although Mermin’s analysis was restricted to television news media, his findings hold true across elite press coverage of Somalia over the same time period. Between April 1992 and Bush’s announcement in December 1992 to expand *Provide Relief*, *The New York Times* provided the most extensive coverage of Somalia, with eleven editorials and fourteen opinion pieces. Over the same period *The Washington Post* published nine editorials and six opinion pieces on the issue, with *The Wall Street Journal* editors and commentators only discussing the issue twice.

When the elite mainstream press did discuss what the US should do in Somalia, criticism of perceived American inaction was almost universal. *The Washington Post* editors and *The New York Times* commentators echoed Boutros-Ghali’s criticism the US and Europe were more interested in the former Yugoslavia’s “rich man’s war” than the humanitarian disaster in Somalia.⁵⁰ Almost all articles demanded greater US “leadership” providing humanitarian relief but did not agree America’s obligation extended to addressing the civil war dynamics exacerbating the famine. *Wall Street Journal* commentator John Prendergast was one of the few voices in the elite press who argued “flooding the country with food is just the first step”,

48. Pew Research Poll Database, ed., *News Interest Index Poll, September 1992*, Survey by Times Mirror. Methodology: Interviewing conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, September 10 - September 13, 1992 and based on 1,508 telephone interviews. Sample: National adult., September 13, 1992, Based on 1508 telephone interviews.

49. Jonathan Mermin, “Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (1997): 385–403.

50. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga* (Londres: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 55; Editorial, “Indifference and Somalia,” *The Washington Post*, June 19, 1992, Editorial, “Indifference and Somalia.”

which should be followed by “reconstruction aid...to prevent a descent into the condition of mass famine”, similar to that envisaged by the the UNSG.⁵¹ Bush’s justification narratives regarding US intervention in Somalia paralleled wider public discourse about preferred US foreign policy action focused on disaster relief. Bush’s narrative also paralleled the portrayal of Somalia in the mainstream elite media whose commentators supported US intervention on the basis that the US should be “saving Somalia from itself.”⁵²

Justifying limited US moral responsibility on the basis that the conflict was intractable and using an operational disengagement exit strategy, however, conflicted with Bush’s other statements about America’s responsibility to pursue global transformation, using force if necessary. Somalia’s intractable humanitarian difficulties, its absence of viable state institutions and the UN’s interest in saving and reconstructing Somalia made it the perfect opportunity to express America’s foreign policy impetus to reform failed states.

In his final speech before the UNGA on 21 September 1992 Bush characterised America’s recent foreign policy actions in the following way:

As our humanitarian operations in Somalia and northern Iraq, Bosnia, and the former Soviet Union will testify, we will continue our robust humanitarian assistance efforts to help those suffering from man-made and natural disasters.⁵³

Bush conflated quite different initiatives—*Provide Relief* aid delivery Somalia, US soldiers defending northern Iraqi safe zones in *Provide Comfort*, USAID programs in Bosnia, and supporting democratic reform and economic assistance in the former USSR—under the heading of “humanitarian operations”. Bush’s comment about “robust humanitarian assistance” perhaps foreshadowed a growing American interest in ‘stability operations’ (see Chapter 2) but it also reveals different contexts had little bearing on how Bush framed American military operations; all were consistent

⁵¹ John Prendergast, “Staving Off Hunger and Food Bandits in Somalia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 1992,

⁵² Nancy Kassebaum and Paul Simon, “Save Somalia from Itself,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1992,

⁵³ Bush, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*.

with America's global transformation approach to foreign policy.

In the same speech Bush went on to advise the UN to learn from US achievements, claiming America's "extensive experience in winning wars and keeping the peace"⁵⁴ made it successful in humanitarian interventions. Bush's advice not only paints an especially rosy picture of America's experiences in World War II, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War, but it focuses strongly on winning without explaining exactly what 'winning' entails in a humanitarian intervention context, and if it differs from winning conventional wars. Bush's concern with victory and the tension between achieving victory, fulfilling America's moral responsibilities and having a plan for rapid troop withdrawal continued to shape subsequent justifications for shifting exit strategies.

6.4 Justifying exit in *Restore Hope*

Three days after Clinton defeated Bush in the 1992 presidential election, Bush's National Security Council asked the CIA to determine if current UNOSOM and *Provide Relief* efforts would end the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, delivering victory and fulfilling America's moral responsibilities.⁵⁵ On 9 November 1992 the CIA responded saying UNOSOM was dramatically under-resourced and in order to succeed, 10,000-15,000 troops were required, more than three times the number currently authorised. Although aware Somalia was not of immediate American interest the NSC and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) concluded America had a significant moral obligation to stop the humanitarian crisis and presented Bush with three possible options for deeper intervention in Somalia.⁵⁶ On 25 November 1992, with less than two months remaining of his presidential term, Bush decided the best course of action was for the US to lead, under its own command, a multinational military

54. Ibid.

55. Fox, "Approaching Humanitarian Intervention Strategically: The Case of Somalia," 149–50.

56. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992-March 1994*, 9.

intervention in Somalia, including ground forces.⁵⁷

On 3 December 1992, the UNSC unanimously authorised America to “use all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia”.⁵⁸ Unlike previous resolutions regarding Somalia, the UNSC publicly debated the measure with the resulting Resolution 794 marking an important development in the global discourse on humanitarian intervention. In passing the resolution the UNSC acted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter rather than using its peacekeeping or ceasefire monitoring powers. As discussed in Chapter 3, Chapter VII authorises member states to conduct military operations with a UN imprimatur. Austria and Hungary saw the resolution as a logical development in the UN’s approach to humanitarian crises after previously authorising America’s intervention in northern Iraq.⁵⁹ China, Ecuador, Belgium, India and France expressed regret the resolution authorised America rather than the UN to lead the intervention, but these governments did not vote against the resolution. In China’s case, this was because the government was convinced the intervention would ultimately be handed over to the UN. The UNSC had, however, resisted the US Department of Defense request to have the transition exit strategy expressly included in Resolution 794.⁶⁰ UNSC members recognised the gravity of their decision but undermined its precedent-setting value arguing the novelty of the situation justified action. Somalia was described variously as “exceptional” by Ecuador and China, “unique” by Zimbabwe and India, “atypical” by Belgium, “unprecedented” by France and “extraordinary” by Venezuela, Morocco and Hungary. The preamble to Resolution 794 also identified Somalia as an “exceptional” case.⁶¹

Neither Resolution 794 nor UNSC members used the word ‘humanitarian intervention’ but Bush’s UN representative Edward Perkins was enthusiastic about America leading

57. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992-March 1994*, 19–20.

58. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 794*, December 3, 1992.

59. United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Meeting S/PV.3145* (New York, USA: United Nations Security Council, December 3, 1992).

60. Recchia, “Pragmatism over Principle,” 18.

61. United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Meeting*.

a “great humanitarian enterprise”. Perkins commended the international community for “taking an important step in developing a strategy for dealing with the potential disorder and conflicts of the post-cold-war world” recognising “relief must be followed closely by rehabilitation and by reconstruction”.⁶² Perkins’ statement reveals an early disconnect between the Bush administration and the rest of the international community’s view of American intervention in Somalia. UNSC members authorised intervention as a last resort in exceptional circumstances; America would only use military power to restore security to facilitate humanitarian assistance, immediately transitioning the mission to UN command. For the Bush administration, however, Somalia was an opportunity to demonstrate how military force could achieve wide humanitarian objectives, delivering the deep political transformation now open to developing nations in the post-Cold War world. Despite the disconnect, however, at no point did the UNSC act to stop America’s intervention, allowing it to continue along the lines Bush set.

The day after the UNSC passed Resolution 794, Bush gave a televised address announcing 25,000 US troops would commence Operation *Restore Hope* in Somalia, its contribution as coordinator and leader of the Unified Task Force (UNITAF).⁶³ Bush revised his earlier explanations for US action in Somalia, widening America’s moral responsibility beyond providing disaster relief to include new world order transformation.

With this wider moral responsibility and ground troops deployed, an operational disengagement strategy was no longer viable. Bush thus changed his exit strategy to one he was ostensibly following in northern Iraq: a UN transition exit.

First, we will create a secure environment in the hardest hit parts of Somalia. . . Second, once we have created that secure environment, we will withdraw our troops, handing the security mission back to a regular UN peacekeeping force. . . . This operation is not open-ended. We will not stay one day longer

62. Ibid., 36.

63. The total number of soldiers to be involved in UNITAF was 38,000 with the balance of troops provided by 22 other nations including France, Italy, Belgium, Morocco, Australia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Canada.

than is absolutely necessary.⁶⁴

This two-point exit plan sounded as uncomplicated as it was succinct. Troop withdrawal would follow mission success and success was simply a matter of applying sufficient military force. Bush's framing suggested the matter of providing security could be neatly carved out from the broader crisis in Somalia, 'fixed' by US soldiers to the point it was unlikely to recur once US troops departed. Bush suggested American soldiers could—and would—operate apolitically in Somalia, not affecting the operational or strategic calculus of the parties to the civil war. But Bush did not provide any details as to what he meant by 'security', how US forces would establish it, or when he would know a sufficient level of security had been established to justify their withdrawal. Just as in Iraq, Bush's exit strategy for Somalia also left open questions about the conditions under which the UN could effectively assume America's responsibilities in a transition exit. Bush chose to explicitly outline his exit strategy in a simple manner despite his NSC and JCS advising a ground operation in Somalia would be complicated, potentially cost American lives and, because of the hostile operating environment, likely take more than a few months to achieve its objective of establishing 'security'.

Bush justified his new exit strategy by arguing that it was the deep suffering in Somalia that rendered the situation one that compelled American intervention and redemption. Bush outlined in great detail the suffering of vulnerable Somalis. He talked of "tragedy"⁶⁵ with "suffering hard to imagine",⁶⁶ where "1.5 million people could starve to death",⁶⁷ of a place with "no government",⁶⁸ where "law and order have broken down [and] anarchy prevails".⁶⁹ The scale of suffering triggered America's moral responsibility to do "God's work" by solving the crisis and providing global

64. George H. W. Bush, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Situation in Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 10, 1992.

65. George H. W. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 4, 1992.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia*; George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 15, 1992.

leadership:

The people of Somalia, especially the children of Somalia, need our help. We're able to ease their suffering. We must help them live. We must give them hope. America must act. Only the United States has the global reach to place a large security force on the ground in such a distant place quickly and efficiently and thus save thousands of innocents from death. [W]e also know that some crises in the world cannot be resolved without American involvement, that American action is often necessary as a catalyst for broader involvement of the community of nations.⁷⁰

Stipulating an exit strategy provided justification for deeper military intervention in Somalia; committing a sizeable number of ground troops to a country of marginal security interest to the US could be made more tolerable to Americans by providing an exit plan. The exit strategy demonstrated Bush's rhetorical commitment to avoiding a quagmire because the mission was not "open-ended". Revealing a clear exit strategy in the way Bush did on 4 December was also a way to reassure Americans their soldiers would emerge from this operation victorious. The exit strategy was simple and, more crucially it was putatively viable, because success was assured. Bush did more than just imply this connection between victory and exit in *Restore Hope*, he made it explicit:

The outlaw elements in Somalia must understand this is serious business. We will accomplish our mission... As Commander in Chief I assure [US soldiers being deployed], you will have our full support to get the job done, and we will bring you home as soon as possible... We will not fail.⁷¹

Rather than completed objectives creating the conditions for exit, the exit strategy discursively represented certainty about victory and thus justified deploying troops in the first place. The exit strategy also helped legitimise Bush's decision to start a military operation after having lost his re-election bid. By emphasising what Bush said was a limited military operation where US soldiers would definitely succeed and withdraw according to a clear exit plan, he demonstrated how his unconventional lame duck presidential behaviour was not as egregious as it might otherwise seem.

Western media crews aplenty documented the first contingent of US Marines landing

70. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia*.

71. *Ibid.*

on a Mogadishu beach on 9 December 1992. Opinion polls from *NBC/The Wall Street Journal*, *Time/CNN* and *ABC/The Washington Post* showed close to 80 percent of Americans supported Bush's decision to send US soldiers to help the UN deliver relief supplies in Somalia.⁷² 70 percent of Americans also agreed *Restore Hope* was "worth the cost" despite "the possible loss of American lives and the other costs involved".⁷³ Another opinion poll using the *Vietnam War* trope of failed exit strategies, showed 62 percent of Americans agreed with Bush's assessment that *Restore Hope* would "end quickly" and US troops would not "get bogged down in a drawn-out military involvement [sic]".⁷⁴

Domestic support was not unqualified or universal but little criticism related to the prospects for victory or the implementability of the president's proposed exit strategy. Some elite press commentators contrasted the decision to send ground troops to Somalia with Bush's persistent refusal to similarly address the mass atrocities and war crimes occurring in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Others such as Anthony Lewis suggested US military commanders opposed *Restore Hope* because they could not fathom its strategic significance. Among the few Congress members who openly opposed the deployment, Senator Hank Brown (R-CO), from Bush's own party, criticised him for deploying troops "without clear, precise military objectives" into a situation akin to Vietnam or Lebanon. Others feared Bush was overconfident in US soldiers' ability to create security in a 'failed state'.⁷⁵

Diplomatic overtures backed by superlative military power rapidly improved aid delivery conditions in Somalia, especially in locations where US troops were active.⁷⁶ American soldiers concentrated their efforts on Somalia's urban centres while Special Operations Forces focused on securing regional areas. The port and airport re-opened

72. Louis J. Klarevas, "The Polls Trends: The United States Peace Operation in Somalia," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000): 533–34.

73. *Ibid.*, 534.

74. *ABC/Washington Post* *ibid.*, 540.

75. Michael Wines, "Mission to Somalia: Bush Declares Goal in Somalia to 'Save Thousands'," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1992,

76. John G. Sommer, *Hope Restored? Humanitarian Aid in Somalia 1990-1994* (Refugee Policy Group, Center for Policy Analysis and Research on Refugee Issues, November 1994), 38; Delaney, "Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?," 32.

by the end of 1992 with more than 40,000 tons of grain off-loaded.⁷⁷ Bush extolled the virtues of *Restore Hope* “vindicating American values”.⁷⁸ When asked when the transition exit would be implemented, however, Bush said he “just can’t help on the question of timetabling”.⁷⁹ Bush argued planning for troop withdrawal was difficult because “I don’t think there will be any leaving of the Somali people to suffer the fate they had been suffering”.⁸⁰ Bush’s difficulty was finding an end point for a mission to create ‘security’ without having articulated the political, geographic and temporal dimensions of what ‘security’ in Somalia entailed.

Bush ended his presidency without resolving the security question or implementing his transition exit strategy in Somalia. Instead, Bush dedicated his waning time in office to setting out foreign policy principles he thought America should follow when using military force in the new world order. As the comments of a president about to leave office Bush’s exhortations lacked policy weight but are nevertheless germane because in these speeches Bush used *Restore Hope* to illustrate American moral foreign policy action. In a speech on 15 December 1992 at Texas A&M University, for example, Bush outlined America’s duty to build a world in its own image, not only because it served the ‘national interest’ but because it was fundamentally the ‘right’ thing to do:

America remains today what Lincoln said it was more than a century ago, ‘the last best hope of man on Earth’... The leadership, the power, and yes, the conscience of the United States of America, all are essential for a peaceful, prosperous international order, just as such an order is essential for us... For the first time, turning this global vision into a new and better world is, indeed, a realistic possibility... Some will dismiss this vision as no more than a dream. I ask them to consider the last four years when a dozen dreams were made real... Today they’re concrete realities, brought about by a common cause: the patient and judicious application of American leadership, American power, and perhaps most of all, American moral force...⁸¹

77. *United States Forces, Somalia: After Action Report and Historical Overview The United States Army in Somalia, 1992-1994* (Center of Military History: United States Army, 2003), 10.

78. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 10, 1992.

79. Alison Mitchell, “President Visits Centre of Crisis in Somali Town,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1993,

80. *Ibid.*

81. Bush, *Remarks at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas*.

Bush argued that in Somalia, as in Iraq, humanitarian intervention was morally incumbent on the US and consistent with normative expectations and practice of US foreign policy:

[I]n the wake of the Cold War, in a world where we are the only remaining superpower, it is the role of the United States to marshal its moral and material resources to promote a democratic peace. It is our responsibility, it is our opportunity to lead. There is no one else... The need to use force arose as well in the wake of the Gulf War, when we came to the aid of the peoples of both northern and southern Iraq. And more recently, as I'm sure you know, I determined that only the use of force could stem this human tragedy of Somalia...⁸²

Bush included Somalia in the domestic narrative of the moral march of American foreign policy. *Restore Hope's* foreign policy purpose was about more than addressing the material needs of Somalis; the humanitarian intervention helped fulfil America's larger global reform and redemption project. Consequently, while Bush claimed *Restore Hope* would be limited in scope and duration, he was also laying the ground-work for deeper American and international community involvement in Somalia's political reconstruction; a project necessitating a larger and longer commitment of military force and other resources to ensure success, if success could be achieved at all. With comments like this it is difficult not to view Bush expanding *Provide Relief* to *Restore Hope* as a moral transformation endeavour, in turn affecting what could be considered to be a sufficient degree of victory to justify troop withdrawal.

In addition to moral motivations, Bush argued exit strategies and military success are central to American decisions to use military force:

And when we place our young men and women of the military in harm's way, we must be able to assure them and their families that their mission is defined and that its success can be achieved.⁸³

But in every case involving the use of force, it will be essential to have a clear and achievable mission, a realistic plan for accomplishing the mission, and criteria no less realistic for withdrawing U.S. forces once the mission is complete. *Only if we keep these principles in mind will the potential sacrifice be one that can be explained and justified.*⁸⁴ (Emphasis added.)

82. George H. W. Bush, *Remarks at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, January 5, 1993.

83. Bush, *Remarks at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas*.

84. Bush, *Remarks at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York*.

Indeed Bush argued it is the *existence* of an exit strategy, *contingent on victory*, that best justifies a decision to use military force. Bush did not suggest Americans are cautious about military intervention because they are casualty averse or concerned military objectives might not be legitimate; rather enthusiasm for sending American soldiers to foreign operations, humanitarian or otherwise, is primarily based on evidence troops will return home victorious. Bush claimed a well-constructed military operation can and must fulfil moral obligations successfully within a predictable time-frame avoiding a quagmire. As Bush was already experiencing in Somalia, however, normative expectations shape how moral responsibilities are constructed and therefore how and whether victory is achieved and if and when troops can leave as victors. Meeting these normative expectations helps explain Bush committing not to withdraw troops from Somalia if it risked returning Somalia to its pre-intervention “fate”. It also helps explain why, just as he did in the northern Iraq intervention he also inherited, Bill Clinton also struggled finding a balance between fulfilling America’s moral obligation to provide Somalis with sustainable security, and achieving the requisite level of success to justify US troops returning home.

6.5 UN transition exit not an exit

Like Bush, Clinton committed to the UN transition exit without explaining how and when it would occur. Clinton agreed with America’s moral responsibility to establish security but he widened Bush’s definition from physical integrity of relief supply chains to state-building; creating long-term, political and human security across Somalia. With UN peacekeepers unable to deliver on America’s promise, and growing violence towards intervention forces, the conditions for US troops achieving success were never quite established. Consequently Clinton never implemented the transition exit strategy.

Unlike *Provide Comfort* in Iraq, Bush intended for *Restore Hope* to be concluded and

troops home on or before Clinton's inauguration day on 20 January 1993,⁸⁵ although Bush's Assistant Secretary of State for Africa James Woods claims no-one in the Bush administration seriously expected the mission to be over in fewer than four to six months. In any event, when Clinton assumed the presidency it was clear that despite its successes, what Bush commenced in *Restore Hope* had to continue for at least a few months under Clinton's leadership.⁸⁶ It would be a mistake, however, to believe Clinton did not support Bush's decision to deploy US soldiers to Somalia. During his election campaign Clinton called for a stronger response to the crisis and during administration transition meetings he declared a special interest in learning about US actions in Somalia.⁸⁷ The day after Bush announced *Restore Hope* Clinton agreed with the mission's impulse to stop an atrocity and for America to lead the effort to "create a security environment to save lives".⁸⁸

In contrast to his predecessor, President Bill Clinton was loquacious, although this does not mean presidential rhetoric analysts consider him an especially great communicator. Daniel Schorr describes Clinton as "the great talker",⁸⁹ a view shared by scholars including Lee Sigelman and Cynthia Whissell who find Clinton "longwinded" when compared with other US presidents.⁹⁰ Ronald Lee and Kane Click note the political communication aspects of Clinton's presidency were marked by his personal populist story, his efforts to create a more centrist Democratic party discourse, his interest in improving race relations, and his successful weathering of repeated political scandals from private indiscretions and abuses of power.⁹¹ Bill

85. James D. Boys, "A Lost Opportunity : The Flawed Implementation of Assertive Multilateralism (1991-1993)," *European Journal of American Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012): 4; Delaney, "Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?," 31.

86. James L. Woods, "US Government Decisionmaking Processes During Humanitarian Operations in Somalia," in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter S. Clarke and Jeffrey Ira Herbst (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 160.

87. Delaney, "Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?," 30.

88. James Gerstenzang, "Bush Sending Troops to Help Somalia's Hungry Millions Mission: 'America Must Act,' President Says in Dispatching Forces for Humanitarian Effort. A Dozen Other Nations also may Participate," *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1992,

89. Daniel Schorr, "The Great Talker," *The New Leader* 76, no. 3 (February 8, 1993): 3-6.

90. Lee Sigelman and Cynthia Whissell, "'The Great Communicator' and 'The Great Talker' on the Radio: Projecting Presidential Personas," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2002): 137-46.

91. Ronald Lee and Kane M. Click, "Clinton, William Jefferson (1946-)," in *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2008).

Clinton was America's first post-Cold War president, which partly explains the success he enjoyed with an election campaign focused on the economy and domestic issues rather than foreign policy.

Perhaps betraying his comparative lack of interest in foreign policy issues, the first time Clinton publicly talked about *Restore Hope* he claimed gang violence in some American suburbs was worse than the violence US troops were trying to stop in Somalia.⁹² Clinton was three weeks into his term when he was first asked about a schedule for withdrawing soldiers from Somalia. Clinton responded by sticking to Bush's UN transition exit strategy, but in terms of a timeframe only said when troops would *not* be withdrawn:

This does need to go from a US mission to a UN mission. I never thought we could do it. Even though I think President Bush hoped we could, I never thought we could do it by the end of January.⁹³

In another statement about his exit strategy made a week later, Clinton said:

But I think the United States has a responsibility in Somalia. And I supported it when we sent our troops over there to try to stop the fighting and to try to bring some safety and food and medicine and education back to the children there. And I think that what we will be doing in Somalia is trying to work with other countries to always keep enough soldiers there to try to keep the peace, but there won't be so many Americans there. And then we can support others and try to make sure that we restore peace on a long-term basis and try to make sure that the people always had enough food and medicine and shelter to do well. I think we do have a responsibility there, but as President my first responsibility is to all of you.⁹⁴

In Clinton's remarkable inability to identify the bounds of the US mission he reveals his central problem ending *Restore Hope*. Clinton bookends his comments with references to America's moral responsibility, but in describing this responsibility, he rhetorically stretches *Restore Hope's* mandate beyond protecting relief supplies in a small part of Somalia to essentially ending the civil war. While Bush first raised this wider security objective, it was Clinton who embedded it as a criterion for mission

92. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the Democratic Governors' Association Dinner*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 1, 1993.

93. William J. Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Democratic Congressional Leaders*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 13, 1993.

94. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the Children's Town Meeting*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 20, 1993.

success. In terms of his exit strategy, therefore, Clinton predicated troop withdrawal on achieving political reform, which, as he acknowledged, is difficult to deliver within a few months.

Changing battlefield conditions further complicated exit strategy implementation. Breaches of the UN mandate coloured *Restore Hope*'s achievements and those of the UNITAF mission of which it was a part, sometimes with good outcomes and at other times with significant cost to the civilian population. Although UNITAF was not required to rebuild Somali infrastructure, enforce disarmament or train local security forces, foreign soldiers repaired roads and bridges, confiscated thousands of small arms and automatic weapons, and recruited Somalis to perform local security functions.⁹⁵ Adekeye Adbajo notes UNITAF soldiers, who did not hesitate to use force when confronting warlords,⁹⁶ killed an estimated 227 civilians by the end of February 1993 and committed other crimes including robbery, murder and torture.⁹⁷ Such actions fermented ill-will among some Somalis and resistance towards foreign troop activities⁹⁸ but they attracted little US media attention and Clinton did not discuss them publicly.

Meanwhile transition negotiations between the US and UN made it doubtful a full handover to a United Nations Mission in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) mission would occur.⁹⁹ According to UNSG Boutros-Ghali, UNOSOM II fulfilling its mandate “depended” on America maintaining a military presence in Somalia “of at least battalion strength” as a “quick reaction force”.¹⁰⁰ Boutros-Ghali also pushed for a UNOSOM II mandate much wider than UNOSOM, which he considered consistent with the peacemaking ideas in his *Agenda for Peace*¹⁰¹ and “an expression

95. Woods, “US Government Decisionmaking Processes During Humanitarian Operations in Somalia,” 159.

96. Ibid.

97. Adekeye Adbajo, “In Search of Warlords: Hegemonic Peacekeeping in Liberia and Somalia,” *International Peacekeeping* 10, no. 4 (2003): 73.

98. Stevenson, “Hope Restored in Somalia?,” 139–40.

99. Robert G. Patman, *Strategic Shortfall: The Somalia Syndrome and the March to 9/11* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010), 45–50.

100. United Nations Secretary-General, *Further Report of the Secretary-General Submitted in Pursuance of Paragraphs 18 and 19 of Resolution 794 (1992) S/25354* (New York, USA: United Nations Security Council, March 3, 1993).

101. Delaney, “Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?,” 33.

of the international community's determination not to remain a silent spectator to the sufferings of an entire people for no fault of their own".¹⁰² UNOSOM II would continue UNOSOM's focus on security but instead of using US troops to facilitate aid delivery, American soldiers would now support fundamental political transformation.¹⁰³ As far as Boutros-Ghali was concerned, Bush and Clinton's transition plan was not an exit strategy for US troops. Congress also approved US participation in UNOSOM II, including the "reconstruction of Somali society" and helping "people of Somalia create and maintain democratic institutions".¹⁰⁴

This was an important moment in how America's humanitarian intervention in Somalia unfolded. Clinton could have withdrawn troops regardless of the UNSG's request but it would have meant going against the normative expectations of American foreign policy behaviour in this humanitarian crisis. By withdrawing troops at this point Clinton would have also admitted there were limits to America's political transformation abilities and the power of American military might to deliver humanitarian outcomes. Clinton did not push back against this new role for US troops, instead he enthusiastically embraced it, with Congressional, State and Pentagon support, publicly revising the victory conditions for his transition exit strategy accordingly.

In late February and early March 1993, Clinton now based his plans to end the US mission in Somalia on America fulfilling its moral responsibility to not just make Somalia safe for humanitarian assistance, but to create the conditions for democracy and political transformation. This revision was consistent with the UNSG's request but it also aligned with Clinton's own view of US foreign policy action. On 26 February 1993 Clinton gave his first speech as president outlining his approach to foreign policy or, what he called "the imperative of American leadership in a changing world".¹⁰⁵ Although he did not formally ascribe to Bush's 'new world order'

102. United Nations Secretary-General, *Further Report of the Secretary-General Submitted in Pursuance of Paragraphs 18 and 19 of Resolution 794 (1992)*, para 101.

103. Walter Clarke, "Failed Visions and Uncertain Mandates in Somalia," in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter S. Clarke and Jeffrey Ira Herbst (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 3–19.

104. George J. Mitchell, "S.J.Res.45 - Resolution Authorizing the Use of United States Armed Forces in Somalia," *103rd Congress (1993-1994) Bill* (Passed Senate and House 1993).

105. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration*, ed. Gerhard

project, Clinton also saw the end of the Cold War presenting a unique opportunity for America to progress its democratic mission. Clinton continued the rhetoric of every US president before him arguing America had a responsibility to transform the world in its own image, but framed the responsibility as a duty to foster democracy alongside economic globalisation in the interests of national security:

[T]he world still calls on us to promote democracy. . . All you have to do to know that is to look at the problems in Somalia, to look at Bosnia, to look at the other trouble spots in the world. If we could make a garden of democracy and prosperity and free enterprise in every part of this globe, the world would be a safer and a better and a more prosperous place for the United States and for all of you to raise your children in.¹⁰⁶

According to Clinton, America's moral duty in places such as Somalia—where there were no functioning state institutions, global economic integration or democracy as experienced in western industrialised nations—was redemptive as much as it was self-interested.¹⁰⁷ He used language recalling frontier myths and American exceptionalism to talk about a present-day reformation program “flow[ing] out of our heritage. . . ingrained in the soul of Americans. . . For it is in our nature to reach out”.¹⁰⁸ Clinton of course acknowledged America needed to be selective about where it chose to pursue this moral duty, but he was clear humanitarian intervention in Somalia fit the bill because this was where US soldiers were “trying to create conditions of peaceful existence”.¹⁰⁹

Two weeks later, Clinton repeated these points in a speech before US naval officers, this time emphasising the centrality of military force to realising reform in Somalia and elsewhere while still using the reference to suffering of Somalis to frame intervention:¹¹⁰

We can be glad that your mission is not darkly framed by the Cold War's confrontation with a nuclear adversary. But many new duties and dangers are taking the place of that single stark threat, some of them yet unknown. . . . And

Peters and John T. Woolley, February 26, 1993.

106. Clinton, *Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration*.

107. See also William J. Clinton, *Remarks to the Crew of the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 12, 1993.

108. Clinton, *Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration*.

109. *Ibid.*

110. William J. Clinton, *Radio Address to the Armed Forces*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 12, 1993.

at times, you who serve our nation in uniform may be called upon to answer not only the sound of guns but also the call of distress, or a summons to keep the peace in a troubled part of the world, or even the cry of starving children... Your work is vitally important to your fellow Americans and to the President and to this very new and very hopeful world we are trying to nourish and to build.¹¹¹

The UNSC unanimously agreed on 26 March 1993 to establish UNOSOM II and the accompanying American Quick Reaction Force (QRF) with the mandate requested by the UNSG. Resolution 814 launched the largest, most expensive UN operation in history¹¹² authorised to use armed force to: disarm warring parties and ensure ceasefire compliance; guarantee the safety of UN, IGO and NGO personnel delivering relief supplies; provide security for repatriating refugees; enforce an arms embargo; re-establish a Somali police force; promote a political settlement to the civil war and national reconciliation; and help Somalis rehabilitate political institutions and develop their economy.¹¹³ Resolution 814 empowered the UNOSOM II Force Commander to “assume responsibility for the consolidation, expansion and maintenance of a secure environment *throughout* Somalia”.¹¹⁴ Tacked on to these Chapter VII objectives were even broader goals including de-mining, re-establishing national and regional administrative institutions, as well as investigating and prosecuting violations of international humanitarian law.

UNSC members recognised this broad mandate took the UN into uncharted, if worthy, territory.¹¹⁵ Djibouti’s Ambassador lauded what he labelled the “humanitarian intervention” in Somalia, while the Moroccan and Russian Ambassadors noted the US had already inextricably connected the UN’s humanitarian assistance and security work. Spain’s Ambassador argued it was “impossible” for the UN to limit itself to distributing humanitarian assistance, needing to focus on Somalia’s “reconciliation and national reconstruction”. Hungary’s Ambassador called the UN

111. Ibid.

112. Bush, “When Two Anarchies Meet: International Intervention in Somalia,” 6.

113. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 814*, March 26, 1993.

114. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 814*, (Emphasis added.) Makinda, *Seeking Peace from Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia*, 76.

115. United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand One Hundred and Eighty-Eighth Meeting S/PV.3188* (New York, USA: United Nations Security Council, March 26, 1993).

mission an effort of “grand design”. New Zealand argued the UN “must be prepared to see through its commitment in Somalia”, which depended upon reconstructing political institutions, establishing democratic processes and ensuring human rights protection. But it was Clinton’s new UNSC Ambassador Madeleine Albright who provided the most enthusiastic statement supporting using the UN’s Chapter VII enforcement powers for a state-building mission:

By adopting this draft resolution, we will embark on an unprecedented enterprise aimed at nothing less than the restoration of an entire country as a proud, functioning and viable member of the community of nations.¹¹⁶

Albright’s framing had clear implications for Clinton’s exit strategy: similar to northern Iraq, Clinton’s UN transition exit was no longer a strategy for completely withdrawing US soldiers from Somalia. A full exit would now occur only when Somalia reformed to the point America believed Somalis could assume independent responsibility for their country. But as with the difficulty in defining ‘security’, the point at which Somalia had transformed sufficiently to no longer require foreign troops was unclear.

6.6 Justifying exit in *Continue Hope*

The day after the UNSC created UNOSOM II, the main belligerents in Somalia concluded the Addis Ababa peace agreement. Clinton ended *Restore Hope* on 4 May 1993, formally withdrawing the majority of US troops from Somalia but leaving 4000 soldiers to begin Operation *Continue Hope*, America’s contribution to UNOSOM II. Of these 4000 troops, 1100 became part of a Quick Reaction Force. Although under the operational command of US Central Command, the Deputy Commander of UNOSOM II was a US Contingent Commander authorised to send America’s QRF into action when he deemed necessary.

116. United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand One Hundred and Eighty-Eighth Meeting*.

In this phase of America's humanitarian intervention, US soldiers were more combat-oriented but also charged with the wider moral responsibility of reforming Somali society. Although having failed to fully implement his UN transition exit strategy for *Restore Hope*, Clinton kept the same exit strategy for *Continue Hope* and justified it on the same basis: the US would succeed at its newly expanded mission and the UN would take over once this occurred. Trying to pursue political reform with military force, however—even when backed by civilian and UN efforts—did not deliver quick results; instead foreign personnel were killed, undermining success claims and exit strategy justifications. Just as in *Restore Hope*, Clinton struggled to identify clear thresholds for American victory and for UN forces reaching a point where they were capable of taking over from US troops. Implementing his transition exit strategy was thus time-consuming, complicated by battlefield realities, and unable to be precisely scheduled.

Despite significant numbers of soldiers remaining in Somalia, Clinton celebrated those US soldiers who were withdrawing as evidence of a successfully completed humanitarian intervention. Clinton welcomed troops home with the words “mission accomplished”, mentioning US success in Somalia a further eleven times in his speech on 5 May 1993. Clinton's victory declaration was framed as a vindication of America's decision to save lives and transform Somalia using military force:

To understand the magnitude of what our forces in Somalia accomplished, the world need only look back at Somalia's condition just six months ago. Hundreds of thousands of people were starving; armed anarchy ruled the land and the streets of every city and town. . . . If all of you who served had not gone, it is absolutely certain that tens of thousands would have died by now. You saved their lives. . . . You set the stage and made it possible for [UNOSOM II] to do its mission and for the Somalis to complete the work of rebuilding and creating a peaceful, self-sustaining, and democratic civil society.¹¹⁷

Clinton connected *Restore Hope's* disaster relief to *Continue Hope's* mission of transforming Somalia into a safe and prosperous nation. Contrasting Somalia with the Vietnam War, Clinton argued this humanitarian intervention had “proved” US military operations “need not be open-ended or ill-defined, that we can go abroad

117. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on Welcoming Military Personnel Returning From Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 5, 1993.

and accomplish distinct objectives, and then come home again when the mission is accomplished".¹¹⁸ Clinton's summation framed *Restore Hope* as a textbook example of the Wienberger-Powell doctrine, a point made by his chief negotiator to Somalia Robert Oakely: US soldiers were committed to a winnable mission with an exit strategy.¹¹⁹

Clinton argued reforming Somalia was part of America's "job to mobilise international action to create a better world". Just as Bush labelled *Restore Hope* "God's work",¹²⁰ Clinton assured Americans God was on their side, closing out his speech with the Biblical beatitude, "blessed are the peacemakers".¹²¹ US intervention in Somalia was divinely sanctioned; victory vindicated the moral rightness of pursuing intervention in the first place showing "the work of the just can prevail over the arms of the warlords".¹²²

At the same time, however, Clinton demonstrated a rhetorical contradiction between claiming wide success and simultaneously arguing soldiers' achievements were insufficient to justify withdrawing *all* American soldiers.¹²³ Although commending troops for "a job very, very well done", Clinton also said there was "still much to be done if enduring peace is to prevail", to reach the "day when Somalia will be reconstructed as a functioning civil society".¹²⁴

Meanwhile in Somalia, parties to the ceasefire agreement were becoming more belligerent. Militiamen apparently loyal to General Aidid attacked UN troops en route to inspect an arms cantonment site at Radio Mogadishu on 5 June 1993, killing 25 Pakistani soldiers and wounding 54 with a further 10 declared missing. Three US soldiers also suffered minor injuries. The following day the UNSC condemned the attacks and authorised Chapter VII measures against the individuals responsible

118. Clinton, *Remarks on Welcoming Military Personnel Returning From Somalia*.

119. Stevenson, "Hope Restored in Somalia?," 153.

120. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Somalia*.

121. Clinton, *Remarks on Welcoming Military Personnel Returning From Somalia*.

122. *Ibid.*

123. Boys, "A Lost Opportunity : The Flawed Implementation of Assertive Multilateralism (1991-1993)," 9.

124. Clinton, *Remarks on Welcoming Military Personnel Returning From Somalia*.

“including to secure the investigation of their actions and their arrest and detention for prosecution, trial and punishment”.¹²⁵

US forces attacked Aidid’s strongholds the following week. Clinton suspended any talk of exit in Somalia, or for that matter US objectives of providing security to prevent atrocities or reform Somali society. Instead he began using language of retribution, punishment and war-fighting calling for General Aidid’s forces to be “crippled” in “battle” and Aidid personally brought to account.¹²⁶ Clinton devoted his weekly radio address to explaining America’s moral responsibility to confront the “savage”¹²⁷ violence in Somalia and bring the perpetrators to justice. Clinton explained his decision to focus on hunting Aidid on the grounds his actions “cannot go unpunished”. America and the UN “refuse[d] to tolerate this ruthless disregard for the will of the international community”.¹²⁸

Clinton could have used the attacks to justify withdrawing US soldiers given the ceasefire was not holding and there was little peace to keep. But this would have admitted US could not achieve victory and was thus an unimaginable option. Instead, from June through September 1993, efforts to prepare US forces to leave Somalia were put on hold. US soldiers now pursued a criminal justice operation which, perhaps unsurprisingly, became a militarised manhunt complete with cash rewards for information on Aidid, US airstrikes¹²⁹ and an additional 400 US Army Rangers and Delta Force Soldiers deployed.¹³⁰ Although not abandoning the idea of *Continue Hope* as a humanitarian intervention, Clinton now framed the mission not as a disaster relief or civilian protection operation but as a just war to defeat an evil foe. Success in this humanitarian intervention began to sound more like the decisive victory of conventional war. Thus Clinton defended the increasingly kinetic, combat-orientated

125. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 837*, June 6, 1993.

126. William J. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 17, 1993.

127. William J. Clinton, *The President’s Radio Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 12, 1993.

128. Ibid.

129. Matthew Bryden, “Somalia: The Wages of Failure,” *Current History* 94, no. 591 (1995): 145–52.

130. Michael Maren, “Somalia: Whose Failure?,” *Current History* 95, no. 601 (1996): 203.

actions of US troops as “appropriate”, even if they resulted in “tensions” between US forces and Somalis.¹³¹ Violence increased, civilian casualties mounted and relations between foreign troops and Somalis soured, highlighting the difficulties inherent in pursuing a humanitarian intervention in a hostile environment.

US troops repeatedly attacked suspected Aidid strongholds, including a meeting of unarmed Somali Habr Gir clan elders on 12 July 1993, mistakenly thinking it to be one of Aidid’s military command centres. Four foreign journalists investigating the scene were beaten to death by a mob.¹³² Civilians and intervention forces continued to suffer casualties, among them four American soldiers who died in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on 8 August 1993.

Clinton did not see any contradiction between America’s humanitarian obligations of disaster relief and reform on the one hand and US soldiers using force in an increasingly partisan manner on the other.¹³³ Clinton defended the actions saying America was showing its commitment to “exert global leadership”,¹³⁴ connoting forceful action to drive social and political change in which any resistance to the US project would be crushed. He argued there was a confluence of interest between US efforts to “restore stability”¹³⁵ in Somalia and fulfilling America’s political reform responsibilities. In a series of press conferences in July and September 1993 Clinton stated he was “still trying to fulfil our original mission”¹³⁶ but urged Americans to “have patience with nation-building” in Somalia.¹³⁷ Clinton argued US troops needed time and a significant amount of violence “to work with the Somalis toward nation-building” because:

131. William J. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 15, 1993.

132. Bronwyn Bruton, “In the Quicksands of Somalia: Where Doing Less Helps More,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 6 (2009): 83.

133. Clarke, “Failed Visions and Uncertain Mandates in Somalia”; Bryden, “Somalia: The Wages of Failure.”

134. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference*.

135. William J. Clinton, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 1, 1993.

136. William J. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With Caribbean Leaders*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 30, 1993.

137. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Foreign Journalists*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 2, 1993.

you can't have these kinds of conflicts and expect them to be brutal and illegal on one side and then have a response [by US soldiers] and expect that there will be nothing controversial about it.¹³⁸

Clinton argued mission success required removing the evil forces standing in the way of America achieving its plan to “build the nation” of Somalia.¹³⁹ Only once the US achieved this success—something Under Secretary for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff confirmed “cannot be accomplished either quickly or bloodlessly”¹⁴⁰—could US troops be removed.

Despite Clinton exhorting Americans to be patient, *Continue Hope* was losing public support, not because of concern about mission costs, but because of scepticism the mission could and would succeed. Even though Clinton's Democratic Party controlled both Houses, Congress passed a resolution in September 1993 requiring that the president obtain Congressional approval for any US deployment to Somalia lasting beyond 15 November 1993.¹⁴¹

Following Congress' motion, Clinton resumed talking about his exit strategy for Somalia, admitting he had given “too little thought [to] how to end the humanitarian mission”.¹⁴² But Clinton did not come up with a new plan. Despite the manifestly changed battle conditions, he stuck with the existing UN transition exit. Again, Clinton could have withdrawn troops at this point but exit was not within the realm of Clinton's imagined possibilities at this time, because, as he put it: “we have no intention of abandoning all those people to the fate that gripped them before we got there”.¹⁴³ Clinton argued any achievements to date were so fragile that US withdrawal would mean a return to humanitarian crisis.

138. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With President Sam Nujoma of Namibia and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 16, 1993.

139. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi of Italy in Tokyo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 7, 1993.

140. Peter Tarnoff, *US Policy in Somalia*, July 29, 1993.

141. Harry Johnston and Ted Dagne, “Congress and the Somalia Crisis,” in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter S. Clarke and Jeffrey Ira Herbst (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 191–205.

142. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa of Japan in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 27, 1993.

143. *Ibid.*

Rather than success justifying exit, Clinton argued a longer troop commitment was required to sustain victory. American troops should not withdraw so long as there was a risk the humanitarian crisis might recur. Instead of withdrawing troops, therefore, Clinton dug in deeper, talking about the UN needing to solve the *political* crisis in Somalia to create the conditions required for American troops to leave. Throughout September 1993, Clinton variously described the UN's task in Somalia as developing a "political initiative",¹⁴⁴ "a political alternative",¹⁴⁵ and "a political strategy"¹⁴⁶ for "political transformation"¹⁴⁷ to turn over "political responsibility"¹⁴⁸ so America could leave:

...it is clear that the UN must have a political strategy which permits us to withdraw but not to withdraw on terms that revert the people to the condition they were living in beforehand. . .¹⁴⁹

Clinton argued American exit without sustained victory amounted to not just mission failure but a military operation lacking nobility, breaching the normative expectations for a humanitarian intervention. And yet Clinton still professed his commitment to setting an 'end date' for the Somali mission, unconnected to the achievement of specific objectives stating "in the end every peacekeeping mission or every humanitarian mission has to have a date certain when it's over and you have to in the end turn the affairs of the country back over to the people who live there".¹⁵⁰

By the end of September 1993 Clinton's exit strategy and his justification rhetoric were completely muddled. The imprecision reveals the rhetorical tension between simultaneously satisfying the various normative expectations of US humanitarian intervention. Clinton clung to the moral basis for American intervention because

144. William J. Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi of Italy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 17, 1993; William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Ciampi of Italy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 17, 1993.

145. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa of Japan in New York City*.

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*

148. *Ibid.*

149. *Ibid.*

150. William J. Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 28, 1993.

fulfilling these normative expectations vindicated the decision to use force in the first place, justified the costs already borne, was the ‘right thing to do’ and demonstrated faith in American military force’s ability to triumph. Clinton also knew the value of providing Americans with certainty about exit by setting an arbitrary deadline for *Continue Hope* but this risked withdrawing forces without them first succeeding and undermining the moral rightness of the mission. Making exit contingent on victory, however, meant meeting the mandate to provide security, which Clinton, Congress and the UN had interpreted as state-building, neutralising violent opposition and delivering political transformation. These were long-term objectives and, just as in northern Iraq, the UN was not in a position to take over the responsibilities Clinton had assumed for America. Battlefield losses and violent local opposition had already begun undermining the mission’s nobility and the American public’s confidence it would succeed. Exit now likely meant exit without moral victory and was thus not an option Clinton could readily contemplate.

6.7 Justifying exit after the Battle of Mogadishu

On 3–4 October 1993 US forces launched Operation *Gothic Serpent*, which became best known for the Battle of Mogadishu. This botched attempt by US soldiers to capture some of Aidid’s supporters ended with between 500 and 1500 Somalis killed. Eighteen US and two Malaysian soldiers also died in the operation; 79 US, seven Malaysian and two Pakistani troops were injured. Images of the bodies of dead US soldiers dragged through the streets by Somali militiamen were broadcast widely, angering and horrifying the US public and Congress. It was a spectacular failure.

Congress began debating resolutions to end US intervention in Somalia as soon as possible. Numerous Senators and Representatives took the floor and airways denouncing the Somali warlords’ actions and chastising Clinton for what they considered a failed strategy.¹⁵¹ Republican Senator John McCain, for example, insisted

151. Patman, *Strategic Shortfall: The Somalia Syndrome and the March to 9/11*, 55.

“it is time for American forces to come home”, arguing he did not “see the sense of our operations in Somalia”, which were “simply not practical”. While *Restore Hope* succeeded, McCain said *Continue Hope* had “failed”.¹⁵²

The Battle of Mogadishu is the most popular explanation of Clinton’s decision to end the humanitarian intervention in Somalia. While it was a factor, it is not the whole explanation.¹⁵³ As I pointed out earlier, public support for the intervention steadily declined from May 1993 and continued to fall sharply after 3 October 1993.¹⁵⁴ Clinton was not the first—or the last—American President to persist with a military operation long after public opinion turned against it. Clinton did not decide to withdraw troops because a handful died in a military operation; McCain’s point was not just that US intervention was “deadly” for Americans, but it was not capable of succeeding. Exit was necessary because American victory was no longer possible.

Clinton acknowledged the connection between exit and victory in his televised radio address two days after the Battle of Mogadishu. He announced a deadline for troop withdrawal of 31 March 1994, but rather than immediately or even progressively drawing down troops, Clinton proposed to initially *increase* the number of US soldiers on the ground. Clinton’s new exit strategy was now withdrawal with local transition—an “African solution to an African problem”¹⁵⁵—although the transition to local responsibility was secondary to sticking to a concrete end date.

Clinton did not justify his new exit strategy as a response to American casualties. Nor did Clinton admit his framing of American responsibility in Somalia had been misguided or overly broad, making the tasks difficult for US soldiers to successfully deliver. Instead, Clinton argued America had delivered on the disaster relief objectives

152. John McCain, “Somalia—It is Time to Come Home,” *Congressional Record 103rd Congress (1993–1994)*, Senate, October 4, 1993, 12904; Tony P. Hall, “H.Res.293 - Providing for Consideration of the Concurrent Resolution (H. Con. Res. 170) Directing the President Pursuant to Section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution to Remove United States Armed Forces from Somalia by January 31, 1994,” *103rd Congress (1993–1994)* Resolution (Agreed to in House 1993).

153. A finding supported by Douglas Delaney: Delaney, “Cutting, Running, or Otherwise?”

154. Baum Matthew, “How Public Opinion Constrains the Use of Force: The Case of Operation Restore Hope,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2004): 187–226.

155. William J. Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters at Yale University in New Haven*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 9, 1993.

Bush had initially set out for *Restore Hope* and thus American soldiers could leave Somalia confident in knowing they achieved their noble goals. Clinton reminded his constituents they had “saved close to one million lives” in Somalia and “starvation is gone”, “none of [which] would have happened without American leadership and American troops”.¹⁵⁶ The problem was, of course, that the disaster relief goals had been achieved long ago, so there was little reason to have kept American troops in Somalia unless they had bigger moral responsibilities to fulfil. Clinton squared this circle by arguing America’s existing success was fragile, which is why soldiers were remaining rather than withdrawing immediately:

And make no mistake about it, if we were to leave Somalia tomorrow, other nations would leave, too. Chaos would resume. The relief effort would stop, and starvation soon would return. . . . let us finish leaving Somalia on our own terms and without destroying all that two administrations have accomplished there. For, if we were to leave today, we know what would happen. Within months, Somali children again would be dying in the streets.¹⁵⁷

Clinton returned to the intractability of African problems to suggest Somalia’s descent into crisis was inevitable without the US there to prevent it from happening. The consequences of this hypothetical future would be catastrophic for Somalia and the whole world because it would undermine the overall moral rightness of the intervention and the credibility of America’s reformation mission:

Our own credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged. Our leadership in world affairs would be undermined at the very time when people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the post-Cold War world. And all around the world, aggressors, thugs, and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people. It would be open season on Americans.¹⁵⁸

Clinton was “anxious” the mission end “honourably”,¹⁵⁹ encapsulating this idea in the phrase ‘doing the job right’.¹⁶⁰

156. William J. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 7, 1993.

157. *Ibid.*

158. *Ibid.*

159. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on Signing the Hatch Act Reform Amendments of 1993*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 6, 1993.

160. See also William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 12, 1993.

I am committed to *doing this job* in Somalia, not only *quickly but effectively*... We started this mission for the right reasons, and we're going to *finish it in the right way*... So let us *finish the work* we set out to do. Let us demonstrate to the world, as generations of Americans have done before us, that when Americans take on a challenge, they *do the job right*... If we take these steps—if we take the time to *do the job right*—I am convinced we will have lived up to the responsibilities of American leadership in the world. And we will have proved that we are committed to addressing the new problems of a new era.¹⁶¹ (Emphasis added.)

Setting a precise withdrawal date for US troops regardless of the outcome, however, contradicted Clinton's idea the US would indeed be staying in Somalia to "do the job right". Clinton acknowledged this point—"Obviously... there is no guarantee that Somalia will rid itself of violence and suffering"—but this was acceptable because Somalia was being given "a reasonable chance".¹⁶²

Clinton's revised framing of *Continue Hope* was a rhetorical manoeuvre to redefine victory in three ways. First, he argued victory no longer required US soldiers to fulfil reform and conflict resolution objectives; Americans had done their part required by the initial *Resetore Hope* and it was now up to Somalis to achieve political transformation themselves, finding an "African solution to an African problem".¹⁶³ At times Clinton went so far as to attempt rewriting history, for example, claiming in a letter to Congress on 13 October 1993 "the US military mission is not now nor was it ever one of 'nation building'" in Somalia.¹⁶⁴ Second, Clinton argued the humanitarian intervention was successful because America had done its best as a responsible international citizen, acting with the "right motives".¹⁶⁵ It was enough to have supported the UN mission and attempted to reform Somalia. Any mistakes were in mission execution rather than in the nature of the mission itself:

[W]]hat happened was, after the Pakistani soldiers were killed and the UN

161. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on Somalia*.

162. Ibid.

163. William J. Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters on Departure for New Brunswick, New Jersey*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 8, 1993; William J. Clinton, *Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Breakfast*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 8, 1993; Clinton, *Exchange With Reporters at Yale University in New Haven*.

164. William J. Clinton, *Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 13, 1993.

165. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 14, 1993.

passed the resolution saying that someone ought to be held accountable, at the moment the United States was the only country capable of serving the police function. You can say, “Well, we should have simply refused to do that and said that was someone else’s problem”. Then the question would have become, “Well, what kind of a friend is the United States?”¹⁶⁶

Here Clinton admitted he struggled with the tension between fulfilling America’s moral responsibility and assured exit. Clinton claimed it was impressive American forces stayed in Somalia as long as they did; what some may criticise as mission creep was actually a commitment to achieving victory:

[T]o stay a year and three months, four months, on a mission that was originally touted as perhaps as short as two months is quite a long time and enough in terms of the contribution that we have made in this area.¹⁶⁷

Redefining victory this way allowed Clinton to maintain his rhetorical position that whenever US troops withdrew it would be as victors. There was no mission failure, only failures of the Somali people and the UN, and America trapped by its own good intentions.

The US ‘surge’ in Somalia occurred in late October 1993 after Congress authorised funding for continuing *Continue Hope*.¹⁶⁸ An additional 1700 Army troops and 104 armoured vehicles were deployed but their force posture changed: all offensive operations against Aidid were halted. Congress did not pass proposed amendments to end the mission in Somalia immediately but provisions were inserted in Title IX of the *Defense Appropriations Act* making future troop deployment to operations like Somalia contingent on Congressional approval because “the United Nations has not yet acquired the expertise or infrastructure to enable it to effectively manage ‘peace enforcement’ operations”.¹⁶⁹ The *Defense Appropriations Act* also required the president to obtain Congressional authorisation before placing American troops under foreign command outside NATO. Clinton strongly opposed the Act’s power-limiting

166. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Tansu Ciller of Turkey*; Clinton, *The President’s News Conference*, See also.

167. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Tansu Ciller of Turkey*.

168. John P. Murtha, “H.R.3116 - Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1994. Public Law 103-139,” *103rd Congress (1993-1994)*, November 11, 1993, See Senate Amendment 1042.

169. Ibid.

amendments but did not veto it.¹⁷⁰

In December 1993, the US Army escorted General Aidid out of Mogadishu to Ethiopia to attend a peace conference on the future of Somalia. The peace process became the focus of Clinton's narrative about Somalia but he took no responsibility for its success instead reminding Americans their soldiers could not "stay forever" in Somalia.¹⁷¹ Clinton did not waver in his scheduled March 1994 exit date. He defended potentially withdrawing before the political conflict in Somalia was resolved, saying it was the Somali people and not the flawed American mission that led to premature exit.

Five-thousand-three-hundred *Continue Hope* troops withdrew from Somalia by 25 March 1994, six days earlier than scheduled. One thousand American soldiers remained past the 31 March 1994 deadline as part of UNOSOM II. Despite Clinton's eagerness to end America's humanitarian intervention on his own terms, he remained philosophically and practically committed to the wider UN mission. All remaining American soldiers left Somalia on 15 September 1994.

Both these exit dates passed without Clinton commenting publicly about them. However, in foreign policy statements, Clinton continued referring to the normative expectations that influenced the Somalia humanitarian intervention: defeating evil forces, reforming failed states and preventing atrocities. Clinton also released Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25) outlining America's policy for reforming UN-initiated peace operations. PDD-25 explicitly made commitment to victory and an exit strategy required justifications for America participating in humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping operations. Among "factors to be considered" in deploying force was ensuring "the role of US forces is tied to clear objectives and an end point for US participation" with "the clear intention of decisively achieving these objectives".¹⁷² PDD-25 thus turned Bush and Clinton's exit strategy discourse

170. William J. Clinton, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Use of United States Armed Forces in International Operations*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 18, 1993.

171. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Larry King*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, January 20, 1994.

172. *Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-25*, May 3, 1994.

in Somalia into explicit government policy for future humanitarian interventions.¹⁷³ Using language of decisive victory may appear to increase the certainty of an operation but, as I argued in Section 2.3, success in humanitarian interventions is more complicated than trouncing an enemy.

US troops leaving Somalia coincided with UNSC members similarly deciding to wrap up UNOSOM II. Throughout 1994 the Council passed a series of resolutions incrementally increasing the length of UNOSOM II's mission amidst expressions of frustration regarding its lack of progress. The Clinton Administration voted in favour of all of these resolutions except Resolution 946 from which it abstained on the grounds it did not set a concrete end date.¹⁷⁴ On 4 November 1994 the UNSC did set an end date for UNOSOM II of 31 May 1995.¹⁷⁵ Governments, including the Clinton Administration, expressed irritation at what they considered Somalis' unwillingness to be helped, undermining the mission and forcing its early conclusion. The United Kingdom's Ambassador, for example, summarised UNOSOM II as:

a sad story of noble aims subverted and undermined by a fundamental lack of cooperation from those the United Nations went to help. Of course mistakes have been made. But I fear that the biggest and most tragic mistake of all has been the failure of Somali leaders to grasp the opportunity the United Nations offered them to get out of the appalling impasse into which they had manoeuvred themselves.¹⁷⁶

Part of Clinton's justification for American troop withdrawal—the incomprehensible level of local resistance to receiving help made it no longer worth the investment—became the justification for ending the entire UNOSOM II mission. UNSC members supported Clinton's portrayal of the intervention's ultimate failure as the failure of the Somali people to support the nation-building project presented to them.¹⁷⁷ The

173. Boys, "A Lost Opportunity : The Flawed Implementation of Assertive Multilateralism (1991-1993)," 8; Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, "Somalia and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1996): 2.

174. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 946*, September 30, 1994; United Nations Security Council, *3432nd Meeting S/PV.3432* (United Nations Security Council, September 30, 1994), 4.

175. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 954*, November 4, 1994.

176. United Nations Security Council, *3447th Meeting S/PV.3447* (New York, USA: United Nations Security Council, November 4, 1994), 15.

177. United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Somalia Submitted in Pursuance of Paragraph 13 of Security Resolution 954 (1994)* S/1995/231 (United Nations Security Council, March 28, 1995), 62.

US and the vast majority of UNSC members publicly persisted with arguing they had discharged their moral responsibility in Somalia even if the outcome was not as intended. Only China admitted the UNSC overreached in applying Chapter VII measures to a humanitarian crisis and expanding into a nation-building endeavour.

All UNOSOM II forces departed Somalia by 25 March 1995. To help withdraw the remaining UN troops from Somalia, 1800 US troops were redeployed on 27 February 1995 as part of Operation *Quick Draw*. This deployment received scant comment from Clinton who only mentioned it in a letter to Congress in which he described it as part of America's international responsibility and "long-standing commitment to UN humanitarian efforts in Somalia".¹⁷⁸ Clinton did, however, say this latest deployment would be short but necessary. In keeping with his narrative that America needed to save Somalia from itself, Clinton argued America needed to stop heavy weapons and other equipment used by foreign troops from falling into the hands of Somali militia. Despite Somalis' unwillingness to be helped, America would still discharge the moral responsibility it assumed in 1992 to prevent "further harm" to the Somali people.¹⁷⁹

6.8 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a quote providing perhaps one of the best summations of the problems Bush and Clinton faced in creating, justifying and implementing a viable exit strategy for Somalia. Among other things, Clinton's comment shows mission creep does not provide a full explanation of the failures of America's humanitarian intervention in Somalia. Although significant, the Battle of Mogadishu does not provide a complete explanation for changing exit strategies throughout all phases of the intervention, and the persistent rhetorical and practical difficulties two presidents had implementing them.

178. William J. Clinton, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on Deployment of United States Troops to Somalia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 1, 1995.

179. *Ibid.*

America started its Somalia intervention while already in the middle of another humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq and experiences in *Provide Comfort I* and *II* influenced Bush and Clinton's approach to *Restore Hope* and *Continue Hope*. First, conviction in the success of the northern Iraq intervention contributed to Bush believing Somalia was 'doable'; the ability to successfully impose US will through military force was almost unquestioned domestically and internationally. Second, the UN transition exit strategy in Somalia was almost exactly like that attempted in *Provide Comfort*. Third, apparent success with the reform and political transformation aspects of *Provide Comfort*, provided succour for believing similar gains could be achieved elsewhere. Although occurring in different parts of the world and in the context of different humanitarian crises, American interventions in Iraq and Somalia were grounded in similar normative expectations of US foreign policy behaviour. Bush and Clinton's decisions in Somalia, including those about when and how to withdraw troops, were constrained as much by internalised ideas of American responsibility and the importance of succeeding in this mission as they were by the battlefield conditions.

Presidential discourse in the Somalia humanitarian intervention reveals three new insights about the challenges American presidents face in crafting and justifying exit strategies. First, success discourse—speaking about success as much as delivering 'concrete' indicators of success—is integral to justifying exit, in part because victory promises imminent exit. Indeed, America's experiences in Somalia and the difficulties in delivering 'victory' contributed to Clinton introducing victory criteria into US exit strategy doctrine and encouraging the UN to do the same.

Second, exit strategies play an important role in the president's overall discourse about a humanitarian intervention. Outlining an exit strategy demonstrates an intervention is worth pursuing because there is a plan to remove troops; it address concerns about quagmires and a Vietnam War redux. Outlining an exit strategy also demonstrates the president's belief victory is possible; it acts as a promise American troops will succeed. Making the rhetorical case for success is important

because it vindicates the moral rightness of and therefore public support for the intervention,¹⁸⁰ and it makes exit justifiable under conditions of victory. This helps explain why Clinton found it so difficult to talk about American failures in Somalia when discussing exit strategies after the Battle of Mogadishu; he found it preferable to re-frame what constituted success, even if it meant contradicting his previous statements.

Countenancing exit after defeat or failure violates American collective narrative frameworks of exceptionalism, the nobility of US soldiers, and the importance of winning, especially in humanitarian interventions because traditional strategic interests are not dominant professed motivations for military action. At the same time, however, normative ideas of the ‘right thing to do’ affect whether or not victory can be achieved, what the costs will be and how long it will take, all of which affect the viability of an exit strategy. All these feedback loops make it very difficult to simultaneously fulfil all normative expectations in a humanitarian intervention. Ironically, perhaps, in their efforts to avoid the Vietnam Syndrome, Bush and Clinton created the ‘Somalia Syndrome’, which would affect presidential exit strategy justifications in subsequent humanitarian interventions.

Third, Somalia reinforces the experience in northern Iraq that a UN transition exit strategy for humanitarian intervention is difficult to realise because it relies on the UN being practically and politically ready to take over from the US.¹⁸¹ The UN has a different mandate and strategic objectives to the US regarding humanitarian intervention so may not continue intervention in the way the American president hopes. It is hard to simultaneously distance America from an intervention by handing it over, and control how it progresses. In addition, the nature of the moral responsibilities the president assumes in a humanitarian intervention makes it difficult to convincingly claim a UN handover absolves America from fulfilling these responsibilities itself; thus mission success or failure will reflect on America even after it has putatively relinquished these responsibilities to the UN.

180. Klarevas, “The Polls Trends: The United States Peace Operation in Somalia.”

181. Bolton, “Wrong Turn in Somalia,” 66.

Somalia had other impacts on the way Clinton and later President Barack Obama approached exit strategies in subsequent humanitarian interventions. After Somalia, Clinton committed to sticking for as long as possible with an operational disengagement exit strategy, which meant limiting from the outset America's operational approach to intervention. Given the shortcomings of the UN transition exit strategy in Somalia and Iraq, transferring responsibility for US humanitarian intervention to a regional organisation, over which the US can exercise more influence, rather than the UN became a standard approach for exit strategies from humanitarian interventions.¹⁸² Thus in the next humanitarian intervention I examine in this thesis—Kosovo—Clinton relied almost exclusively on an aerial bombing campaign and his exit strategy combined operational disengagement with a transition to EU authorities. Obama would similarly seek to hand over his Libyan intervention to NATO.

182. Recchia, "Pragmatism over Principle."

CHAPTER 7

Striking the Noble Anvil in Kosovo (1999–)

In recent years, the military had adopted a politically potent term for assignments they felt were too broad: ‘mission creep’. This was a powerful pejorative, conjuring up images of quagmire. But it was never clearly defined, only invoked, and always in a negative sense, used only to kill someone else’s proposal.

Richard Holbrooke
Dayton Accords chief negotiator

7.1 Introduction

If America’s humanitarian intervention in Somalia is best known for its failures, America’s intervention in Kosovo is known for its successes. Much of the scholarly and popular preoccupation with Kosovo focuses on the reasons for participating in the Kosovo intervention and its conduct, particularly the challenges the intervention posed to international sovereignty norms and what it means to fight a just war.¹ Scholars

1. David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009); Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur, eds., “Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention: Selective Indignation, Collective Action and International Citizenship” (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2000).

generally view Kosovo as a turning point in the historical development and practise of humanitarian intervention, directly contributing to the introduction of responsibility to protect (R2P) principles.² In addition to questions of legitimacy, there is a small but growing literature on the implications the US/NATO intervention had for the long-term political situation in Kosovo.³ A small number of scholars have also looked at the public discourse surrounding the intervention but most contributions examine media coverage of intervention rather than its public justifications.⁴

Although generally considered a ‘successful’ intervention, there are very few studies discussing the development and execution of America’s (or for that matter NATO’s) exit strategy in Kosovo, none particularly detailed.⁵ Contributions broaching the question of exit generally argue neither Clinton nor his NATO counterparts, having challenged Serbian President Milosevic to call their diplomatic bluff, correctly anticipated exactly how the Kosovo intervention would pan out. In this chapter I look beyond the ‘muddling through’ explanation for Clinton’s approach to his exit strategy in Kosovo. I argue normative expectations of how America should respond to a mass atrocity—particularly one occurring in the same geographic region Clinton had authorised US forces to intervene four years earlier—constrained Clinton’s exit decision-making. I show Clinton’s initial promise of a simple operational disengagement exit was complicated by his concerns America’s moral responsibilities in the intervention were unfulfilled. Thus Clinton struggled to explain to the American people when the mission had succeeded sufficiently to justify troops returning home.

America’s Kosovo intervention reveals the practical and rhetorical tension between

2. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*; Robert C. DiPrizio, *Armed Humanitarians: U.S. Interventions from Northern Iraq to Kosovo* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2002); Alex J. Bellamy, “Kosovo and the Advent of Sovereignty as Responsibility,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 3, no. 2 (2009): 163–84.

3. Mark Webber, “The Kosovo War: A Recapitulation,” *International Affairs* 85, no. 3 (2009): 447–59; Julie A. Mertus, “Operation Allied Force: Handmaiden of Independent Kosovo,” *International Affairs* 85, no. 3 (2009): 461–76.

4. See, for example Danielle S. Sremac, *War of Words: Washington Tackles the Yugoslav Conflict* (Westport: Praeger, 1999); Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman, eds., *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis* (Pluto Press, 2000); Chiara DeFranco, *Media Power and the Transformation of War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

5. A general overview of the options for exit can be found in Michael Codner, “Bringing an End to an Old-Fashioned War?,” *RUSI Journal*, 1999, 9–14; See also Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

achieving sustainable victory in a humanitarian intervention and assuring the American people troops will withdraw. Although Clinton eventually opted for a similar transition exit strategy pursued in the preceding Iraq and Somalia interventions, in Kosovo, Clinton initially tried a different type of transition exit to NATO rather than the UN. In addition, unlike Somalia, Clinton expressly refused to provide a timetable for troop withdrawal instead outlining general goals for American troops to achieve. Although this potentially allowed more scope for the president to define victory, the broad nature of the goals also made it difficult to demonstrate sufficient victory to justify exit.

As in previous chapters, I begin this chapter with the rhetorical context for the intervention and then divide my analysis into three phases of the intervention itself. First pre-intervention, where Clinton framed Kosovo's humanitarian crisis as a moral concern to which America had a responsibility to respond with military action. Even though US troops were yet to be deployed, Clinton presented an exit strategy for any hypothetical intervention contingent on America succeeding in its moral quest to stop the atrocity. The intensity of America's moral obligation, however, meant the idea America would *not* intervene in Kosovo was beyond the realm of imagined possibilities. In the second phase, Clinton commenced Operation *Noble Anvil*, part of NATO's Operation *Allied Force*, arguing America's intervention was contingent on there being an implementable exit strategy for US forces. For Clinton this meant an aerial campaign and no ground forces because this allowed for an operational disengagement exit strategy, but also the possibility of transitioning the operation to NATO. Implementing the exit became difficult, however, as Clinton also argued US forces could only justifiably exit when they stopped the atrocities, protected the Kosovo Albanians and defeated those who threatened to commit human rights violations; wide moral responsibilities that arguably neither lent themselves to short, aerial engagements nor could be offloaded to other NATO countries to fulfil without US assistance.

I explore how the contradictions between these exit strategy expectations ultimately

compromised Clinton's ability to fully implement his exit strategy and meant although Clinton ended *Allied Force*, he immediately replaced it with Operation *Joint Guardian*. In this third phase Clinton justified his failure to implement his initial exit strategy on the basis American success to date was fragile and did not constitute sufficient victory to justify exit. Instead Clinton argued for deeper involvement, deploying ground forces to Kosovo to guarantee peace and prevent the resurgence of ethnic violence in accordance with America's moral duty and to ensure US victory was sustainable.

In examining Clinton's exit strategy dynamics in this chapter, I demonstrate the challenges normative expectations of American military intervention poses to efforts to adhere to an exit strategy primarily because moral responsibilities make operational limits hard to sustain. Clinton's attempt to implement a transition exit strategy, although configured differently to previous efforts in Iraq and Somalia, still did not enable US troops to withdraw easily or completely. Despite these problems with exit, however, Clinton and later President Obama considered Kosovo a sound model for American humanitarian interventions and military responses to mass atrocities.

7.2 The rhetorical context

The war in Kosovo began in March 1998 between the newly-established Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighting for an independent Kosovo Albanian territory, and the Serbian government led by President Slobodan Milosevic, that had progressively reduced the Albanian provinces' autonomy since 1990.⁶ The conflict was the latest in the conflagrations accompanying the disintegration of Yugoslavia following the death of President Tito and the end of the Cold War. In 1995 America conducted a humanitarian intervention in Bosnia, to arrest a humanitarian crisis arising from three years of widespread human rights abuses and genocidal violence occurring

6. For more detail on the historical antecedents of the conflict see: R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans Since the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2002).

under the direction of President Milosevic. The humanitarian intervention succeeded in concluding the Dayton Accords peace agreement. At the time of the Kosovo intervention American forces were stationed in Bosnia as part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) as well as in Macedonia as part of United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

In the first year of fighting in Kosovo more than 2000 people were killed and 400,000 civilians were displaced with widespread reports of genocidal violence like that witnessed in wars across Bosnia-Herzegovina. These so-called ‘ethnic cleansing’ crimes were predominantly perpetrated against the Kosovar Albanians by Serbian armed forces.⁷ On 13 October 1998, NATO’s peak decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) authorised activation orders for US-led airstrikes, as well as Russia’s diplomatic negotiations between Serbian authorities and Kosovo insurgents. These combined diplomatic and deterrence efforts culminated in the Rambouillet Peace Accord. During the negotiations for the peace agreement, Clinton proposed contributing 4000 American personnel as peacekeepers, enforcing the autonomy provisions of the accord. The KLA signed the agreement on 18 March 1999 but the Serbs and Russians rejected it. Violence and war crimes continued unabated.

Back home, Clinton survived an impeachment attempt in December 1998 following revelations he lied about his extra-marital affair with White House intern Monica Lewinski. Now in his second and final term of office, Clinton was eager to ensure his presidency was not defined by the Lewinski scandal, the Somalia intervention shortcomings, inadequate responses to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, or the possibility the Yugoslavian situation would spread and destabilise other parts of central Europe.

7. Greg Campbell, *The Road to Kosovo: A Balkan Diary* (Boulder: Basic Books, 1999), The report of the International Criminal Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia also provides a detailed narrative and results of the investigation of war crimes committed during the Kosovo war and the associated conflicts. Matthew McAllester, *Beyond the Mountains of the Damned: The War Inside Kosovo* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Gilles Peress Fred Abrahams Eric Stover, *A Village Destroyed, May 14, 1999: War Crimes in Kosovo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Ken Booth, ed., *The Kosovo Tragedy: The Human Rights Dimensions*, International Journal of Human Rights, 4 vols., 2–3 (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

Although he enjoyed some success with his military intervention to restore President Aristide to office in Haiti in 1994, and with the intervention in Bosnia in 1995, Clinton could not shake the criticism he lacked a coherent or effective foreign policy. At the same time, the Republican Party enjoyed majorities in both houses of Congress for the first time since the 1950s, driving impeachment proceedings and displaying increasing hostility towards Clinton's domestic and foreign policy agendas.⁸

7.3 Talking about exit before intervention

Even before a single US soldier was engaged in America's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, Clinton was already talking about his exit strategy. In keeping with the policy commitments he made after Somalia, including those contained in Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25), Clinton doubled down on making an implementable exit strategy a prerequisite for commencing humanitarian intervention. This commitment to meeting domestic expectations for an assured exit for American troops strongly influenced the operational choices Clinton saw as available to him for the mooted intervention in Kosovo. Clinton decided on a dual operational disengagement and NATO transition exit strategy as his exit plan and this choice lent itself to an exclusively aerial operation. This operational approach would enable the US to immediately withdraw its forces as soon as the mission succeeded. Clinton argued an operational disengagement exit would address domestic concerns about Kosovo repeating the errors of Somalia by becoming a quagmire or unduly risking the lives of US troops like Somalia.

While an aerial campaign was consistent with exit strategy expectations, relying exclusively on strategic bombing risked not satisfying the moral obligations Clinton argued were incumbent upon the US in the context of the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. Clinton agreed America should meet expectations to stop human rights

8. Julie Kim, *Kosovo and the 106th Congress*, Report for Congress (Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 2001).

atrocities and protect Kosovo Albanians by defeating their evil Serbian oppressors. But Clinton also argued America should spearhead wider political reform as a bulwark against a return to violence in the future. In this section I show the problem was fulfilling expectations regarding the level of success necessary to fully discharge America's moral responsibilities. These expectations conflicted with the expectation for quick troop withdrawal, thus complicating Clinton's exit strategy.

From the outset Clinton embraced the expectation America should intervene in this new war in the Balkans because it had a moral responsibility to do so. Unlike the previous interventions in Iraq and Somalia that I cover in this thesis, Clinton did not start by framing American responsibility in narrow terms limited to providing disaster relief or halting an ongoing atrocity. Instead, Clinton began by arguing America had a responsibility to *prevent* Serbian forces committing atrocities against the Kosovar Albanians and was clear any exit strategy was contingent on American troops successfully preventing atrocities.

Clinton repeatedly singled out Milosevic as an evil force, "standing in the way of peace",⁹ and labelled Milosevic's decision to engage Serbian forces in a war as "crazy".¹⁰ Clinton also implored the Serbian leader not to persist in "intransigence and aggression",¹¹ "choose aggression over peace"¹² or "continue aggression with impunity".¹³ Despite the violence occurring in the context of a civil war, Clinton argued there was "no moral equivalence" between the Serbian forces and Kosovar Albanians in this armed conflict.¹⁴ America, therefore, needed to be on the side of the oppressed Kosovar Albanians and defeat the evil Serb leader.

Clinton also used the language of atrocity to highlight Milosevic's abject evilness

9. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 19, 1999.

10. William J. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 11, 1999.

11. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Prior to Discussions With NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 15, 1999.

12. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the Situation in Kosovo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 22, 1999.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

and explain why America's moral responsibility to halt the violence was rightly activated. Clinton talked about "terrible killings in one village in Kosovo that were precipitated [sic] by the Serbs";¹⁵ "bloodshed",¹⁶ "massacres",¹⁷ "killing",¹⁸ Milosevic's "repression"¹⁹ and "unquestioned record of atrocity",²⁰ and "innocent men, women, and children taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt, sprayed with gunfire, not because of anything they had done but because of who they were".²¹ Clinton argued America was able to stop more atrocities from occurring and therefore it had a responsibility to do so:

Our firmness is the only thing standing between [Kosovar civilians] and countless more villages like Račak, full of people without protection... Make no mistake, if we and our allies do not have the will to act, there will be more massacres.²²

At this stage, Clinton's view was at odds with his NATO counterparts. NATO's President Javier Solana repeatedly framed the crisis in Kosovo as a "humanitarian catastrophe"²³ but he refused to hold Serbian leaders exclusively responsible for the violence, saying "both the Belgrade authorities and the Kosovo armed elements are not respecting the ceasefire".²⁴ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) took a similar position to NATO. At its meeting of 19 January 1999, the UNSC issued a statement condemning Serbian government forces for the massacre of at least 45 Kosovo Albanian civilians found in a mass grave in the village of Račak. The

15. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema of Italy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, Washington D.C., March 5, 1999.

16. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

17. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*; William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the Legislative Convention of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 23, 1999.

18. William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With President Jacques Chirac of France*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 19, 1999.

19. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on United States Foreign Policy in San Francisco*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 26, 1999; Clinton, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema of Italy*.

20. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. NATO, "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on Kosovo. NATO Press Release (99)12 - 30 Jan. 1999," January 30, 1999, accessed April 16, 2017; Javier Solana, "Statement by the NATO Secretary-General Dr Javier Solana on behalf of the North Atlantic Council: NATO Press Release (99)020," February 19, 1999; Javier Solana, "NATO: Its 50th Anniversary - The Washington Summit - The Next Century," January 25, 1999.

24. Javier Solana, "NATO's Agenda towards the Washington Summit," January 11, 1999.

Council had adopted three resolutions the previous year imposing an arms embargo on Yugoslavia, calling for a ceasefire in the conflict, and for UN-led verification missions in Kosovo.²⁵ The UNSC did not consider the incident worthy of a foreign military response because it was no threat to international peace and security. In another meeting held 10 days later the UNSC issued a statement expressing its “deep concern at the escalating violence in Kosovo”,²⁶ noting the attacks on civilians. Although acknowledging the “risk of a further deterioration in the humanitarian situation if steps are not taken by the parties to reduce tensions”, again the Council did not identify Milosevic’s culpability or argue the situation constituted a threat to international peace and security sufficient to justify foreign military intervention.²⁷

The tempered international response to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo did not moderate Clinton’s rhetoric. As President Bush did in the Iraq and Somalia interventions, Clinton drew an analogy between the Kosovo War and WWII, activating the political myth of WWII as a just war America was right to fight:

We have learned that if we do not contain conflict in Europe, it will spread, and we will pay a far higher price to deal with it down the road.²⁸

Clinton would return to this comparison to WWII throughout the Kosovo intervention. It was also an image that later underpinned Clinton’s rhetoric about the mission success parameters justifying troop withdrawal.

Clinton’s argument for fulfilling American moral responsibilities was not without limits, however; Clinton recognised the other expectations for any military response to Kosovo required the assurance of troop withdrawal before US troops were deployed:

NATO’s mission must be well-defined, with a clear and realistic strategy to ~~allow us to bring our forces home~~ when their work is done.²⁹

25. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1203: S/RES/1203*, October 24, 1998; United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1160: S/RES/1160*, March 31, 1998; United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1199: S/RES/1199*, September 23, 1998.

26. United Nations Security Council, *Minutes of the 3974th Meeting: S/PV.3974*, technical report (UN Security Council, January 29, 1999).

27. Ibid.

28. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema of Italy*.

29. William J. Clinton, *The President’s Radio Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 13, 1999.

Clinton never resolved this tension between the expectations military intervention would stop the atrocities and the expectation US troops needed a guaranteed exit, leading to contradictory rhetoric. On the one hand, Clinton did not accept they were competing expectations saying “the exit strategy should be defined by the missions; You will be able to see that we have an exit strategy if we define the missions properly”.³⁰ At other times, Clinton admitted the contradiction between planning a viable, rapid exit strategy on the one hand, and responding in a timely and effective way to a mass atrocity on the other:

So I can just tell you that I think that we have tried to limit our involvement, we have tried to limit our mission, and we will conclude it as quickly as we can. I think that in all these cases, you have to ask yourself, what will be the cost and the duration of involvement and the consequences if we do not move. And I have asked myself that question as well.³¹

To the extent it was contradictory, it was unclear which expectations Clinton believed should take primacy, or how he proposed to balance the two, instead allowing the contradiction to sit, unresolved, in his rhetoric:

[W]e must have a NATO strategy that includes a clear plan for bringing our forces home. If, and only if, these conditions are met, I strongly believe United States forces should contribute to securing the peace in Kosovo. We have a strong stake in bringing peace there, just as we have a strong stake in peace in Central America. If we don't end the conflict now, it will spread; and when it does, we will not be able to avoid participating in stopping it; and when we do, it will come at far greater risk and far greater cost.³²

Although statements like these are confusingly imprecise, when coupled with Clinton's repeated statements ruling out deploying ground forces in Kosovo, I argue they show a president trying to discursively reconcile competing expectations to ‘do something’ to stop an atrocity while avoiding a Vietnam War-style quagmire or a situation like Somalia where American troops cannot return home victorious.

Clinton acknowledged planning for a rapid exit from a humanitarian intervention is particularly hard when exit is contingent on mission success. Clinton argued it

30. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

31. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

32. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

would be “wrong” to “make an open-ended commitment” of US troops to Kosovo but he also did not want to make a mistake about signalling when exit would occur in case he was unable to meet his own timetable:

... I don't want to get in the position in Kosovo that I was in in Bosnia, where the Pentagon came to me with a very honest estimate of when they thought we could finish. And we turned out to be wrong about that. We were not able to stabilise the situation as quickly as we thought we could.³³

Clinton's concern about the desire for victory limiting exit options was based on his experiences in Bosnia but again, his moral responsibility-victory-exit nexus message was contradictory. Clinton maintained the Bosnian intervention successfully stopped atrocities but also that Kosovo was essentially a repeat of the Bosnian crisis. Hence intervention was required to:

avoid the level of atrocity and death that we saw in Bosnia. We didn't want to go down that road again. We wanted to dramatically shorten the timetable from aggression and the loss of innocent life and upheaval to action.³⁴

My intention would be to do whatever is possible, first of all, to weaken [Milosevic's] ability to massacre them, to have another Bosnia.³⁵

While Clinton argued Bosnia was a success because troops had been withdrawn rapidly after the intervention,³⁶ he also said success in Kosovo meant reinforcing the wins in Bosnia and ensuring there would not be yet another outbreak of violence: “[P]art of my responsibility is to try to leave to my successors and to our country in the 21st century an environment in Europe that is stable, humane and secure.”³⁷ These longer-term goals had clearly not been secured by the humanitarian intervention in Bosnia; indeed it was why US troops remained involved in Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and then IFOR. Clinton acknowledged sustainable mission success required willingness to sacrifice a rapid, timetabled exit strategy, or as Clinton explained:

So we decided in Kosovo the right thing to do was to say what the benchmarks of the mission would be... but we wouldn't mislead [Congress] about knowing in advance exactly how long it would take.³⁸

Clinton argued the hypothetical future in which the US did not militarily intervene in Kosovo soon was nothing short of catastrophic and much more dangerous than the risks Americans would not return home quickly:

33. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

34. Clinton, *Remarks Prior to Discussions With NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and an Exchange With Reporters*.

35. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

36. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

37. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

38. Clinton, *Closing Remarks at the Central America Summit in Antigua and an Exchange*.

Make no mistake, if we and our allies do not have the will to act, there will be more massacres. In dealing with aggressors in the Balkans, hesitation is a license to kill.³⁹

If we don't act, the war will spread. If it spreads, we will not be able to contain it without far greater risk and cost. . . . I'm convinced we'll be dragged into this thing under worse circumstances, at greater cost if we don't act.⁴⁰

This is a humanitarian crisis, but it is much more. This is a conflict with no natural boundaries. It threatens our national interests. If it continues, it will push refugees across borders and draw in neighbouring countries. It will undermine the credibility of NATO, on which stability in Europe and our own credibility depend. It will likely reignite the historical animosities, including those that can embrace Albania, Macedonia, Greece, even Turkey. These divisions still have the potential to make the next century a truly violent one for that part of the world that straddles Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.⁴¹

Clinton's concept of 'cost', however, was not limited to the risk to American lives, but also the moral cost of standing by while people were killed. Thus Clinton argued:

I would hate to think that we'd have to see a lot of other little children die before we could do what seems to be, to me, clearly the right thing to do to prevent it.⁴²

I do not believe that we ought to have to have thousands more people slaughtered and buried in open soccer fields before we do something. I think that would be unfortunate if we had said we have to have a lot more victims before we can stop what we know is about to happen.⁴³

. . . whenever we can stop a humanitarian disaster at an acceptable price, we ought to do it. . . we ought to do what we can to prevent further atrocities. . . I think that would be unfortunate if we had said we have to have a lot more victims before we can stop what we know is about to happen.⁴⁴

What we see in this pre-intervention phase of the Kosovo intervention, therefore, is a president expressing conflicting rhetoric about exit strategy expectations for humanitarian intervention, the product of trying to resolve irreconcilable tensions between intervention expectations. On the one hand, Clinton made exit a pre-requisite for deploying troops; on the other hand, Clinton was also committed to intervening militarily to halt mass atrocities because this was the right foreign policy response. From the very early stages of the Kosovo intervention, therefore, expectations for an

39. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

implementable exit strategy existed in rhetorical tension with normative expectations of American responsibility to defeat evil and stop human rights atrocities, and the expectation America should not exit without having succeeded in its mission.

Clinton's domestic audience shared Clinton's concern that any slated humanitarian intervention in Kosovo needed the assurance of troop withdrawal but there was also the moral responsibility to 'do something' to halt the atrocities. Republican congressional members introduced a bill to both houses on 8 March 1999 to block funding for any future humanitarian intervention that did not first receive congressional approval. The concurrent resolution passed the House of Representatives but not the Senate and required Clinton to provide Congress with details of America's "military exit strategy that would control the withdrawal of United States Armed Forces personnel from Kosovo" as well as a "timeframe" for withdrawal, *before* the president deployed troops.⁴⁵ Congressional debate provided a platform for members to argue publicly about what Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott (R-Miss) said were "significant reservations"⁴⁶ about the president authorising troop deployment without a clear exit strategy for American troops. Republican House Whip Tom DeLay used the Vietnam War *quagmire* trope to describe the risk American forces faced in another Balkan mission.⁴⁷

Other resolutions introduced into both the House of Representatives variously attempted placing limits on Clinton's authority to deploy troops to Kosovo. None of these resolutions were passed by both Houses of Congress.⁴⁸ Some Republican

45. Benjamin A. Gilman, "H.Con.Res.42 - Peacekeeping Operations in Kosovo Resolution," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution* (Introduced 1999).

46. Bradley Graham, "Serbs Warned Of NATO Strikes; Kosovo Mediators Set to End Talks," *The Washington Post*, March 19, 1999,

47. Tom DeLay, "Autonomy for Kosovo Isn't Worth American Blood," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 1999, A22.

48. Tillie Fowler, "H.Con.Res.343 - Expressing the opposition of Congress to any deployment of United States ground forces in Kosovo, a province in southern Serbia, for peacemaking or peacekeeping purposes," *105th Congress (1997-1998) Resolution* (Introduced 1998); Tillie Fowler, "H.Con.Res.29 - Expressing the opposition of Congress to any deployment of United States ground forces in Kosovo, a province in the Republic of Serbia, for peacemaking or peacekeeping purposes," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution* (Introduced 1999); Ron Paul, "H.R.647 - To prohibit the use of funds appropriated to the Department of Defense from being used for the deployment of United States Armed Forces in Kosovo unless that deployment is specifically authorized by Law," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution* (Introduced 1999).

Congress members argued Serbian actions had not yet reached the “threshold” of an atrocity worthy of US intervention, warning that after Somalia, Americans would have a low tolerance for the “high potential of American men and women coming home in body bags”.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Congress’ overwhelming concern was Clinton’s ability to guarantee an implementable exit plan; during the first day of debate on H.Con.Res.42, for example, Representatives referred to the need for a ‘exit strategy’ 42 times.

Exit strategy concerns and uncertainty were amplified in the opinion pages of major US newspapers, including the traditionally liberal *The Washington Post*, which published commentary calling for “clarity of purpose” in Kosovo in the face of “very uncertain ends”.⁵⁰ Not all commentary published in the elite media focused on reasons to be cautious about humanitarian intervention, however. There were a number of pieces supporting intervention because American responsibility to stop atrocities in Europe was paramount and should trump concerns about mission duration and viable exit strategies. *The Washington Post* editors tended to agree, responding “so what?” to concerns America may need to plan for a long-term military commitment in Kosovo, which they acknowledged “could prove to be a quagmire”.⁵¹ For them, a Kosovo intervention would be just the latest military operation in the history of America safeguarding democracy in Europe. Activating the *American exceptionalism* trope, the editors argued America “should indeed have an exit strategy for its deployments: It should bring the troops home once democracy is secure”.⁵² The editors failed, however, to indicate exactly when America would know democracy was ‘secure’.

Nevertheless, domestic critics of the mooted intervention rarely criticised Clinton’s

49. Senate Assistant Majority Leader Dan Nickles (R-Okla) and Senator John. W. Warner (R-Va) quoted in Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), The Congress members made these statements following a briefing they received from the President on 19 March 1999, which the President followed with a press conference.

50. Robert B. Zoellick and John Hillen, “. . . A Little Clarity of Purpose, Please,” *The Washington Post*, March 17, 1999, A27.

51. Editorial, “The Right Exit Strategy,” *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1999,

52. Ibid.

argument America had a moral interest in stopping atrocities or resolving the Kosovo war, or that such an intervention would be inconsistent with normative expectations of an American response. Rather they questioned whether the atrocities were sufficient to trigger those normative expectations and the ability of the US to respond militarily in a way that ensured sustained victory with an assured promise of troop withdrawal. *The New York Times* presented the Račak massacre, for example, not as an atrocity but rather as characteristic of a “surge” of violence accompanying another Balkan war.⁵³ When elite media began reporting increasing violence against civilians in mid-March 1999, reports noted all parties to the conflict, not just Milosevic’s forces bore some responsibility.⁵⁴ There were thus domestic concerns from the outset as to whether America was ‘right’ to intervene in Kosovo, but this discussion was grounded in expectations that America would have a responsibility to intervene if the human rights abuses were indeed severe. To the extent that this debate affected Clinton’s talk about his exit strategy, it was in Clinton’s arguments that US troops would be victorious against war criminals and return home soon after.

7.4 Justifying exit in *Noble Anvil*

On 23 March 1999, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana echoed Clinton’s framing of the Kosovo crisis and declared NATO had a “moral duty” to “do what is necessary” and “stop an authoritarian regime from repressing its people in Europe”.⁵⁵ Solana announced NATO members would implement the organisation’s 1998 activation order, beginning a humanitarian intervention to “stop the violence and bring an

53. Carlotta Gall, “US Official Sees ‘Collision Course’ in Kosovo Dispute,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 1999, Jane Perlez, “US Hope is Slim as Talks Restart on Kosovo Crisis,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1999, *The Washington Post* did, however, suggest later in March that the incident was a war crime Jeffrey Smith, “Kosovo Killings Called a Massacre; Some Victims Shot While on Their Knees,” *The Washington Post*, March 17, 1999,

54. See for example *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*’ report on bombings in civilian areas prior to peace talks Peter Finn, “3 Bombs Shake Kosovo on Eve of New Talks,” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 1999, Carlotta Gall, “Bombs Kill 6 in Kosovo Markets as Leaders Depart for Paris Talks,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 1999,

55. Javier Solana, *Press Statement - by Dr. Javier Solana, Secretary General of NATO*, March 23, 1999.

end to the humanitarian catastrophe” as well as “prevent more human suffering and more repression and violence against the civilian population of Kosovo”.⁵⁶

Despite US Senators’ earlier hand-wringing, a majority supported Senator Joe Biden’s (D-DE) concurrent resolution on 23 March 1999 authorising Clinton to deploy American forces to NATO’s operation, but limited their actions to “military air operations and missile strikes”.⁵⁷ The resolution was not voted on in the House of Representatives until April 1999, however, leaving Clinton without a clear congressional mandate to launch an intervention in Kosovo. Regardless, the following day, Clinton announced America would commence Operation *Noble Anvil* as part of NATO’s Operation *Allied Force*. Although part of a coalition, US forces led the bombing campaign. The majority of the 1000 aircraft deployed in the operation were American and US troops flew more than 75 percent (30,018) of the approximately total 40,000 sorties in the operation,⁵⁸ The Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces was also an American, General Wesley Clark. Although some scholars have noted the difficulties in committee-type operational decision-making because a coalition was responsible for *Allied Force*,⁵⁹ as the single biggest contributor to the operation, America exercised disproportionate influence over operational decisions.

During this phase of the humanitarian intervention Clinton continued his efforts to balance the normative expectations of intervention to fulfil America’s moral responsibilities with assured troop withdrawal and the expectation the US mission would end in victory for US troops. As in the Iraq and Somalia humanitarian interventions, Clinton’s operational approach lent itself to his exit strategy: an exclusively aerial operation theoretically allowed for operational disengagement. In

56. Solana, *Press Statement - by Dr. Javier Solana, Secretary General of NATO*, See also the NATO statements issued on 24 March 1999, 25 March 1999 and 27 March 1999.

57. Joseph R. Biden, “S.Con.Res.21 - A concurrent resolution authorizing the President of the United States to conduct military air operations and missile strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro),” *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution* (Introduced 1999).

58. Gregory Ball, “1999–Operation Allied Force,” in *The US Air Force in the Air War over Serbia, 1999*, ed. Daniel L. Haulman (1999); Steve Bowman, *Kosovo and Macedonia: U.S. and Allied Military Operations*, CRS Issue Brief for Congress, research report (Congressional Research Service, 2003).

59. Bruce Nardulli, Walter L. Perry, and Bruce R. Pirni, *Disjointed War: Military Operations in Kosovo* (RAND, 2002).

this section I argue Clinton's exit justifications during this time demonstrate an inter-relationship between exit strategy options and operational choices. Clinton persisted with aerial bombardment even when bombing was not delivering its intended results, choosing to support widening and intensifying the bombing campaign to the point the humanitarian nature of the intervention became questionable.⁶⁰ Given his unwillingness to modify his operational disengagement exit strategy and his commitment not to use American ground forces because this would make operational disengagement almost impossible, Clinton had few options but to double-down on the bombing campaign.⁶¹ Continuing with the bombing was also the only way Clinton could avoid withdrawing American troops before they fulfilled their moral responsibilities to stop atrocities, protect Kosovar Albanians and defeat Milosevic.

But as Clinton struggled to coerce Milosevic to stop the human rights atrocities with strategic bombing alone, Clinton justified choosing *not* to exit by expanding America's moral obligations in Kosovo to include state-building and political transformation. He also continued arguing success was a prerequisite for troop withdrawal, amplifying his claims of a catastrophic global future should America not succeed. Clinton argued America should embrace a wide moral duty in Kosovo because it was necessary to ensure the intervention's achievements were sustainable, but an exclusively aerial campaign was even less likely to deliver wholesale political transformation than it would neutralise Milosevic's military capabilities. Although Clinton's operational approach was supposed to yield quick results and rapid exit, Clinton became increasingly unable to guarantee the mission success that would make exit justifiable under the conditions he set. Clinton did not resolve this rhetorical and practical tension, ultimately failing to implement his operational disengagement exit strategy even after NATO succeeded in defeating Milosevic and stopping Serbian forces committing further human rights atrocities against the Kosovar Albanians.

Clinton was clear from the beginning of *Allied Force* his desire for an implementable

60. Susan Hannah Allen and Tiffany Vincent, "Bombing to Bargain? The Air War for Kosovo," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7 (2011): 1–26.

61. A point acknowledged by Michael Codner, which he argues made the Kosovo similar to other US wars: Codner, "Bringing an End to an Old-Fashioned War?"

exit strategy affected his operational decisions. He argued an exclusively aerial campaign was the only way to ensure a Kosovo humanitarian intervention did not turn into a Vietnam-style quagmire or a Somalia-style disaster for American forces:

[T]he thing that bothers me about introducing ground troops into a hostile situation—into Kosovo and into the Balkans—is the prospect of never being able to get them out... If you go in in a hostile environment in which you do not believe in ethnic cleansing and you do not wish to see any innocent civilians killed, you could be put in a position of, for example, creating a Kosovar enclave that would keep you there forever.⁶²

Here Clinton argued it was the normative expectation to protect civilians from atrocities that made it difficult to implement an exit strategy. His mention of a “Kosovar enclave” is arguably a reference to the northern Iraq enclaves in which American forces remained long after their proposed exit date. As I showed in Chapter 5, Clinton and Bush justified failing to withdraw because US troops had not yet fulfilled their moral responsibility to protect the Kurds. Clinton argued implementing Kosovo’s humanitarian intervention exit strategy also required victory, and American forces were more likely to succeed if their objectives were limited to those that could be achieved without ground troops.

During the first two weeks of *Noble Anvil* Clinton repeatedly argued for implementing an exit strategy only after victory, using language both he and his predecessor Bush had employed in Iraq and Somalia about ‘staying the course’, and not leaving ‘until the job is done’ because “we cannot predict how long these operations will need to continue”.⁶³

We must be determined; we must be persistent; we must be patient if we expect to see this mission through. And I am absolutely determined to do that... We have real firm determination today in Europe that these objectives [of Allied Force] will be achieved. And we intend to stay after them until they are.⁶⁴

We are prepared to sustain this effort for the long haul. Our plan is to persist

62. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Dan Rather of CBS News*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 31, 1999.

63. William J. Clinton, *Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on Airstrikes Against Serbian*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 26, 1999.

64. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the National Economy and Kosovar Refugees and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 2, 1999.

until we prevail.⁶⁵

We are prepared to continue this effort as long as necessary to achieve our objectives. Our timetable will be determined by our goals, not the other way around.⁶⁶

When reporters asked Clinton in the early days of the intervention what level of success was sufficient for troop withdrawal, Clinton said Kosovo would need to be returned to its *antebellum* or pre-war state with atrocities ended and Kosovar Albanian autonomy re-established:

I believe we have quite a good chance of achieving our objectives of the return of the Kosovars to live in security with the measure of self-government that they enjoyed under the old Yugoslav Constitution before Mr. Milosevic took it away from them.⁶⁷

While Clinton did not talk in great detail about what victory entailed, he was adamant about the imperative of victory because it vindicated America's (and NATO's) willingness to stop human rights atrocities with force:

Ending this tragedy is a moral imperative... We pledged that we, the United States and the other 18 nations of NATO, would stick by [the Kosovo people] if they did the right thing. We cannot let them down now. ... Imagine what would happen if we and our allies instead decided just to look the other way, as these people were massacred on NATO's doorstep. That would discredit NATO, the cornerstone on which our security has rested for 50 years now.⁶⁸

The problem, however, was a humanitarian intervention consisting almost entirely of dropping bombs, no matter how precisely those bombs were targeted, resulted in destruction and civilian casualties. The longer such a campaign continued, the more difficult it was for Clinton to maintain the humanitarian character of the humanitarian intervention or argue the intervention was succeeding in protecting the Kosovo Albanians. At the very least, it was more difficult to attain intervention

65. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the Situation in the Balkans and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 5, 1999.

66. William J. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, San Francisco, USA, April 15, 1999.

67. Clinton, *Remarks on the National Economy and Kosovar Refugees and an Exchange With Reporters*.

68. William J. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 24, 1999.

success in Taylor Seybolt's terms of lives saved/protected by intervention versus lives lost/damaged without intervention.⁶⁹

For all Clinton's claims America and its NATO allies were stopping a humanitarian catastrophe, he did not enjoy unwavering support from the rest of the international community. Two days into the intervention, Belarus, Russia and India presented a draft resolution to the UNSC calling for an immediate cessation of *Allied Force* calling it a "unilateral use of force" that "flagrantly violated" the UN's commitment to uphold international peace and security.⁷⁰ Russia sponsored the resolution having participated in NATO's earlier diplomatic efforts to resolve the Kosovo situation. The resolution's supporters criticised the intervention as an "aggressive", "illegal" military action launched on the "pretext of preventing a humanitarian catastrophe",⁷¹ with the Chinese ambassador deploring the "severe casualties and damage" caused by the "strong bullying the weak".⁷² The resolution ultimately failed with only Russia, China and Namibia voting in favour. The US, France and the UK rallied their allies to vote against and exercised their respective veto powers.⁷³

The UNSC did not give the Kosovo intervention an international imprimatur. America and its allies were unwilling to present a resolution before the UNSC expressly seeking authorisation for intervention because of the high probability the resolution would be vetoed by Russia and/or China. Consequently the only UNSC resolution passed during NATO's Kosovo intervention was restricted to calling on member states to the humanitarian relief effort for those affected by the crisis.⁷⁴ Without clear international consensus on the lawfulness of humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, the public schism on display in the Security Council undermined Clinton's claims America was using military force in a way that protected international peace and security. According to India's ambassador, "the international community can

69. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*.

70. United Nations Security Council, *Draft Resolution S/1999/328*, March 26, 1999.

71. Russia's Ambassador Lavrov United Nations Security Council, *Minutes of the 3989th meeting of the UN Security Council, 26 March 1999: S/PV.3989*, March 26, 1999, 5.

72. China's Ambassador Qin *ibid.*, 9.

73. Belarus', Cuba's and India's representatives spoke against the resolution but did not enjoy a vote on the draft resolution.

74. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1239: S/RES/1239*, May 14, 1999.

hardly be said to have endorsed [NATO's] actions when already representatives of half of humanity have said that they do not agree with what they have done".⁷⁵

On the domestic front, Clinton received equivocal, begrudging political support for the intervention. Not all Congress members agreed with Clinton that US forces had a moral imperative to intervene and not leave. Nor did they agree about the exit strategy except insofar as to say that the president had to guarantee troops would be withdrawn.⁷⁶ Clinton's announcement of the start of the bombing campaign made Congressional attempts to prescribe the shape of American intervention in Kosovo redundant. Still this did not stop Congressional efforts to influence the intervention and proscribe presidential behaviour. Once *Noble Anvil* began, both the House and Senate passed resolutions overwhelmingly supporting American troops carrying out the policy, even as members expressed disagreement with Clinton's decision.⁷⁷ The concurrent resolution passed in the Senate authorising airstrikes was also finally voted on in the House of Representatives on 28 April 1999. Despite airstrikes already well underway, the resolution failed to pass the House in a tied vote. On the same day Congress debated three other bills about the president's authority to conduct a humanitarian intervention in Kosovo. Although the Republicans controlled the House the divisions on all Congressional votes relating to the Kosovo intervention were not along party lines. The House passed a resolution to prohibit funding ground forces in Kosovo without Congressional authorisation,⁷⁸ but failed to pass a resolution requiring the president to stop the current intervention.⁷⁹ Congress also failed to declare an official state of war between the US and the government

75. India's UN Ambassador Sharma United Nations Security Council, *Minutes of the 3989th meeting of the UN Security Council, 26 March 1999*, 16.

76. Kim, *Kosovo and the 106th Congress*.

77. Floyd Spence, "H.Res.130 - Expressing the support of the House of Representatives for the members of the United States Armed Forces who are engaged in military operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution (Introduced 1999)*; Trent Lott, "S.Res.74 - A resolution expressing the support of the Senate for the members of the United States Armed Forces who are engaged in military operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution (Introduced 1999)*.

78. Tillie Fowler, "H.R.1569 - Military Operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Limitation Act of 1999," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution (Introduced 1999)*.

79. Tom Campbell, "H.Con.Res.82 - Directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove United States Armed Forces from their positions in connection with the present operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution (Introduced 1999)*.

of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.⁸⁰ Clinton pushed back against attempted Congressional constraints, threatening to veto any law including Congressional budgetary restrictions. He ultimately succeeded in obtaining the full funding he requested from Congress for the Kosovo intervention.⁸¹

During House debates on 28 April 1999, members mentioned “exit strategy” 27 times and each time it was used by Representatives to argue against US intervention because Clinton had no “clear” or “credible” exit strategy for US forces in Kosovo.⁸² But Congress members were equally opposed to intervention either because Clinton did not have a strategy to ‘win’ the intervention or the intervention was not ‘winnable’. Indeed, Congress members commented on America’s likelihood of winning in Kosovo 39 times, more often than they spoke about exit strategies. For Congress members opposed to intervention, the question was not whether any amount of intervention would save people but whether US troops would return home victorious. Representative Bob Schaffer’s (R-CO) comments are particularly illustrative as acknowledging the inherent normative expectation that US troops must win any military operation in which they participate but not be drawn into a quagmire:

Mr. Speaker, that comment, that phrase about winning is usually something that one side or another could understand in the case of some military conflict or the engagement in warfare. But the definition of winning with respect to this conflict [in Kosovo] is very nondescript... It is by definition impossible to determine when one has won and when it is time to declare victory and go home. That is the real dilemma that the President has put us in, because it has set off a whole cascade of problems that stem in all directions, and does so without the clear definition of what victory means for the United States of America. Without that definition, I am afraid this is an engagement to which we will be committed for a long, long time.⁸³

Congressional concern for US troops to be withdrawn only after they had succeeded was reflected in the editorial and commentary pages of the nation’s major newspapers. After earlier favouring intervention because it was morally incumbent, commentators

80. Tom Campbell, “H.J.Res.44 - Declaring a state of war between the United States and the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution* (Introduced 1999).

81. Kim, *Kosovo and the 106th Congress*.

82. *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 106th Congress, First Session*, vol. 145, 59 (April 28, 1999).

83. Bob Schaffer, *Congressional Record—House* (April 28, 1999), H2461.

now focused on how America would ‘win’ the intervention. During the first three weeks of *Noble Anvil*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* published 27 op-ed pieces between them on the necessity for America to win the Kosovo intervention including recommendations on how this victory should be achieved. Of these, only one piece by paleoconservative candidate for the Republican presidency nomination, Pat Buchanan, suggested Americans would not be able to “do whatever is necessary to win”,⁸⁴ although he was careful not to argue American troops should withdraw short of achieving victory. Regardless of whether commentators proposed persisting with the same strategy, increasing diplomatic efforts, intensifying America’s bombing campaign, or sending in ground forces, mainstream media opinion took for granted that once American forces were engaged in a military operation, they could not withdraw without winning. At the same time, there were few concrete proposals—apart from regime change⁸⁵—about what level or type of success in Kosovo would be sufficient to permit exit.

Clinton’s arguments about American responsibility to stop atrocities in Kosovo initially resonated with the general public⁸⁶ but he struggled to maintain the public’s enthusiasm for the intervention longer than a few weeks. Pew surveys of 2000 Americans conducted during the first week of airstrikes (24–28 March 1999) and again three weeks later reveal these changing views. By mid-April 1999, 41 percent of Americans paid very close attention to the Kosovo intervention (up from 11 percent a month earlier). Sixty percent of those surveyed initially supported the NATO airstrikes and 70 percent cited “preventing the killing of innocent civilians” as a very important reason for military intervention. By mid-April 1999 support for airstrikes remained steady but now two-thirds believed victory required not only American ground forces but ground forces remaining in Kosovo for a long time. Concern about US casualties rose from 55 to 66 percent among the American population, but Americans remained narrowly in favour of deepening US involvement by sending

84. Patrick J. Buchanan, “The Mess They’ve Made,” *The Washington Post*, April 13, 1999,

85. Misha Glenny, “So Milosevic Leaves Serbia—and Goes Where?,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2000,

86. Henry E. Carey, “U.S. Domestic Politics and the Emerging Humanitarian Intervention Policy: Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo,” *World Affairs* 154, no. 2 (2001): 74.

ground forces “to try to end the conflict in Kosovo” (51 percent). The survey did not reveal, however, what Americans thought it meant to “end” the conflict. What these survey results do show is despite concern about risks to its troops, the American public supported military intervention in Kosovo because it was the right thing to do, and the public was prepared to maintain or even increase military involvement if necessary in order to succeed.

Milosevic did not capitulate in the first weeks of bombing and NATO responded by following America’s strategy of intensifying and widening the bombing campaign, moving from attacks on Serbian air defence systems to military targets in Serbia outside its capital, Belgrade, and eventually to bombing targets within Belgrade itself. American forces led the charge, again dropping the majority of munitions and flying the majority of sorties. Despite the intensified bombing campaign Clinton maintained the Kosovo intervention had a humanitarian protection purpose. He doubled-down on his justification for not withdrawing US forces immediately, explaining his exit strategy would only be implemented when the mission succeeded. Clinton argued more forcefully American victory in Kosovo was a moral imperative and exiting without fulfilling these moral obligations was beyond his realm of imagined possibilities. Almost as if matching the rise in the intervention’s violence, Clinton raised the moral stakes, expanding his definition of American moral responsibility in Kosovo beyond preventing atrocities to defending liberal democracy and spearheading political transformation.

Clinton drew parallels between Kosovo and WWII efforts to stop the Holocaust, using language of atrocity to argue the moral good of intervention made the price of intervention worth paying by the Kosovar and Serbian people, if not Americans:

Sarajevo, the capital of neighbouring Bosnia, is where World War I began. World War II and the Holocaust engulfed this region. In both wars, Europe was slow to recognise the dangers, and the United States waited even longer to enter the conflicts. Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough, how many lives could have been saved, how many Americans would not have had to die.⁸⁷

87. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets in the Federal Republic*

The stories we are hearing now are truly chilling: Serb security forces herding Albanian villagers together, gunning them down with automatic weapons, and setting them on fire; telling villagers, “Leave or we will kill you”; separating family members; loading up buses and trains, carrying some to the borders and some to be slaughtered; confiscating identity papers and property records, seeking, literally, to erase the presence of these people in their own land forever.⁸⁸

We’ve learned the hard way through two World Wars and through what we saw in Bosnia that with these kinds of conflicts, if you don’t halt them, they spread, to be stopped later at greater cost and greater risk.⁸⁹

We cannot simply watch as hundreds of thousands of people are brutalised, murdered, raped, forced from their homes, their family histories erased, all in the name of ethnic pride and purity.⁹⁰

But Clinton no longer limited the moral good to stopping atrocities; he argued persisting with intervention fulfilled America’s responsibility to defend NATO’s credibility and the future of the transatlantic security alliance, giving NATO a new purpose in a post-Cold War era:

[T]here is a second issue here, as well, and that is whether we and our allies in Europe are going to allow that kind of problem—hatred based on race or ethnicity or religion—to be the defining force of the next 20 or 30 years. . . . This is America trying to get the world to live on human terms, so we can have peace and freedom in Europe, and our people will not be called to fight a wider war for someone else’s madness.⁹¹

Were we to stand aside. . . NATO would be discredited, yes, because it made promises not kept but, more important, because its values and vision of Europe would be profoundly damaged.⁹²

But we are fundamentally there because the Alliance will not have meaning in the 21st century if it permits the slaughter of innocents on its doorstep. This is not a question of territorial conquest or political domination but standing for the values that made NATO possible in the first place.⁹³

Clinton argued America had to succeed in Kosovo because the future of the post-Cold War world order was at stake. Also at stake was America’s moral and military reputation, sharpened by failures in Somalia and Rwanda and the fragility of victory *of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)*.

88. William J. Clinton, *Remarks to the Community at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, Louisiana*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, Bossier City, USA, April 12, 1999.

89. *Ibid.*

90. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

91. Clinton, *Remarks to the Community at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, Louisiana*.

92. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

93. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at a North Atlantic Treaty Organization Commemorative Ceremony*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 23, 1999.

in Iraq and Bosnia. Clinton expanded his use of the *good versus evil* trope beyond the *us versus them* of ‘NATO versus Milosevic’ to ‘America versus regressive global forces’, using language that also drew on *American exceptionalism*:

We are in Kosovo because we care about saving lives and we care about the character of the multi-ethnic post-Cold War world. . . We cannot allow the Milosevic vision, rooted as it is in hatred and violence and cynicism, to prevail.⁹⁴

This is our competing vision. Mr Milosevic’s vision: Greater Serbia, enforced by paramilitary thugs and propaganda, denying the humanity of people who do not fall within his ethnic group. But our version is democracy, messy sometimes, yes. . . but recognising that it is better to work together for a brighter tomorrow because, underneath, our common humanity is more important than anything that divides us; that we are all the children of God.⁹⁵

We have come to the end of the Cold war. People, by and large, have rejected communism. And we now see the prospect of a bright new future for the world in which we can resolve our differences in an orderly way and build a common future—that future threatened by the oldest problem of human society, our tendency to fear and dehumanise people who are different from ourselves.⁹⁶

Mr Milosevic’s forces burn and loot homes and murder innocent people; our forces deliver food and shelter and hope to the displaced. Mr Milosevic fans the flames of anger between nations and peoples; we are an Alliance of 19 nations, uniting 780 million people of many faiths and ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. Mr. Milosevic knows only one way to achieve his aims, through force; we have done everything we could to resolve this matter peacefully.⁹⁷

Focusing on Milosevic’s human rights violations justified Clinton’s decision not to exit but it was also a counter-narrative to human rights organisations criticising the intervention’s adverse humanitarian outcomes, and growing public concern about civilian casualties. The US Department of Defense claimed the US bombs dropped on Serbia hit 99.6 percent of their military targets but civilian casualties nevertheless occurred, some caused directly by US bombs and others because the intervention spurred retaliatory violence by Serb forces.⁹⁸ Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch argued NATO ‘bombing a village to save it’ resulted in unacceptable civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure in Serbia. Estimates vary

94. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

95. William J. Clinton, *Remarks to Humanitarian Relief Organizations in Roseville, Michigan*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 16, 1999.

96. *Ibid.*

97. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at the Opening of the North Atlantic Council Meeting on Kosovo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 23, 1999, See also, Clinton’s speech on 1 May 1999.

98. William M. Arkin, *Civilian Deaths in the NATO Air Campaign* (Human Rights Watch, 2000).

but approximately 500 civilians died from NATO attacks, which also destroyed major pieces of military and civilian infrastructure including broadcasting facilities, electricity plants and bridges.⁹⁹ 10,000 Kosovar civilians were killed by Serbs from the start of the NATO intervention, representing a significant uptick in violence during the war. A further 1000–2000 Serbs were also killed during the fighting.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the general level of violence, a series of bombing incidents fuelled domestic and international criticism of the intervention: a NATO airstrike on a bridge hit a passenger train killing 14 and injuring 16 on 12 April 1999; American aircraft repeatedly bombed a convoy of refugees fleeing Kosovo on Djakovica-Decane Road killing 75 people on 14 April 1999; an American airstrike on the Serb Radio and Television headquarters killed 16 and injured 16 injured on 23 April 1999; the US bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade on 7–8 May 1999; and US forces deployed cluster munitions in residential areas throughout the intervention.¹⁰¹ Despite these incidents, the number of civilian casualties in the Kosovo intervention was lower than comparable military campaigns, including the Gulf War. Clinton defended the accidental bombing of the refugee convoy as one of the risks of intervention but argued American forces were being as careful as they could be, “really risk[ing] a lot to avoid destroying innocent civilians and to avoid destroying the country”.¹⁰² Clinton also acknowledged civilian casualties were one of the risks of his operational approach:

There is no such thing as flying airplanes this fast, dropping weapons this powerful, dealing with an enemy who is willing to use people as human shields, and never have this sort of tragic thing happen. It cannot be done.¹⁰³

The American public, while paying less attention to the Kosovo intervention than when it began, was particularly worried about civilian casualties. According to a

99. Mary-Wynne Ashford and Ulrich Gottstein, “The Impact on Civilians of the Bombing of Kosovo and Serbia,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 16, no. 3 (2000): 267–80.

100. Arkin, *Civilian Deaths in the NATO Air Campaign*.

101. *Ibid.*

102. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Tom Brokaw of the National Broadcasting Corporation in Spangdahlem, Germany*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 5, 1999.

103. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

Pew survey in May 1999, only one in three Americans were closely following the intervention but 53 percent still supported the continuing airstrikes. At the same time, while one in two Americans expressed concern about US bombs killing civilians the proportion supporting Clinton's decision to intervene to stop atrocities remained consistent (70 percent).¹⁰⁴ Mainstream press coverage of the intervention continued to marginalise discussion of exit strategies in favour of understanding how Clinton could win the intervention. Commentators observed Vietnam Syndrome concerns of the necessity for America to commit to winning and winning "absolutely",¹⁰⁵ "giving war a chance",¹⁰⁶ and preparing for ground invasion.¹⁰⁷ Charles Krauthammer's op-ed in *The Washington Post* was an isolated voice criticising the intervention's trajectory of "fighting not to win, not even to save, but to feel righteous".¹⁰⁸

Raising the moral stakes of the intervention not only responded to the paradox of using force for humanitarian purposes, but it justified Clinton persisting with a military operation that did not appear to be yielding results. Clinton argued withdrawing American troops without defeating Milosevic was simply not an option, a view of American moral superiority that would be vindicated by military success. Clinton's NATO allies shared his views. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair argued the bombing campaign must continue because "I do believe that in the end if a course is right it will win".¹⁰⁹ Likewise, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder argued "we are under a moral obligation to help stop new atrocities [in Kosovo]... NATO has to win this military conflict."¹¹⁰ US forces could therefore not leave Kosovo until they had won.

Winning was necessary for exit but Clinton also expanded what he meant by victory beyond stopping or preventing imminent atrocities and defeating Milosevic to promoting long-term, American-led political transformation. Thus Clinton argued

104. Andrew Kohut, "A Clear Case of Clinton Fatigue," *The New York Times*, August 5, 1999,

105. Elizabeth Dole, "Time to Play Our Aces," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1999, A23.

106. Thomas Friedman, "Stop the Music," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1999,

107. William Safire, "Celebrating Defeat," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1999,

108. Charles Krauthammer, "Fighting to Feel Righteous," *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1999,

109. Jim Hoagland, "Tony Blair's Initiation," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 1999,

110. Lally Weymouth, "Q&A: Gerhard Schroeder, Firmly Convinced," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 1999, B01.

humanitarian intervention in Kosovo was not just a military campaign but a precursor to a new post-Cold War ‘Marshall Plan’. Clinton’s justification for exit requiring long-term success was made before a room of American newspaper editors the day after US forces bombed the refugee convoy. It is worth quoting in full because Clinton also explains why US troops will not necessarily leave even if Milosevic is eventually defeated; what was putatively a marker of victory that would make exit justifiable:

Even as we fight this conflict, we must look beyond it to what the Balkans, south-eastern Europe, indeed, the whole continent of Europe should look like in 10 or 20 years. We should try to do for southeastern Europe what we helped to do for Western Europe after World War II, and for Central Europe after the Cold War, to help its people build a region of multi-ethnic democracies, a community that upholds common standards of human rights, a community in which borders are open to people in trade, where nations cooperate to make war unthinkable... if we truly want a more tolerant, inclusive future for the Balkans and all of southeast Europe, we will have to both oppose [Milosevic’s] efforts and offer a better vision of the future, one that we are willing to help build. ... [W]e must follow the example of the World War II generation by standing up to aggression and hate and then by following through with a post-conflict strategy for reconstruction and renewal. ... It will demand from us a recognition that there is no easy way out of the region’s troubles, but there is a solution that advances our interests and keeps faith with our values if we are ready to make a long-term commitment... So, however this conflict ends, or whenever it ends—I think I know how it’s going to end—but whenever it ends, we have some building to do.¹¹¹

The President’s plans to rebuild/recreate Western Europe fit well with the image of America as a light on the hill, a model to be promoted around the world. In keeping with this *American exceptionalism* trope, Clinton painted the Kosovo intervention as the latest in a long list of American military interventions in sovereign states to pursue democratic values for the good of humanity. In an expression of hubris or naïvete, the President argued that even when these interventions did not turn out well, the international community did not question America’s noble intentions:

Our steadily increasing involvement with the rest of the world [since the beginning of the 20th century], not for territorial gain but for peace and freedom and security, is a fact of recent history. During the Cold War, it can be argued that on occasion we made a wrong judgement because we tended to see the world solely through the lenses of communism or anti-communism. But no one suggests that we ever sought territorial advantage. No one doubts

111. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

that when America did get involved, we were doing what at least we thought was right for humanity.¹¹²

Clinton's operational disengagement exit strategy had been central to his justification for commencing the Kosovo intervention as well as his decision to limit the operational approach to an exclusively aerial mission. But Clinton's ability to justifiably implement his exit strategy also depended on other normative expectations of acceptable American conduct in humanitarian intervention, especially expectations that America maintain the morally righteous character of the intervention and deliver long-term protection to the Kosovar Albanians. After three weeks of sustained bombardment of Serbia without signs of success, Clinton's decision to talk about a wider moral responsibility preserved the moral defensibility of his decision to intervene and persist with his self-imposed operational limitations despite the humanitarian cost. The practical result of Clinton re-centring his exit strategy justifications away from guaranteeing troop withdrawal towards fulfilling moral responsibility meant markers of mission success and victory were now more difficult to define and, as Clinton himself acknowledged, required a longer-term commitment of American forces. Despite his earlier commitment to do so, Clinton struggled to stick to his exit strategy even after the immediate humanitarian crisis was over.

7.5 Problems exiting from *Noble Anvil*

As America's bombing campaign in Kosovo stretched into months, Clinton stuck with his operational disengagement exit strategy but began explaining why implementing this strategy would not necessarily mean America's Kosovo intervention was over. Clinton's justification for not ending the humanitarian intervention as planned was similar to the one he used previously in Iraq and Somalia, arguing America's military successes were fragile and required an ongoing troop presence to make them sustainable. Thus *Noble Anvil's* objectives now included creating the battlefield

112. Clinton, *Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California*.

conditions for deploying foreign ground troops to “protect the people, including the Serb minority in Kosovo, as they work toward self-determination”.¹¹³

Clinton repeated this point on nine separate occasions throughout the second half of April and May 1999,¹¹⁴ however it wasn't until his letter to Congress on 5 June 1999 that he mentioned the “anticipated contribution” of 7000 US troops “to the international security force in Kosovo”.¹¹⁵ While winning was still a prerequisite for exit, Clinton argued success should not be restricted to battlefield victory and must be demonstrated over the long term; America's moral responsibility extended to political transformation that would not be delivered through airstrikes alone. Clinton's redefinition of America's moral responsibility in Kosovo affected the timing, shape and implementability of his exit strategy, but so did his changing definition of victory. When Milosevic agreed to withdraw his forces in June 1999, Clinton declared American victory and implemented his operational disengagement exit strategy as promised. However, Clinton immediately deployed US ground troops to participate in a second phase of the Kosovo intervention to deliver the political transformation Clinton argued was necessary for a truly successful intervention.

Clinton's argument about the fragility of American victory became a key focus of his rhetoric in May and June 1999. His public contemplation of why *Noble Anvil* victory would not mean complete American troop withdrawal was grounded in the

113. Clinton, *Remarks to Humanitarian Relief Organizations in Roseville, Michigan*.

114. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 22, 1999; William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 24, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks Following a Meeting With a Congressional Delegation and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 28, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks on Departure for Europe and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 4, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Interview With Tom Brokaw of the National Broadcasting Corporation Aboard Air Force One*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 4, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks to the Community at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 5, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Interview With European Journalists at Rhein Main Air Base, Germany*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 6, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany and an Exchange With Reporters in Bonn*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 6, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States at Fort McNair, Maryland*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 13, 1999.

115. William J. Clinton, *Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Deployment of United States Forces to Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 5, 1999.

dramatically disastrous hypothetical future he painted of Europe descending into violent chaos, and the inevitable future cost America would incur if he decided not to commit troops today:

[Speaking to US troops deployed to Kosovo:] If we don't want your successors to have to come to this continent and fight another bitter war, then we must stand in Kosovo for the elemental principle of the common humanity of every breathing, living person in this continent.¹¹⁶

What we are doing today will save lives, including American lives, in the future.¹¹⁷

We must be willing to pay the price of time and effort to reverse the course of ethnic cleansing. The benefits will be far greater and last much longer than the costs... some things are worth fighting for.¹¹⁸

We should do this because it's the right thing to do. And it will be—let me say this, it will be far less expensive—far, far less expensive—for us to make a decent contribution to the long-term development of these people than it will be to wait around for something like this to happen again and run the risks, all the risks we had to deal with this time that it might spread and all of that.¹¹⁹

In talking about these avoided costs, Clinton again returned to the Holocaust and WWII analogies, deepening the vision of a catastrophic outcome without ongoing American military involvement in Kosovo, as well as comparing the Kosovo intervention to the noble cause of WWII:

This is a lot cheaper than having another European war of the kind that we saw in the 20th century.¹²⁰

I know that many Americans believe that this [war in Kosovo] is not our fight. But remember why many of the people are laying in these graves out here [in Arlington Cemetery]—because of what happened in Europe and because of what was allowed to go on too long before people intervened.¹²¹

We have a security responsibility to prevent a wider war in Europe, which we know from our two World Wars would eventually draw America in at far greater cost in lives, time, and treasure.¹²²

When questioned directly about what his statements meant for how and when the

116. Clinton, *Remarks to the Community at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany*.

117. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 31, 1999.

118. William J. Clinton, *Commencement Address at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 2, 1999.

119. William J. Clinton, *Remarks on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 10, 1999.

120. Clinton, *Remarks on Departure for Europe and an Exchange With Reporters*.

121. Clinton, *Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia*.

122. Clinton, *Commencement Address at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs*.

Kosovo intervention would in fact end, Clinton argued the timing of exit was less important than supporting US and NATO troops engaged in a noble endeavour, fighting the war to end all wars:

What the people of Europe need to know is that their governments are doing the right thing and that it will be over, and that when it finishes, it will finish in a way that will permit Europe to be united and democratic and free for the first time in the history of the continent. Now, that is quite an achievement. And it is worth waiting for. It will not drag on for years. We're not talking about endlessly. But we cannot expect an instantaneous result.¹²³

NATO's bombing campaign eventually did end on 10 June 1999, ten weeks after it began. The airstrikes, UK-led preparations for a ground invasion, Serbia's inability to garner foreign military support, and Finnish and Russian diplomatic efforts to convince Milosevic to back down, all contributed to the Serbian parliament agreeing to NATO's peace plan on 3 June 1999. NATO concluded an agreement with the Serbian government on 9 June 1999 providing for complete Yugoslav military withdrawal from Kosovo and NATO ended its airstrikes the following day.

Clinton celebrated his nation's success in fulfilling America's moral responsibilities to stop human rights atrocities and defeat Milosevic, satisfying expectations for how America should respond to humanitarian crises: the "necessary conflict" was "brought to a just and honourable conclusion".¹²⁴ Clinton argued *Noble Anvil's* victory and that of *Allied Force* more widely, transcended protecting Kosovar Albanians; it had made the world "safer", ensuring "the twentieth century is ending not with helpless indignation but with a hopeful affirmation of human dignity and human rights for the twenty-first century".¹²⁵

Clinton did not hesitate using America's victory as vindication for his decisions to intervene in Kosovo and conducting the operation as an exclusively aerial campaign:

This victory brings a new hope that when a people are singled out for destruc-

123. Clinton, *Interview With European Journalists at Rhein Main Air Base, Germany*.

124. Clinton, *Remarks on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters*.

125. William J. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 10, 1999.

tion because of their heritage and religious faith and we can do something about it, the world will not look the other way.¹²⁶

At least I'm confident that I did the right thing in the right way.¹²⁷

In his victory speeches, Clinton did not mention the more than one million Kosovar Albanians driven from their homes over the course of the humanitarian crisis, three-quarters of whom were forced to flee during the three months of NATO airstrikes. The US Department of Defense's 'after-action' report declared *Noble Anvil* an "extraordinary success", based in part on the number of sorties US aircraft flew while sustaining zero American casualties.¹²⁸

For all Clinton's triumphalist rhetoric, Clinton reminded his audience battlefield victory was only one aspect of true intervention success and thus insufficient to warrant all American troops returning home. Clinton returned to the reconstruction and nation-building program he argued for in April 1999, saying the best marker of victory was America meeting its moral responsibility to change the political calculus in the former Yugoslavia, eradicating ethnic tensions and preventing future irredentism:

[T]he United States should feel vindicated when the people go home and when they're safe and when we can say that we, as a nation, have played a role in reversing ethnic cleansing.¹²⁹

Clinton's new 'Marshall Plan' required more than economic stimulus; eradicating "ancient hatreds" that caused the Kosovo crisis required ongoing American troop presence on the ground in Kosovo. Clinton argued there was "still quite a lot to be done" in Kosovo to fulfil America's political transformation obligation to "guarantee security" and ensure "lasting peace and stability" with a "plan for tomorrow, not just today":¹³⁰

126. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo*.

127. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Jim Lehrer of PBS' 'NewsHour'*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 11, 1999.

128. US Department of Defense, *Report to Congress: Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report*, technical report (Washington D.C.: US Department of Defense, Pentagon, January 31, 2000).

129. Clinton, *Remarks on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters*.

130. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo*.

We face the broader challenge of preventing future crises by promoting democracy and prosperity in this region which has been so troubled. . . . We now have a moment of hope . . . And we have to finish the job and build the peace.¹³¹

Thus in the very same speech Clinton declared America's participation in *Noble Anvil* over and he was implementing his operational disengagement exit strategy, Clinton announced American ground forces would start Operation *Joint Guardian*—its contribution to the Kosovo Force (KFOR)—the following day. Although he had spent much of the previous six weeks laying the justification groundwork for his decision not to completely withdraw American troops from Kosovo, as *Joint Guardian* began Clinton argued this operation was simultaneously a completely separate mission not to be judged by the same standards as *Allied Force*—“apples and oranges”¹³²—but also inextricably linked to *Noble Anvil*. Clinton argued *Joint Guardian* was a mission to “win the peace”¹³³ secured by *Noble Anvil*, necessary “to make sure that this [Kosovo] mission is finally won”.¹³⁴

Clinton's attempt to semantically distinguish the two operations reflects the difficulties he faced crafting a strategic narrative that balanced the normative expectations of what America's moral responsibilities were in the face of a mass atrocity with achieving sufficient military success to make exit justifiable. Despite defeating Milošević, Clinton found himself acknowledging *Noble Anvil* had only partially fulfilled America's moral obligations. Partial victory made only a partial exit possible.

131. Clinton, *Remarks on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters*.

132. William J. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With European Union Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Bonn*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 21, 1999.

133. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With European Union Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Bonn*; William J. Clinton, *Remarks to Operation Allied Force Troops at Aviano Air Base in Italy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 22, 1999; William J. Clinton, *The President's News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 25, 1999; William J. Clinton, *Remarks to American Troops Following Thanksgiving Dinner at Camp Bondsteel*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, November 23, 1999.

134. Clinton, *Remarks to Operation Allied Force Troops at Aviano Air Base in Italy*.

7.6 Justifying exit in *Joint Guardian*

On the day Clinton and his NATO allies declared victory in their Kosovo intervention, the UNSC passed Resolution 1244 endorsing the *Military Technical Agreement* signed by Milosevic and NATO¹³⁵ and authorising “an international security presence” in Kosovo.¹³⁶ The work of foreign troops included establishing a “secure environment”, demilitarising armed groups, and “detering renewed hostilities”.¹³⁷ The resolution also authorised foreign troops in Kosovo to support nation-building, institution creation, political transformation, human rights protection and economic reconstruction projects, essentially all the elements of Clinton’s Marshall Plan for the Balkans.

Clinton’s semantic distinction between *Noble Anvil* and *Joint Guardian* did not alter the fact he now needed a new exit strategy for American forces in Kosovo. Using ground troops meant another operational disengagement strategy was almost impossible. Clinton avoided the exit strategy routes he had taken in Iraq and Somalia of operational disengagement or transition to the UN and opted instead for a local transition exit. During this phase of the Kosovo intervention Clinton refused to set a timetable for exit, insisting once again that American troops would withdraw once they had successfully completed *Joint Guardian*:

I don’t think we should put a timetable on [*Joint Guardian*]. We will define our objectives and proceed to implement them.¹³⁸

I hope we will stay until the objectives of the mission are completed... when we’ve achieved our objectives, we’ll get out.¹³⁹

But success required discharging wide moral obligations, thus the mission objectives—very similar to those Clinton and Bush had set in Iraq and Somalia—were broad

135. United States Institute of Peace, ed., *Military Technical Agreement Between the International Security Force (“KFOR”) and the Governments of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia*, Peace Agreements Digital Collection, Washington D.C., June 9, 1999.

136. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1244: S/RES/1244*, June 10, 1999.

137. Ibid.

138. Clinton, *Remarks on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters*.

139. Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With European Union Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Bonn*.

political transformation goals, what Clinton called the “heaviest responsibility [of delivering] self-government, autonomy and rebuilding assistance” including establishing sufficient security in Kosovo to ensure there was not another outbreak of violence.¹⁴⁰ Clinton reprised the mantra US troops would stay until they “finish[ed] the job”¹⁴¹ but indicated American troops would not be withdrawn quickly or without winning as this was beyond the realm of Clinton’s imagined possibilities for how the Kosovo humanitarian intervention would end as the president rounded out his final term in office:

We cannot say our job is finished when refugees are returning to shattered lives. We cannot pretend our work is done when Serbia is still ruled by leaders who maintain power by manipulating ethnic differences, living off corruption, and threatening their neighbours. We cannot pretend our victory is complete when the people of a vast region of Europe are still suffering from the disruption brought about by a decade of violence.¹⁴²

Once again blindsided by Clinton’s unilateral decision-making in Kosovo, Congress attempted enacting legislation to shape *Joint Guardian* with mixed effects. Representative Ike Skelton’s (D-MO) measure introduced in June 1999 to prevent defence funding being used for combat or peacekeeping missions in Kosovo was defeated after Clinton promised to seek Congressional approval for supplemental funding for *Joint Guardian* as required.¹⁴³ Clinton did make funding requests repeatedly throughout the remainder of 1999 and into 2000. Each request was passed by Congress contingent on Clinton outlining an exit strategy for the intervention but this element of the bills drew almost no comment from Congress, despite Clinton’s repeatedly stating that American troops would only withdraw once they succeeded in their political transformation goals. Matching Clinton’s emphasis, Congress members did not question this exit plan, more concerned that America’s NATO allies were not contributing adequately to the nation-building effort. A bill to impose a withdrawal date for US

140. William J. Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With President Jacques Chirac of France in Paris*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 17, 1999.

141. Clinton, *Address to the Nation on the Military Technical Agreement on Kosovo*; Clinton, *The President’s News Conference With President Jacques Chirac of France in Paris*.

142. William J. Clinton, *Statement to the Stability Pact Summit in Sarajevo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 30, 1999.

143. Ike Skelton, “H.Amdt.161 to H.R.1401 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000,” *106th Congress (1999-2000) Resolution (Introduced 1999)*.

troops in *Joint Guardian* a year after they were first deployed was narrowly defeated in the Senate. Although Senators equivocated on the need for a precise end date for the intervention, Congress was keen to prevent American money being used to support nation-building work in Serbia so long as Milosevic remained president. Each time Clinton responded by reminding Congress supporting nation-building work in Kosovo would create the “conditions for the eventual withdrawal of US troops”,¹⁴⁴ taking for granted American would only exit once nation-building in Kosovo reached the point local institutions were strong enough to survive without external military support.

Although nation-building was a pre-condition for exit from *Joint Guardian* Clinton did not talk about a timetable for achieving these objectives. Instead, for the rest of 1999, Clinton reminded Americans their job in Kosovo was not finished because their moral responsibility continued. Clinton again invoked the memory of WWII to argue troops would remain engaged in Kosovo until this nation-building moral responsibility was fully discharged:

We still have to win the peace. Those folks have to go home, and they've got to have a roof over their head before it gets too cold to be outside. We've got landmines to take up and businesses to rebuild and a future to make... In the final days of World War II, Harry Truman said: "It is easier to remove tyrants and destroy concentration camps than it is to kill the ideas which gave them birth and strength. Victory on the battlefield was essential, but it was not enough. For a good peace, a lasting peace, decent people of the Earth must remain determined to strike down the evil spirit which has hung over the world for the last decade." Well, the decent people of the world are determined to rebuild Kosovo and the Balkans.¹⁴⁵

Now we have to finish the job. We have to help the Kosovars to restore their homes and the basic conditions of living, the institutions of civil society necessary for them to exercise autonomy. We also have to help the region.¹⁴⁶

Mainstream American press commentators revelled in the US victory in Kosovo.

144. William J. Clinton, *Statement on Signing the Emergency Supplemental Act, 2000*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 13, 2000.

145. William J. Clinton, *Remarks at Whiteman Air Force Base in Knob Noster, Missouri*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 11, 1999.

146. Clinton, *The President's News Conference With President Jacques Chirac of France in Paris*; William J. Clinton, *Remarks to Kosovo International Security Force Troops in Skopje*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 22, 1999, See also; William J. Clinton, *Remarks at Georgetown University*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, November 8, 1999.

Commentators proposed various ways Clinton's exhortation to "win the peace"¹⁴⁷ could be effectively implemented, taking for granted that delivering this objective was required for complete American troop withdrawal. Most commentators argued for significant investment and commitment to creating democratic institutions in the former Yugoslavia, with some suggesting forcible division of the territory along ethnic lines would promote stability. Opinion polls showed an increase in public support for the airstrikes (up to 68 percent in June 1999) once *Allied Force* was officially over and well over half of those surveyed supported sending ground forces into Kosovo to continue the intervention.¹⁴⁸ As attention shifted to the presidential campaign, discussion of the US troop presence in Kosovo and plans for their withdrawal fell off the pages of the mainstream press.

For the remainder of his 18 months in office Clinton attempted to incorporate his narrative of the Kosovo intervention within the wider collective narrative about normative expectations for America using military force when responding to humanitarian crises. Clinton's justifications for the Kosovo intervention, including his exit strategies, became part of the so-called 'Clinton doctrine':

[W]here we can, at an acceptable cost—that is, without risking nuclear war or some other terrible thing—we ought to prevent the slaughter of innocent civilians and the wholesale uprooting of them because of their race, their ethnic background, or the way they worship God.¹⁴⁹

Clinton did not shy away from grounding his approach in moral responsibility language. He used what he considered as America's Kosovo victory to encourage using 'atrocities prevention' as a platform justifying deployment of American military force. This foreign policy approach was firmly rooted in normative expectations of how America should respond to humanitarian crises arising from gross human rights violations. Clinton argued these principles should not just guide American foreign

147. Clinton, *Remarks at Whiteman Air Force Base in Knob Noster, Missouri*; Clinton, *Remarks Following Discussions With European Union Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Bonn*; Clinton, *Remarks to Operation Allied Force Troops at Aviano Air Base in Italy*; Clinton, *The President's News Conference*; Clinton, *Statement to the Stability Pact Summit in Sarajevo*.

148. Andrew Kohut, *Muted and Mixed Public Response to Peace in Kosovo* (Pew Research Centre for the People & the Press, June 15, 1999).

149. Clinton, *Interview With Jim Lehrer of PBS' 'NewsHour'*.

policy but also become an international norm:

I think there's an important principle here that I hope will be now upheld in the future and not just by the United States, not just by NATO but also by the leading countries of the world, through the United Nations... whether within or beyond the borders of a country, if the world community has the power to stop it, we ought to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing. . . . [W]hen innocent civilians are subject to mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing, if we can stop it, we should.¹⁵⁰

The American public also expressed strong support for the Clinton doctrine in the wake of the Kosovo intervention, with almost two-thirds supporting America using military force to stop genocide and human rights atrocities across the globe.¹⁵¹ Despite the intervention being far from over, Clinton used Milosevic's defeat to argue humanitarian intervention was not just a moral imperative but it can and does 'work'.

Much of the international criticism of the Kosovo intervention, including draft UNSC resolutions condemning the intervention, were based on the idea there was no norm of humanitarian intervention and unauthorised military action against a sovereign state is unlawful, regardless of whether intervention is motivated by humanitarian intent to stop a domestic mass atrocity. Clinton argued American intervention in Kosovo, despite the lack of UNSC imprimatur, had not undermined the UN system's ability to regulate the use of military force but rather enhanced UN credibility because "by acting as we did, we helped to vindicate the principles and purposes of the UN Charter".¹⁵² Clinton cast a wide net for cases he believed should be classified as humanitarian interventions to stop mass atrocities, placing Bosnia, Sierra Leone and East Timor alongside Kosovo. Clinton notably omitted Iraq and Somalia, however, even though he and President Bush used similar 'atrocity prevention' language when talking about those interventions:

The second resolution I hope [the UNGA will] make today is to strengthen the capacity of the international community to prevent and, whenever possible,

150. William J. Clinton, *Interview With Yevgeniy Kiselev of Russia's NTV in Cologne*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 20, 1999.

151. Kohut, *Muted and Mixed Public Response to Peace in Kosovo*.

152. William J. Clinton, *Remarks to the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 21, 1999.

to stop outbreaks of mass killing and displacement. This requires, as we all know, shared responsibility, like the one West African nations accepted when they acted to restore peace in Sierra Leone; the one 19 democracies in NATO embraced to stop ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo; the one Asian and Pacific nations have now assumed in East Timor. . . .¹⁵³

In the lead-up to the 2000 presidential election campaign, in which Clinton was not able to participate, the Democrat candidate and Clinton's Vice-President Al Gore, defended Clinton's Kosovo intervention policy and pledged to continue it. Republican candidate George W. Bush—George H.W. Bush's son—promised he would withdraw American troops from Kosovo “at some point” once America's “European friends become peacekeepers”.¹⁵⁴ Although he talked about the need for a “well-defined” exit strategy before America committed troops to military operations, W.Bush did not elaborate on his exit strategy (if any) for Kosovo.¹⁵⁵

W.Bush won the election and took up office in January 2001 with almost 7000 US troops remaining in Kosovo. He never implemented his promise to bring *Joint Guardian* troops home. Perhaps preoccupied with other national security and foreign policy concerns arising from the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, Bush repeatedly renewed US troop participation in *Joint Guardian* during his two-term presidency, never once discussing any plans for withdrawal. That said, when arguing for UN support for a new war in Iraq, W.Bush used Kosovo as an example of the international community failing to act to stop a “common danger” with military force.¹⁵⁶ Congress also repeatedly approved funding for the Kosovo intervention granting US troops essentially the same mandate with which Clinton charged them in 1999. President Obama also continued America's participation in *Joint Guardian* and like Presidents W.Bush and Clinton before him, used Kosovo as an example of where military force was justifiably used to end a humanitarian crisis.

153. Ibid.

154. George W. Bush, *Presidential Debate in Winston-Salem, North Carolina*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 11, 2000.

155. George W. Bush, *The 2000 Campaign; Exchanges between the Candidates in the Third Presidential Debate*, October 18, 2000.

156. George W. Bush, *The President's Radio Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 15, 2003; George W. Bush, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso of Portugal, President Jose Maria Aznar of Spain, and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom in the Azores, Portugal*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 16, 2003.

7.7 Conclusion

Clinton's intervention in Kosovo was the second humanitarian intervention he launched and the fourth humanitarian intervention over which we exercised responsibility during his eight-year presidential term. Clinton's exit strategy justifications in Kosovo occurred at the zenith of American's post-Cold War humanitarian intervention efforts. Although Clinton did not come to the office with a flair for foreign policy, it is fair to say by the time of *Allied Force* Clinton had experience navigating US foreign policy normative expectations, including crafting and implementing exit strategies for more humanitarian interventions than any other president in US history.

Clinton's exit strategy justifications were front and centre of his Kosovo intervention rhetoric. Clinton took his own PDD-25 directive seriously and was concerned any intervention must have a rapidly implementable exit strategy. This preoccupation with exit strategy shaped the operational limitations Clinton placed on the intervention as much as any concern about avoiding American casualties. At the same time, however, Clinton could not escape the constraining effects of other normative expectations for American foreign policy behaviour in humanitarian intervention. In particular, Clinton's strategic narrative was affected by his view an exclusively aerial operation would not deliver sustainable peace or the political transformation required to prevent a resurgence in war or genocidal violence. Clinton argued America's moral responsibility extended to delivering political transformation, making political transformation an indispensable criterion for success.

In Kosovo, Clinton's framing of US moral responsibility in terms of stopping atrocities and defeating a gross evil made anything short of victory unthinkable. 'Doing the right thing' by 'finishing the job' also helped Clinton excuse civilian casualties and justified widening the range of targets during the bombing campaign, ignoring opposition from the UNSC and finally introducing ground forces into Kosovo after they had been ruled out, without committing to an exit timetable. With such high moral stakes and victory defined as establishing peace and nation-building, a quick

exit was not viable. At the same time, the burden of being a moral actor was also high; the most direct route to success can be constrained by the duty to behave morally.

What the US experience in Kosovo demonstrates, therefore, are some of the practical and rhetorical difficulties of crafting and implementing an exit strategy in humanitarian interventions. Presidents do not necessarily struggle to implement exit strategies because of mission creep per se, but because of domestic and international expectations of America's moral responsibilities in the face of humanitarian crisis affect what victory looks like in humanitarian interventions. Victory also 'proves' the moral righteousness of intervention—an important consideration for a domestic American audience and establishing international legitimacy. Thus deciding to withdraw troops without first achieving victory is beyond the realm of imagined possibilities for American presidents. And while appeals to morality can be used to justify bearing greater costs for longer, operational approaches like air campaigns prioritising a quick exit and low risk to American troops may only deliver a fragile victory because they fail to address the root causes of the humanitarian crises. What Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon call the "bomb-and-pray" strategy may not stop the humanitarian crisis at all.¹⁵⁷ The approach may even exacerbate the crisis, as it did in Kosovo, especially if atrocity perpetrators have a higher-than-expected tolerance for coercion.¹⁵⁸ In this sense Milosevic had much in common with Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and General Aidid in Somalia, and likely future perpetrators of human rights abuses in other places around the world.

Jus ex bello theorists have identified instances where the most just course of action in a military operation might require troops withdrawing before they achieve their initial objectives, but it is difficult to see how these ideas can be readily assimilated within American ideas about using armed force. Kosovo in particular highlights how concerns about 'victory', 'winning' and 'success' remain integral to presidential justifications for humanitarian intervention exit strategies, even if the motivations

157. Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 160.

158. Allen and Vincent, "Bombing to Bargain? The Air War for Kosovo."

for intervention and its moral calculus are different from other types of military operations.

American experience in Kosovo also shows us why Adam Siegel's effort to deconstruct the idea of 'mission creep'¹⁵⁹ is particularly important for understanding the difficulties involved in ending humanitarian interventions but not wholly explanatory. The changes Clinton initiated in the Kosovo intervention displayed elements of task accretion and arguably mission leap, but simply identifying the nature of the change does not explain how or why it occurred. By looking at Clinton's discourse about exit, victory and moral responsibility over the course of the intervention, I argue we can better understand the role of normative expectations in Clinton's public justifications. These normative expectations constrained Clinton's strategic narrative and ultimately affected his ability to justifiably withdraw troops from Kosovo as initially promised.

Although US forces have been progressively withdrawn from Kosovo, the US maintains a military presence there today, operating under essentially the same mandate Clinton granted them when they were first deployed. The exit strategy that was contingent on 'finishing the job' of fulfilling America's responsibility to bring self-sustaining democratic peace and stability to the Balkans is yet to be realised. Progress has been made but significant challenges remain. Even though the Kosovo Assembly declared Kosovo a country independent of Serbia in 2008 it has not been universally recognised as such by the UNGA or a number of countries that are not US allies.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless President Clinton's appeal for the principle he applied in Kosovo to be adopted more generally by the international community has gained traction.¹⁶¹ The Kosovo intervention prompted a discussion in the UN about formally recognising limitations to state sovereignty by broadening the definition of what constitutes a

159. Siegel, "Mission Creep or Mission Misunderstood?"

160. Jason Franks and Oliver P. Richmond, "Coopting Liberal Peace-Building: Untying the Gordian Knot in Kosovo," *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 1 (2008): 81–103; Doug Bandow, "US Policy toward Kosovo: Sowing the Wind in the Balkans, Reaping the Whirlwind in the Caucasus," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2009): 15–30.

161. Bernard Kouchner, "The Right to Intervention: Codified in Kosovo," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 4–7.

threat to international peace and security.¹⁶² The Canadian government convened the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) whose members proposed a new concept of R2P. Although the US was at the forefront of advocating for this principle, the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 shifted the focus of the new President George W. Bush and the American people to more traditional wars of self-defence and retribution. Ten years later the Arab Spring occurred and another President would have cause to revisit these questions in Libya.

162. Fernando R Tesón, “Kosovo: A Powerful Precedent for the Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention,” *Amsterdam Law Forum* 1, no. 2 (2009): 42–48.

CHAPTER 8

Dawning Odyssey in Libya (2011)

So we actually executed this plan as well as I could have expected: We got a UN mandate, we built a coalition, it cost us \$1 billion—which, when it comes to military operations, is very cheap. We averted large-scale civilian casualties, we prevented what almost surely would have been a prolonged and bloody civil conflict. And despite all that, Libya is a mess.

Barack Obama
Interview with *The Atlantic*, 16 April 2016

8.1 Introduction

Unfortunately, President Clinton's desire for his Kosovo intervention to usher in a millennium of global peace did not come to pass. George W. Bush took office in 2001 and within the first year of his presidency launched the 'War on Terror', involving invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as military operations elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. The War on Terror dominated foreign policy public discourse for Bush's eight years in office and prompted considerable domestic debate about victory, mission creep and exit strategies. Barack Obama succeeded Bush in 2009, taking over responsibility for the American operations in Afghanistan and Iraq,

which by this stage were set to become the longest wars in American history, costing trillions of dollars and thousands of American soldiers' lives, as well as causing tens of thousands of civilian casualties.

Two years into his presidency, and soon after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama launched a humanitarian intervention in Libya. Obama's Libyan operation had much in common with the other humanitarian interventions I explore in this thesis, despite occurring more than a decade after Kosovo. Like Kosovo, Somalia and Iraq, Obama also justified intervention to prevent mass atrocities and protect vulnerable populations against evil leaders. Obama, however, incorporated emerging R2P principles in his justifications for resorting to military force allowing him to focus squarely on atrocity prevention as the purpose of intervention.

Like America's previous interventions, Obama began with an exclusively aerial operation. Unlike those previous interventions, however, Obama did not follow-up his air campaign in Libya with ground troops. Instead, Obama chose a partial transition exit to NATO allies, followed by operational disengagement. Although in earlier interventions US presidents had called (to varying degrees) for evil leaders to be neutralised or removed, Obama's intervention contributed directly to Libyan President Muamar Qaddafi's death, enabling rebel forces to take control of the government. Obama argued Qaddafi's death and installation of the new government marked mission success, which justified him implementing his exit strategy, ending the intervention.

In contrast to his predecessors, although information published well after the intervention revealed his private scepticism of the effectiveness of the limited intervention response, throughout the Libyan intervention Obama publicly defended his decision to restrict America's humanitarian intervention to policing a NFZ over Libya. This approach was consistent with the remit of the UNSC authorisation and Obama argued it was also consistent with America's moral responsibility to protect the Libyan people from impending mass atrocities. Obama argued policing a no-fly zone

(NFZ) and removing Qaddafi was sufficient to discharge this responsibility, resisting normative expectations to deliver wider political transformation in Libya. Obama avoided mission creep and withdrew troops when they achieved their stated objectives. As time progressed, however, domestic and international assessments shifted to considering the intervention a failure because the US did not fulfil its wider moral obligations to see democratic transformation in Libya. Ironically, perhaps, these later critiques rested on claims America had not engaged in sufficient nation-building and ended its intervention too soon. Obama later acknowledged this as a shortcoming of his approach.

Despite Obama's effort to shape a strategic narrative to deliver a successful intervention that discharged moral responsibility and allowed for rapid withdrawal, I argue Obama's exit strategy justifications were ultimately undermined by his failure to ensure the intervention adhered to American foreign policy expectations in responding to humanitarian crises. I argue Libya shows that in humanitarian interventions, implementing an exit strategy alone is not enough. It is important but if other normative expectations of intervention are unmet, the intervention can still be judged as unsuccessful or a mistake.

I begin this chapter with an overview of the rhetorical context in which the Libyan intervention occurred. Although a number of foreign policy developments occurred between Kosovo and Libya, I focus on four issues I believe had the greatest bearing on Obama's exit strategy justifications in Libya: on the domestic front, there were debates about exit strategy and mission creep in America's Afghanistan and Iraq wars, as well as Obama and other key members of his administration's long-standing personal interest in genocide/mass atrocity prevention; in the international arena, there were debates about applying R2P in emerging and ongoing civil conflicts, as well as the Arab Spring promoting violence in Libya.

Next I explore how Obama talked about exit strategies prior to his Libyan intervention. I note while Obama publicly argued America had a moral responsibility to use military

force to stop what he feared was an impending mass atrocity, he was also concerned to distinguish his intervention to those of his predecessors by having an implementable exit strategy. Having recently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and given his election promise to end the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, justifying a new military operation required a convincing exit strategy. Obama argued for a local transition exit strategy. Leaving political transformation in the hands of the Libyan people rather than reliant on continued American troop presence ostensibly made victory easier for America because its obligation was restricted to stopping the initial, imminent atrocity. Stopping the atrocity was not, however, a straightforward proposition.

When American troops eventually did intervene in Operation *Odyssey Dawn*, Obama changed from a local transition exit to a NATO transition exit because this was faster to implement, while still arguing America had discharged its moral responsibilities to protect the Libyan people. Obama implemented this exit strategy but American troops remained heavily engaged in the intervention, requiring a new operational disengagement exit strategy from Operation *Unified Protector*.

Obama framed President Qaddafi's assassination as the ultimate marker of mission success claiming this event removed the risk of human rights atrocities and justified the withdrawal of American troops. I conclude this chapter by showing how subsequent political instability in Libya contributed to domestic and international criticism of Obama's intervention for withdrawing troops too soon, before America had adequately discharged its moral responsibility to transform Libya into a stable democracy. Obama's decision to emphasise the assured exit normative expectations of intervention compromised his ability to satisfy other normative expectations regarding America fulfilling its moral responsibility and winning this military operation.

8.2 The rhetorical context

8.2.1 Obama's promise to end America's wars and prevent genocide

From 2001–2011 public debates about the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and the wider War on Terror crowded out discussion of America possibly responding militarily to other conflicts or trouble-spots around the world. Among the foreign policy goals Obama set for his administration was ending the Iraq war and beginning to implement an exit strategy in the Afghanistan war.¹ These goals were part of Obama's electoral platform and reflected domestic debates about the wars' progress, specifically debates about victory, the wisdom of nation-building, exit strategies and mission creep.² Thousands of American casualties, imprecise mission objectives and inability to deliver decisive victory revived talk of quagmires and possible defeat.³ The costs of these two engagements and their resistance to rapid resolution also contributed to the American public's reluctance to support deploying soldiers to other military operations. Obama argued implementing an exit strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan was part of America's "responsibility" to follow "the right path, not just the easy path", to build a more democratic and peaceful world order.⁴

In addition to commitments to end the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, Obama also pledged to renew America's focus on international diplomacy and preventing mass atrocities. On the fifteenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide on 7 April 2009, fewer than three months into his first term, Obama committed "to act when faced with

1. David Osborne and Jerome Sarkey, "Obama's Exit Strategy for Afghanistan," *The Independent* (London), March 27, 2009,

2. Edelstein, "Exit Lessons"; Lucy Morgan Edwards, "How the 'Entry' Defines the 'Exit': Contradictions between the Political and Military Strategies Adopted in 2001 and How They Have Deleteriously Affected the Longer-Term Possibilities for Stabilisation in Afghanistan," *Conflict, Security & Development* 14, no. 5 (October 20, 2014): 593–619.

3. Porter, "The Third Option in Iraq: A Responsible Exit Strategy," See for example; Marc Jason Gilbert, "Fatal Amnesia: American Nation-Building in Viet Nam, Afghanistan and Iraq," *Journal of Third World Studies* 21, no. 2 (2004): 13–43; Richard Ponzio and Christopher Freeman, "Conclusion: Rethinking Statebuilding in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (January 2007): 173–84, accessed February 20, 2019.

4. Barack Obama, *Remarks in Cairo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 4, 2009.

genocide and to work with partners around the world to prevent future atrocities”.⁵ A fortnight later, Obama committed to “doing everything we can to prevent and end atrocities like those that took place in Rwanda [and] those taking place in Darfur”.⁶ In his speech before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 23 September 2009, President Obama used the word ‘responsibility’ more than a dozen times, referring to the global responsibility to stop genocide and mass atrocities. Although he recognised the failures of America’s history of promoting democracy, Obama argued his administration would “never waver” in its efforts to support democratic reform.⁷ Obama also appointed senior advisers and administration officials strongly critical of America’s failings in Srebrenica and Rwanda, and personally committed to a more interventionist position on atrocity prevention. Obama appointed Susan Rice (former Clinton national security advisor on Africa during the Rwandan genocide) his UN Ambassador, Samantha Power (author of *A Problem from Hell*, which was critical of the US response to the Srebrenica massacre) his Special Assistant to the President on the NSC, and Hillary Clinton (First Lady during and strong supporter of America’s Bosnian and Kosovo interventions) as Secretary of State.

Despite not yet delivering on his promised withdrawals from Afghanistan and Iraq, and in fact preparing for a ‘surge’ of a further 70,000 troops to Afghanistan, Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2009. While previous recipients were known for their commitments to non-violence, Obama used his acceptance speech to connect the use of force with America’s responsibility to prevent atrocities. Obama used just war language to argue “war is sometimes necessary” to resolve international problems. He labelled American actions in WWII, the Korean War, Bosnia and Kosovo as examples of American “just wars” fought to promote “freedom and democracy” around the world. This ‘Obama doctrine’ did not deviate significantly from those of his predecessors, having much in common with the justifications previous

5. Barack Obama, *Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the Genocide in Rwanda*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 7, 2009.

6. Barack Obama, *Remarks at the Holocaust Days of Remembrance Ceremony*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 23, 2009.

7. Barack Obama, *Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 23, 2009.

presidents had used to justify American military interventions, characterising them as moral endeavours pursued by a benevolent superpower, consistent with American exceptionalism tropes:

Whatever mistakes we have made, the plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. . . We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest. . .⁸

Just as every post-Cold War president before him—Republican and Democrat—Obama defended using military force to stop or prevent mass atrocities against civilian populations arguing “force can be justified on humanitarian grounds”.⁹ Although Obama did not view traditional military responses as a panacea for every threat to America’s interests, he embraced the drone program, authorising more drone attacks in his first year of office than President George W. Bush authorised during his entire 8-year term.¹⁰ By the time he left office, Obama had also deployed US special forces teams to 133 countries.¹¹

Obama’s foreign policy approach can arguably be explained by his self-confessed affinity for Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian who attempted to reconcile ideas of a divinely just God with the earthly *realpolitik* human impulses and frailties.¹² Obama explained to David Brooks that the political lesson he drew from Niebuhr’s work was the need to balance two “irreconcilable truths”¹³ about war as an evil but also sometimes necessary:

I take away the compelling idea that there’s serious evil in the world and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn’t use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction.¹⁴

8. Barack Obama, *Remarks on Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, December 10, 2009.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Jessica Purkiss and Jack Serle, “Obama’s Covert Drone War in Numbers: Ten Times More Strikes than Bush,” January 17, 2017, accessed February 18, 2019.

11. Edward Delman, “Has Obama Started More Wars Than He’s Ended?,” March 30, 2016, accessed February 18, 2019.

12. David Wellman, “Niebuhrian Realism and the Formation of US Foreign Policy,” *Political Theology* 10, no. 1 (2009): 11–29.

13. Obama, *Remarks on Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo*.

14. David Brooks, “Obama, Gospel and Verse,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007, A25;

Following the recommendations of his Genocide Prevention Task Force, in 2010 Obama created a position within the White House administration specifically focused on preventing and responding to war crimes and other mass atrocities. In a statement on the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica on 11 July 2010, Obama noted America had a “sacred duty” to remember the atrocities and “to prevent such atrocities from happening again. . . we have a responsibility to future generations all over the globe to agree that we must refuse to be bystanders to evil; whenever and wherever it occurs, we must be prepared to stand up for human dignity.”¹⁵ Obama’s commitment to fight just wars, find exit strategies for Iraq and Afghanistan, and stop mass atrocities were not isolated pronouncements but they did become particularly relevant when a wave of revolutionary action began in 2010 in North Africa and the Middle East and swept across that region the following year.

8.2.2 Emerging R2P ideas and practice

Clinton and his NATO counterparts viewed the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo as a successful operation, a point I noted in Chapter 7. Criticism of the intervention for bypassing traditional UNSC approval mechanisms, however, came from many quarters, including from those governments that otherwise supported taking a strong stance against mass atrocities and gross violations of human rights and were troubled by the failure to respond more effectively to the Rwandan genocide.¹⁶ In 2001 the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) released its report introducing the concept of R2P, charting a revised relationship between the idea of state sovereignty as inviolable and the responsibility states have to protect

David Brooks, “Obama’s Christian Realism,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2009. See also; Raymond Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 249; For more on the theologian’s influence on Obama’s foreign policy see: R Ward Holder and Peter B. Josephson, *The Irony of Barack Obama: Barack Obama, Reinhold Niebuhr and the Problem of Christian Statecraft* (ebook: Ashgate Publishing, 2012).

15. Barack Obama, *Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, July 11, 2010.

16. Ramesh Thakur, “The Responsibility to Protect Turns 15,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 2 (2016): 415–34.

their citizens from atrocities.¹⁷ R2P gained traction in public discourse, finding a champion in then-UNSG Boutros Boutros-Ghali and being endorsed by the UNGA in 2005. The African Union (AU) also included R2P principles in its founding charter as well as in its 2005 “Ezulwini Consensus”.¹⁸

Like all policy frameworks, those attempting to operationalise R2P have confronted challenges, particularly with respect to how R2P principles function in the context of natural disasters (such as Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar), insurgencies (for example in Syria) and anti-terrorism responses (for example regarding the LTTE in Sri Lanka or ISIS in Iraq and Syria).¹⁹ The international community also could not agree to activate R2P to the point of authorising humanitarian intervention in Darfur despite the then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell labelling the atrocities committed during the civil conflict “genocide” in 2004.²⁰ Indeed the UNSC did not even discuss the humanitarian crisis in Darfur until 2004, 13 months after the conflict began.²¹ The R2P implementation challenges at the international level were overcome to a certain extent at the regional level. The UK government, for example, used R2P principles to support its intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000.²² Relatively successful uses of R2P also occurred in Kenya (2007-2008), Guinea (2009-2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010) and Côte d’Ivoire (2010-2011).²³

17. In his review of the early history of state sovereignty Luke Glanville argues humanitarian intervention was one of the inherent ‘rights’ of sovereign power: Luke Glanville, *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: A New History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), For more detail see Section 2.2 in this thesis.

18. African Union, *The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: The Ezulwini Consensus* (Addis Ababa: African Union Executive Council 7th Extraordinary Session, March 7, 2005).

19. Alex J. Bellamy and Edward C. Luck, *The Responsibility to Protect: From Promise to Practice* (Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, December 5, 2018).

20. Touko Piiparinen, “The Lessons of Darfur for the Future of Humanitarian Intervention,” *Global Governance* 13, no. 3 (2007): 366.

21. John Borton and John Eriksson, *Assessment of the Impact and Influence of Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda* (Aarhus: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark, 2004).

22. Andrew M. Dorman, *Blair’s Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

23. Bellamy and Luck, *The Responsibility to Protect*, Chapter 7.

8.2.3 The Arab Spring reaches Libya

The Arab Spring began on 10 December 2010, comprising a series of revolutionary movements, coups and anti-government protests—violent and non-violent—across the Middle East and North Africa. The phenomena began in Tunisia resulting in the overthrow of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. Protests soon spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria where governments frequently responded with violent repression. Other countries affected by the Arab Spring movement to varying extents included Morocco, Bahrain, Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan, Djibouti, Mauritania, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara.

The US government's relationship with a number of the countries in which the Arab Spring took place is torrid and its relationship with the Libyan government particularly so. By 2011 Libya's President, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi had led the country for 41 years. In the early days of Qaddafi's presidency, America opposed his decision to nationalise Libya's oil production in the 1970s. The US also bombed Libya in response to what it considered was the Qaddafi government's support for terrorism, including the 1988 attack by Libyan intelligence operatives on a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland. The US began normalising relations with Qaddafi in 2003 after the Libyan President agreed to dismantle his nuclear and chemical weapons programs. In 2006 President George W. Bush removed Libya from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and began negotiating a bilateral trade deal.

Libyans were inspired by the Arab Spring and protests against local, regional and national governments began on 2 February 2011, although there were smaller gatherings the previous month. Protest organisers dubbed 17 February 2011 a "Day of Rage" as Libyans took to the streets of Benghazi and other major cities around the world to directly challenge Qaddafi's rule. The protests were violently repressed with the government using helicopter gunships and snipers to attack protesters and funeral processions for those who were killed. Human Rights Watch, the Italian

government and the UN Human Rights Commission estimated government forces killed between 233 and 1000 people in February 2011. Opposition protesters were also responsible for arbitrary detentions and executing security forces as well as other foreign nationals—mostly black African migrant workers—accused of being government mercenaries.²⁴ The opposition included former army leaders and members of the Qaddafi government, and rapidly coalesced into a rebellion to overthrow the current government. By 20 February 2011 fighting in Tripoli resulted in a significant part of the city controlled by anti-government forces. The Libyan government also lost control of the nation's second-biggest city Benghazi, which was also the site of a major port.²⁵

8.3 Talking about exit before intervention

The tensions resulting in the outburst of Arab Spring pro-democracy activity had simmered for decades but they nevertheless caught the Obama Administration largely by surprise. Once the US government belatedly acknowledged the social movement's significance in early 2011 and the political transformation it was delivering, Obama was philosophically and politically committed to supporting it, including the revolutionary movement in Libya. The Libyan government's efforts to halt the uprising grew increasingly violent throughout February 2011 and Obama became convinced a mass atrocity was imminent. Thus Obama shifted his language from condemning the violence to talking about American military preparations for stopping it.

In late February and early March 2011, Obama reprised the language of his earlier policy speeches regarding America's responsibility to stop widespread human rights abuses with military force if necessary. In arguing for humanitarian intervention, however, Obama did not explain specifically how such an operation would end.

24. Jason Koutsoukis, "Black Men Mistaken for Mercenaries," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6, 2011,

25. Paul D. Williams, "Briefing: The Road to Humanitarian War in Libya," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 3 (2011): 248–59.

Instead he framed potential intervention as America's moral responsibility to protect the Libyan people. This duty could be discharged in an aerial operation, which implied the preferred exit strategy would be operational disengagement. Obama also used the *evil leader* trope to blame Qaddafi for the human rights atrocities, and while he did not argue specifically for America precipitating regime change, he did make it clear—as President Bush and President Clinton did in northern Iraq—that Qaddafi's resignation would ensure the human rights atrocities would be ended once and for all.

On 22 February 2011, following the resignation of a number of senior military and government officials who began forming an alternative government, Qaddafi gave a televised address in which he referred to the Libyan protesters as “rats and cockroaches” and vowed to “crush” the revolt. A number of major Libyan cities had already fallen to opposition forces.²⁶ The following day, Obama responded to Qaddafi's comments, denouncing the “suffering and bloodshed”, “violence” and “suppression” of protesters as “outrageous and unacceptable”.²⁷ Obama labelled the Libyan government's actions a violation of international norms and “every standard of common decency”.²⁸ Obama framed his criticism in terms of the Libyan government's “responsibility” to “refrain from violence... and to respect the rights of its people”.²⁹ Obama also spoke of the international community's “responsibility” to hold the perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions.³⁰ Obama committed America to “stand up for freedom, stand up for justice and stand up for the dignity of all people” in Libya during this “time of transition”, using R2P and *atrocities prevention* rhetorical frames to lay the groundwork for justifiable humanitarian intervention in Libya, to make Libyan leaders “face the cost of continued violations of human rights”.³¹

26. For an analysis of why military forces defected so readily see: Florence Gaub, “The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-Proofing and Repression,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2 (2013): 221–44.

27. Barack Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 23, 2011.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

Other industrialised democracies and American allies joined Obama in condemning Qaddafi's comments and the Libyan government's actions, with almost all leaders using the language of atrocity prevention in their statements. UK Prime Minister David Cameron called the Libyan government's actions "appalling and unacceptable", saying it would face "consequences", with "no options" ruled out if internal repression in Libya continued.³² German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Qaddafi's comments were "very, very appalling" and "very, very frightening, especially because he virtually declared war on his own people".³³ French President Nicholas Sarkozy called on the EU to impose sanctions on Libya because "the international community cannot remain a spectator" and those responsible for the violence "should assume the consequences of their actions".³⁴

United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Ban Ki-Moon also condemned the "gross violations of human rights" in Libya using *atrocities* and *vulnerable people* frames to detail "allegations of indiscriminate killings, arbitrary arrests, the shooting of peaceful demonstrators and the detention and torture of the opposition and the use of foreign mercenaries", singling out reports of women and children among the victims.³⁵ The UNSG also used R2P frames to describe both the Libyan government's and international community's duty to "punish" those who were "brutally shedding the blood of innocents" and to protect the Libyan people from "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity".³⁶ From this early stage we can see the international community framing the Libyan crisis as a matter of international concern not just because it posed a threat to peace and security but because it was characterised by gross violations of human rights and systemic violence against civilians that characterised it.

On 26 February 2011, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution

32. BBC News, ed., "Timeline: UK's Road to Action in Libya," April 15, 2011.

33. Davis Brown, "Introduction: The Just War Tradition and the Continuing Challenges to World Public Order," *Journal of Military Ethics* 10, no. 3 (2011): 125–32.

34. Al Jazeera, "France Urges EU Sanctions on Libya," *Al Jazeera News*, February 23, 2011,

35. Ban Ki-Moon, "Remarks to Security Council Meeting on Peace and Security in Africa," *United Nations Security Council*, February 25, 2011,

36. *Ibid.*

1970 expressly referring to the Libyan government's "responsibility to protect its population" and authorising military intervention to enforce this responsibility. The Resolution imposed an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze as well as referred individuals in the Libyan government to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for possible prosecution.³⁷ Notwithstanding the irony of this resolution passed by five UNSC members who themselves refused to subject their own citizens to the ICC jurisdiction, the brief debate on the resolution featured denunciations of atrocities and incitement to violence in Libya. South Africa's representative said the resolution sent "a clear and unambiguous message to the Libyan authorities to end the carnage against their people"³⁸ and Russia called on the Libyan government to "show restraint and observe the norms of international civil and human rights law".³⁹ All UNSC members stated both the resolution and Chapter VII action it authorised were necessary to protect civilians and rapidly end the Libyan conflict. Only China and India did not refer to the violence as a violation of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law. In her contribution to the UNSC debate on Resolution 1970, Obama's UN Ambassador, Susan Rice, took her criticism of Libya further than her colleagues stating the "mass violence" meant Qaddafi had "lost the legitimacy to rule and needs to do what is right for his country by leaving now".⁴⁰ Obama's criticism of the Libyan government amplified his Ambassador's views.⁴¹ Obama moved away from his earlier statements that "it is up to the Libyan people to decide their future" to spearheading calls for Qaddafi's immediate resignation:

[W]hen a leader's only means of staying in power is to use mass violence against his own people, he has lost the legitimacy to rule and needs to do what is right for his country by leaving now... Qaddafi's government must be held accountable.⁴²

The UNSC resolution provided international legitimacy to buttress Obama's moral justifications for military intervention. Throughout March 2011 Obama's rhetoric

37. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1970*, S/Res/1970(2011), February 26, 2011.

38. United Nations Security Council, *6491st meeting transcript*, S/PV.6491, February 26, 2011.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Barack Obama, *Press Release - Readout of President Obama's Call with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, February 26, 2011.

42. *Ibid.*

was steeped in references to normative expectations of humanitarian intervention as examples of America defeating evil and preventing atrocities. On 3 March 2011, for example, in a press conference at the White House, Obama spoke about plans for America to “lead an international effort to deter further violence” in Libya framing objectives in R2P and regime change terms:

The violence must stop. Muammar Qaddafi has lost the legitimacy to lead, and he must leave. Those who perpetrate violence against the Libyan people will be held accountable. And the aspirations of the Libyan people for freedom, democracy, and dignity must be met.⁴³

In this press conference, Obama called for the Libyan president’s resignation three times but when questioned about what concrete steps, if any, America would take to precipitate regime change, Obama refused to be drawn, only stating the US would respond to a humanitarian emergency:

So what I want to make sure of is that the United States has full capacity to act potentially rapidly if the situation deteriorated in such a way that you had a humanitarian crisis on our hands or a situation in which civilians were—defenceless civilians were finding themselves trapped and in great danger.⁴⁴

Two days after Obama’s comments, the National Transitional Council–Libya (NTC) was formally established and held its first meeting in Benghazi. The NTC issued a statement in which it declared itself to be the “sole representative of all Libya”, including at the international political level, where its members assumed to speak for the Libyan state at all its foreign embassies, the UN and Arab League. In its statement the NTC called on the international community “to fulfil its obligations to protect the Libyan people from any further genocide and crimes against humanity”, however, the Council asked those responsibilities be met “without any direct military intervention on Libya soil”, although it did not specify how this could be achieved.⁴⁵

Qaddafi’s government did not fall to the NTC but the violence continued in Libya. Obama continued calling for Qaddafi’s resignation and although he did not argue for

43. Barack Obama, *The President’s News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 3, 2011.

44. Ibid.

45. “National Transitional Council – Libya,” November 12, 2018.

a military presence to achieve this outcome, Obama did emphasise America's role in having:

mobilised the international community through the United Nations so that across the board we are slowly tightening the noose on Qaddafi. . . . And we are going to be in contact with the opposition, as well as in consultation with the international community to try to achieve the goal of Mr Qaddafi being removed from power.⁴⁶

Obama also distinguished these regime change efforts from plans for humanitarian intervention to defend the Libyan people. Obama used analogical bridging to draw parallels between the crisis in Libya and earlier situations in Bosnia and Rwanda, where mass atrocities were not stopped quickly. Obama reminded Americans of their “obligation to do what it can do to prevent a repeat of something like what occurred in the Balkans in the nineties [and] what occurred in Rwanda” and was on alert, “maintaining 24-hour surveillance of the situation there. . . to have some sort of alert system if you start seeing defenceless civilians who being “massacred by Qaddafi’s forces”.⁴⁷ To underscore the immediacy of the threat, Obama used the image of Qaddafi’s forces “going door to door hunting for people”,⁴⁸ which referenced images of pogroms and rapidly escalating community violence in places like Rwanda and during the WWII Holocaust. By focusing on the immediacy and seriousness of the atrocities Obama also made the case for a new military operation for American soldiers despite their continued participation in two other wars in which America was already embroiled and which Obama had not yet ended.

The American public expressed conflicting views about possible humanitarian intervention in Libya. Pew polls conducted on 10–13 March 2011 showed only 27 percent of Americans thought their government had a “responsibility to do something about the fighting in Libya”. By contrast, a much larger proportion had felt the same way about the Kosovo crisis (47 percent). Those surveyed preferred diplomatic action and sanctions, with opinion split on military action such as enforcing a NFZ (44 percent

46. Barack Obama, *The President's News Conference*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 11, 2011.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

in favour, 45 percent opposed), but decidedly against a more intensive bombing campaign (16 percent in favour, 77 percent opposed). Americans were also very wary of sending ground troops into Libya with only 13 percent in favour and 82 percent opposed. And yet, when asked about the benefit of using military force in Libya, only 26 percent of those surveyed opposed using force at all, with one-third saying using force would demonstrate America's commitment to democracy. One in five supported regime change with the same proportion saying America had a "moral obligation to stop the violence". The dominant reason for *not* using force in Libya was the belief American soldiers were "already overcommitted".⁴⁹ Such mixed views show how the conflicting expectations of humanitarian interventions permeate public debate as much as the president's rhetoric. Americans wanted to use military force to 'do something' about Libya but they also wanted to know this action would not only succeed and that US troops would not be stuck in a quagmire.

In articulating what it meant to 'do something' Obama began constructing the moral responsibility of humanitarian intervention as protecting civilians and facilitating political transformation, stating he saw America's response to Libya as part of a bigger plan for "the entire region. . . to reform itself both politically and economically".⁵⁰ Obama acknowledged humanitarian intervention meant picking a side in the Libyan conflict—in this case, the NTC—and creating the conditions to ensure it won:

Part of what we're going to be wanting to do is to change the balance not just militarily inside of Libya, but also to change the balance in terms of those who are around Qaddafi and are thinking about what their future prospects are if they continue down the course that they're on. . . And we are going to be in contact with the opposition, as well as in consultation with the international community, to try to achieve the goal of Mr Qaddafi being removed from power.⁵¹

The above comment encapsulates Obama's view of how humanitarian intervention in Libya would pan out, including his exit strategy: US action would help remove

49. The Pew Research Centre for People and the Press, ed., *Which of the following would be the best argument for not using military force in Libya?*, ed. The Pew Research Centre for People and the Press, March 13, 2011; Andrew Kohut et al., *Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya* (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, March 14, 2011).

50. Obama, *The President's News Conference*.

51. *Ibid.*

Qaddafi, which would stop human rights atrocities and prevent them from recurring; America could make a quick operational exit made possible through transitioning to local authorities who would take responsibility for the aftermath of the crisis and ensure US troops were not embroiled in a quagmire. Consequently, even though humanitarian intervention involved sending troops into a “potentially hostile situation [where] there are risks involved and there are consequences”,⁵² Obama argued he would limit intervention in a way that was “helpful on the ground and also sustainable”, ultimately ensuring victory.⁵³

Despite not explicitly outlining an exit strategy for US troops Obama’s rhetoric during this phase nevertheless reveals the conditions under which exit would occur demonstrating how Obama tried to limit American moral responsibilities in a way that made the requisite level of victory for exit clear, bounded and achievable. Troops would only be responsible for stopping the atrocities against the Libyan people. While Obama argued Qaddafi was the ‘root cause’ of the atrocities, this would not be the purpose of American military intervention, rather a political outcome achieved through parallel means that would nevertheless ensure America’s humanitarian intervention was successful over the longer term.⁵⁴ With a new government in power, notwithstanding their dubious human rights credentials, American troops could withdraw knowing they had successfully fulfilled their moral obligations to protect the Libyan people.

8.4 Justifying exit in *Odyssey Dawn*

In the weeks during and immediately after the Pew poll asking Americans’ opinion regarding possible humanitarian intervention in Libya, Libyan government forces used their superior military capabilities to gradually regain control of cities fallen to

52. Obama, *The President’s News Conference*.

53. Ibid.

54. Stephen R. Weissman, “Presidential Deception in Foreign Policy Making: Military Intervention in Libya 2011,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2016): 674–75.

the rebels. Resolution 1970 and the accompanying international diplomatic pressure did not appear to have affected Qaddafi's actions. The Gulf Cooperation Council, the OIC, the EU, the G8 and the LAS passed resolutions and issued statements calling for governments to enforce a NFZ over Libya and the Arab League agreed on 12 March 2011 to request the UNSC consider authorising a NFZ over Libya. On 15 March 2011 the Libyan government shelled the city of Ajdabiya and thousands of people fled their homes to Benghazi. Members of the Obama Administration feared the Libyan armed forces would next turn their attention to Benghazi with the lives of more than 700,000 potentially in imminent danger.⁵⁵

On 15 and 17 March 2011 Obama held two meetings with his NSC to discuss America's options in Libya. The nature of these discussion only came to light well after the Libyan intervention was over 18 months later in an article published by Michael Lewis in *Vanity Fair* magazine. Although this thesis is centred on *public* justifications regarding intervention, it is worth noting some of what transpired in those meetings because they go to the heart of expectations and beliefs about what humanitarian intervention could and should achieve, the bounds of American moral responsibility and the criteria for victory and troop withdrawal.

During these meetings, the prospect of 'doing nothing' about Qaddafi's threats to the Libyan people was beyond the realm of Obama's imagined possibilities, or as the president put it, "it's not who we are".⁵⁶ Although it was the option preferred by his military advisers, a NFZ was also out of the question for Obama because it would not deliver the requisite level of victory, thus risking US troops having trouble withdrawing, instead being drawn into a more intensive engagement:

We knew that a no-fly zone would not save the people of Benghazi. The no-fly zone was an expression of concern that didn't really do anything... [I]f you announced a no-fly zone and if it appeared feckless, there would be additional pressure for us to go further... What I didn't want is a month later a call from our allies saying, 'It's not working—you need to do more'.⁵⁷

55. Derek Chollet, Ben Fishman, and Alex Kuperman, "Who Lost Libya? Obama's Intervention in Retrospect," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2015.

56. Michael Lewis, "Obama's Way," *Vanity Fair*, September 11, 2012,

57. *Ibid.*

Connor Friedersdorf has similarly pointed out that Qaddafi's threat to Benghazi, if indeed it was to be carried out, would have used tanks and jeeps not planes and so targeting the Libya government's aerial capability would not have provided adequate civilian protection.⁵⁸ In noting Obama's private reservations it must also be said that others in the Obama Administration saw the goals in Libya as much wider than humanitarian protection. Former CIA Director and then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, stated of the time "I said what everyone in Washington knew but we couldn't officially acknowledge: that our goal in Libya was regime change".⁵⁹

Two days later, on 17 March 2011 the UNSC passed Resolution 1973 permitting any state or regional organisation to "take all necessary measures... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack" in Libya including an NFZ and tougher arms embargo.⁶⁰ The Resolution was the first time the UNSC authorised Chapter VII military action for civilian protection against the wishes of a sitting government.⁶¹

When speaking in favour of the resolution government representatives used *atrocities prevention* and R2P frames, noting the moral imperative to urgently save civilians in Libya. Lebanon's representative spoke of "violent acts and atrocious crimes".⁶² The UK's representative asserted Qaddafi was "using weapons of war against civilians" and "preparing for a violent assault on a city of 1 million people... using air, land and sea forces".⁶³ France's representative talked about Qaddafi's "murderous repression" as his troops pursued "violent conquest of liberated cities" amounting to "the rule of law and international morality [being] trampled underfoot". Colombia's representative argued the Libyan government had "shown that it is not up to the international responsibility of protecting its population".⁶⁴

58. Conor Friedersdorf, "How Obama Ignored Congress, and Mised America, on War in Libya," *The Atlantic*, September 13, 2012, accessed August 1, 2017.

59. Leon Panetta with Jim Newton, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 354.

60. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1973*, S/Res/1973(2011), March 17, 2011.

61. Alex J. Bellamy, "Libya and the Responsibility to Protect: The Exception and the Norm," *Ethics and International Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2011): 263–69.

62. United Nations Security Council, *6498th meeting transcript*, S/PV.6498, March 17, 2011.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

Although significant, Resolution 1973 did not represent a clear statement of international sentiment in favour of humanitarian intervention in Libya. Five UNSC members—Brazil, China, Germany, India and Russia—abstained from the vote because their governments were concerned about the precedent-setting value of the resolution and because they were unconvinced military action was the correct response in the circumstances. Germany argued foreign armed intervention brought unacceptably high risks, and thus “we should not enter into a military confrontation on the optimistic assumption that quick results with few casualties will be achieved”.⁶⁵ Brazil agreed military intervention may cause “more harm than good to the very same civilians we are committed to protecting” as well as “change the narrative” about the Arab Spring being a spontaneous, domestic movement. China had “serious difficulty” with parts of the resolution and agreed with Russia’s contention there was insufficient detail about how the resolution would be enforced, the rules of engagement, and limitations on the use of force. Russia was concerned the resolution’s wording “potentially open[ed] the door to large-scale military intervention” in Libya.⁶⁶

In addition to foregrounding civilian protection responsibilities, Resolution 1973 responded to international concerns about previous humanitarian interventions as well as the progress of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which had resulted in a much longer-term presence of foreign soldiers than initially promised or anticipated. The resolution expressly excluded foreign occupation from the “necessary measures” member states could take to protect civilians and given the reservations of veto-holding states, it is likely the resolution would not have passed without this provision. The operational limitation could therefore be interpreted as an effort to compel intervening states to avoid mission creep by expressly restricting operational choices. However, the provision’s inclusion also suggests UNSC members believed civilian protection objectives could be achieved *without* a ground troop presence, challenging Obama and his fellow NATO leaders to conduct the Libyan intervention differently

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

to every previous humanitarian intervention attempted by other US presidents who had all eventually used ground forces to reinforce initial aerial operations.

On the basis of Resolution 1973, Obama launched Operation *Odyssey Dawn* on 19 March 2011. The total number of US personnel involved in the operation has been datamasked but is estimated to be approximately 30,000. *Odyssey Dawn* was conducted alongside France's Operation *Harmattan* and the UK's Operation *Ellam*⁶⁷ but the US commanded the intervention and controlled its activities. Obama followed in the footsteps of his predecessors in limiting *Odyssey Dawn* to an exclusively aerial campaign focused on enforcing a NFZ. Like those previous humanitarian interventions, Obama's operational approach was related to his exit strategy. But unlike those earlier interventions, Obama's exit strategy at this time was not operational disengagement as may have been anticipated prior to intervention. Instead, US forces would transition the operation to NATO and withdraw later. Obama's public statements acknowledged it would be difficult for American soldiers to simply leave if the humanitarian situation was not resolved through enforcing the NFZ alone. His strategic narrative approach thus avoided problems Clinton and Bush encountered in northern Iraq and Somalia and Clinton had experienced in Kosovo, when they were unable to implement their operational disengagement strategy because the aerial campaign had not delivered victory. To the extent Obama did implement his exit strategy it had arguably negligible practical consequences given US forces remained heavily engaged in the intervention even after NATO took over.

When announcing *Odyssey Dawn* to the American public the day after the UNSC passed Resolution 1973, Obama rhetorically situated the intervention as continuing the moral foreign policy tradition of previous American humanitarian interventions. Obama argued America's moral responsibility was to prevent atrocities and protect the Libyan people from their evil leader who threatened to worsen the humanitarian crisis to catastrophic proportions, in this case to threatening the lives of 700,000 people living in Benghazi:

67. Karl P. Mueller, *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015).

Left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people. Many thousands could die. A humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilised, endangering many of our allies and partners. The calls of the Libyan people for help would go unanswered. The democratic values that we stand for would be overrun. Moreover, the words of the international community would be rendered hollow.⁶⁸

Over the coming days, Obama argued America's moral responsibility to use military force arose directly because the Libyan people demanded intervention; troops were "answering the calls of a threatened people".⁶⁹ While in the lead-up to intervention Obama had argued regime change was necessary to prevent atrocities in Libya, now Obama adhered closely to the text of the UNSC resolution, notably avoiding talk of removing Qaddafi. Instead, Obama talked about sticking to "a well-defined goal, specifically the protection of civilians".⁷⁰ According to this argument, Obama would end the intervention and hand it over to NATO forces once civilians had been 'protected' with the NFZ.

The difficulty, however, was understanding this civilian protection obligation in light of the earlier comments Obama had made about the instrumentality of regime change to protecting civilians. The "focused",⁷¹ "clear",⁷² and "well-defined",⁷³ goal was not as straightforward as Obama claimed because he did not state at what point civilians would enjoy sufficient protection for the intervention to be considered to have been sufficiently successful to justify US troops withdrawing. Indeed, once the intervention began, Obama struggled in his public comments to explain how American troops would protect civilians *without* targeting Qaddafi, given the intervention was to punish a "tyrant" and demonstrate "actions have consequences and the writ of the

68. Barack Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 18, 2011.

69. Barack Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Brasilia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 19, 2011.

70. Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya*.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya*; Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Brasilia*; Barack Obama, *Remarks Following a Meeting With President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil in Brasilia, Brazil*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 19, 2011.

73. Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya*; Barack Obama, *Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Commencement of Military Operations Against Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 21, 2011; Barack Obama, *The President's News Conference With President Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena of El Salvador in San Salvador, El Salvador*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 22, 2011.

international community must be enforced”.⁷⁴

When questioned directly about the contradiction between his stated policy position on Qaddafi and the limitations of the UNSC authorisation, Obama argued the intervention was about “humanitarian efforts” and he would “make sure that we stick to that mandate”.⁷⁵ At the same time, however, Obama did not resile from his preferred regime change outcome. Instead he drew a false distinction between the military effort to stop Qaddafi’s human rights abuses on the one hand, and America’s non-military means to precipitate regime change on the other, as if the bombing campaign’s effects on Qaddafi were independent of the impact of sanctions and asset freezes, and vice versa:

Q. Sir, how do you square your position that Colonel Qadhafi has lost legitimacy and must go against the limited objective of this campaign, which does not demand his removal? If Colonel Qadhafi is killing his own people, is it permissible to let him stay in power?

OBAMA. I think it’s very easy to square our military actions and our stated policies. Our military action is in support of an international mandate from the Security Council that specifically focuses on the humanitarian threat posed by Colonel Qaddafi to his people... Now, I have also stated that it is US policy that Qaddafi needs to go. And we’ve got a wide range of tools in addition to our military efforts to support that policy.⁷⁶

It is difficult to see how Obama could maintain this rhetorical distinction in practice, especially as Qaddafi was the alleged perpetrator of the very human rights abuses the humanitarian intervention was designed to stop. Regardless of whether or not regime change activities were consistent with the civilian protection remit of Resolution 1973, from the beginning of *Odyssey Dawn* removing Qaddafi was a criterion for America’s victory in Libya and would be central to exit strategy justifications.

Victory was such an important prerequisite for troop withdrawal that Obama warned the American people US troops may not leave even after the mission transitioned to NATO if victory had not been achieved. Obama argued that even when US

⁷⁴ Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Brasilia*; Barack Obama, *The President’s Weekly Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 19, 2011, See also; Obama, *Remarks Following a Meeting With President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil in Brasilia, Brazil*.

⁷⁵ Barack Obama, *The President’s News Conference With President Sebastian Pinera Echenique of Chile in Santiago, Chile*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 21, 2011.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

troops “accomplish[ed] the very specific objectives of the mission under the UN Charter”, American troops had to remain because the US “has to respond as a leader in the world community”,⁷⁷ which meant staying “as part of a broader international effort”.⁷⁸ Just like Clinton in Somalia and Kosovo and Bush in Iraq a handover would not extinguish America’s moral obligations and therefore was not by itself sufficient to justify exit. Leaving America’s moral duty unfulfilled would undermine claims of mission success. Obama thus struggled to limit his humanitarian intervention to simply “com[ing] in early to shape the environment”⁷⁹ in Libya for others to continue while American soldiers exited. Such an exit was beyond the realm of imaginable possibilities in humanitarian intervention; US troops had to remain engaged until they succeeded in achieving the civilian protection outcomes Obama set for the intervention.

Congress did not support Obama’s actions in Libya. Some legislators such as Senator Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) believed Obama should have acted sooner and more forcefully, but they were a minority.⁸⁰ For the most part, the Republican-controlled Congress had adopted a belligerently oppositional attitude to Obama’s legislative and policy agenda and the Libyan intervention was no exception. Lawmakers within Obama’s own Democratic party such as Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) also resisted the intervention arguing the president had violated the *War Powers Resolution*⁸¹ by not seeking Congressional approval either prior to committing US forces or at any time during the course of the operation. Despite the opposition, however, Congressional efforts to block Obama’s efforts to commence the operation were not successful, reinforcing the dominant rhetorical and practical role the president has to shape the course of US humanitarian interventions, including their exit strategies.

Over the course of *Odyssey Dawn* US lawmakers introduced 20 bills into Congress

77. Obama, *The President’s News Conference With President Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena of El Salvador in San Salvador, El Salvador*.

78. Ibid.

79. Barack Obama, *Interview With Juan Carlos Lopez of Corriente Latina*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 23, 2011.

80. Michael Bowman, “US Legislators Debate Libya Intervention,” ed. Voice of America News, *Voice of America News*, March 21, 2011,

81. 50 U.S.C. 1541–1548

about America's participation in the intervention, only two of which expressed support. While debate predominantly focused on the constitutionality of Obama's latest military deployments, Congress members were also concerned about exit strategies, which they framed in the context of existing difficulties in Afghanistan and Iraq. For instance, Representative Steve Pearce (R-NM), wondered "if we can be out by the end of the decade".⁸² Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was also concerned America's responsibility to successfully deliver on its moral responsibilities to the Libyan people, which he saw would inevitably extend beyond enforcing the NFZ, would ultimately compromise prospects for a quick exit:

When will the U.S. combat role in the operation end? Will America's commitment end in days, not weeks, as the President promised? What will be the duration of the noncombat operation, and what will be the cost? What national security interests of the United States justify the risk of American life? What is the role of our country in Libya's ongoing civil war?⁸³

8.5 Exit from *Odyssey Dawn* not an exit

On 28 March 2011 Obama announced Operation *Odyssey Dawn* would end in three days as US soldiers had begun transitioning their efforts to NATO.⁸⁴ In the days leading up to NATO assuming command for the intervention under Operation *Unified Protector*, Obama gave a series of speeches lauding a successfully implemented transition exit strategy. Obama justified exit on the basis America had "accomplished" its objectives of preventing atrocities Libya, claiming "because we acted quickly, a humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided and the lives of countless civilians—innocent men, women and children—have been saved"⁸⁵ and "we have stopped

82. Steve Pearce, "Concerns about Libya: Proceedings and debates of the 112th Congress, First Session," in *Congressional Record—House* (March 29, 2011), S1880.

83. Mitch McConnell, "Military Action in Libya," in *Congressional Record—Senate* (March 28, 2011), H4540.

84. Barack Obama, *Remarks at Univision's "Es el Momento" Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 28, 2011.

85. Barack Obama, *The President's Weekly Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 26, 2011; Obama, *Remarks at Univision's "Es el Momento" Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session*.

Qadhafi's deadly advance".⁸⁶ Obama argued America had acted consistently with the normative expectations for humanitarian intervention and foreign policy behaviour more generally, having "played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom."⁸⁷

Obama also argued American soldiers could withdraw because other nations were now ready to "bear the responsibility and cost of upholding peace and security".⁸⁸ As in the lead-up to intervention, Obama repeatedly framed the intervention in terms of "meeting responsibilities" to protect the Libyan people.⁸⁹ He underscored the success of the Libyan intervention by claiming it had only taken 31 days to "intervene with air power to protect civilians", whereas it had taken more than a year in Bosnia. Consequently, as US soldiers had acted at the intervention's "front end",⁹⁰ the president argued America could now retreat into the background, playing a "supporting role" that would continue to be "limited in time and scope",⁹¹ with the "risk and cost of this operation—to our military and to American taxpayers—reduced significantly".⁹²

Although Obama physically and rhetorically downgraded the US contribution, it soon became apparent the NATO transition exit was not really an exit at all. The US was the largest single contributor to *Unified Protector*, deploying more military assets (153 out of 295 planes) and personnel (8407 out of 12,909 soldiers) than the other countries combined.⁹³ Although this was a much smaller-sized military contribution than *Odyssey Dawn*, if, as Obama claimed, US soldiers had been so

86. Obama, *Remarks at Univision's "Es el Momento" Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session*.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Obama, *The President's Weekly Address*.

89. Obama, *Remarks at Univision's "Es el Momento" Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session*.

90. Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Brasilia*; Barack Obama, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, March 28, 2011; Barack Obama, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in London*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 25, 2011, The President reinforced this point in subsequent statements. See, for example, Barack Obama, *The President's News Conference With Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, June 7, 2011.

91. Obama, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Libya*.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *The Guardian* newspaper, ed., "NATO Libya Attacks," *The Guardian*, 2011.

successful in stopping/preventing atrocities, it was unclear why the humanitarian intervention needed to continue or why US soldiers needed to remain in Libya at all. Ultimately Obama was not justifying an exit but as every president conducting a humanitarian intervention before him, he began justifying why troops were remaining in the intervention rather than exiting. Obama's justification for not withdrawing troops was also similar to his predecessors in that he argued success required more than stopping the impending atrocity.

Even before the formal handover to NATO, Obama reminded the American people continued participation in the humanitarian intervention in Libya was necessary because military efforts were part of his government's wider regime change policy:

This military effort is part of our larger strategy to support the Libyan people and hold the Qadhafi regime accountable... Muammar Qadhafi has lost the confidence of his people and the legitimacy to rule, and the aspirations of the Libyan people must be realised.⁹⁴

Although Obama had downplayed regime change at the start of the humanitarian intervention, as US troops ostensibly prepared to handover to NATO he began talking more about how achieving regime change would create sustainable mission success by preventing new atrocities and supporting Libya's political transformation:

As the bulk of our military effort ratchets down, what we can do, and will do, is support the aspirations of the Libyan people. We have intervened to stop a massacre, and we will work with our allies and partners to maintain the safety of civilians. We will deny the regime arms, cut off its supplies of cash, assist the opposition, and work with other nations to hasten the day when Qaddafi leaves power. It may not happen overnight, as a badly weakened Qaddafi tries desperately to hang on to power. But it should be clear to those around Qaddafi and to every Libyan that history is not on Qaddafi's side.⁹⁵

In the very same speech on 28 March 2011, however, Obama also recognised the risk that such a mission might result in a quagmire. Fulfilling wide moral obligations would come at the expense of an assured troop withdrawal. Thus Obama argued "broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake" because

94. Obama, *The President's Weekly Address*.

95. Obama, *Address to the Nation on the Situation in Libya*.

of the mission would involve ground forces, which would be costly and unpopular because US troops could not withdraw quickly:

If we tried to overthrow Qaddafi by force, our coalition would splinter. We would likely have to put US troops on the ground to accomplish that mission or risk killing many civilians from the air... To be blunt, we went down that road in Iraq... That is not something we can afford to repeat in Libya.⁹⁶

The president thus delivered conflicting messages about his exit strategy for the Libya intervention. On the one hand, Obama argued the end of *Odyssey Dawn* meant the intervention was almost over because America had achieved its atrocity prevention objectives. On the other hand, Obama argued America's larger moral responsibilities in Libya were still outstanding, and thus US soldiers needed to remain in Libya until they had achieved their regime change goals. Obama was unable to justify completely withdrawing all soldiers, constrained as he was by normative expectations to keep troops engaged until they succeeded in their mission to stop atrocities by defeating the evil force perpetrating them and supporting political transformation.

8.6 Justifying exit in *Unified Protector*

With the humanitarian intervention entering a new phase, Obama needed a new exit strategy for completely withdrawing US soldiers, but the president never expressly committed to one. America's intervention was still being conducted exclusively from the air, and so an operational disengagement exit strategy was a default option open to the president. But it was not the exit strategy Obama chose; he selected another transition exit, this time a transition to local Libyan authorities.

In constructing a justification for this new exit strategy, Obama refused to indicate how long America would continue its humanitarian intervention, following the actions his predecessors Clinton and Bush took in Kosovo, Somalia and northern Iraq, by saying he would not "put forward any artificial timeline" for withdrawing troops from

96. Ibid.

Libya.⁹⁷ Instead, over the coming months Obama undermined his previous comments about *Odyssey Dawn* having succeeded in Libya, sometimes stating America had not ended the atrocities at all because Qaddafi remained in power and continued committing human rights abuses. In an op-ed jointly penned with the leaders of NATO allies France and the UK, Obama stated:

Tens of thousands of lives have been protected. But the people of Libya are still suffering terrible horrors at Qaddafi's hands each and every day. His rockets and shells rained down on defenceless civilians in Ajdabiya. The city of Misurata is enduring a medieval siege, as Qaddafi tries to strangle its population into submission. The evidence of disappearances and abuses grows daily.⁹⁸

Statements such as these reveal Obama's view that enforcing the UNSC's civilian protection mandate was not and could not be effectively discharged or sustained by relying on air power alone to enforce a NFZ, especially if the intervention did not effectively deter perpetrators from committing human rights abuses. It was true that although the US was able to destroy some of the Libyan government's military capabilities, without the presence of foreign ground troops to stand between perpetrators and victims, it was still possible for Libyan government forces to continue attacking civilians.

Pursuing an exclusively aerial operation, rather than expanding the options for implementing an exit strategy, decreased the likelihood of exit because intervention expectations were more difficult to meet with this operational restriction. It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, that when *Unified Protector* began Obama argued America's earlier success was fragile and incomplete. There were powerful normative expectations America's intervention had to materially stop the human rights abuses and troops could not be justifiably withdrawn until this goal was achieved. The *possibility* of Qaddafi perpetrating an atrocity needed to be eliminated, before exit could be countenanced. While there was a chance this goal could be achieved with Qaddafi still in power, Obama was hardly an enthusiastic advocate for this position,

97. Obama, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in London*.

98. Barack Obama, *Libya's Pathway to Peace: Joint Op-ed by Barack Obama, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 14, 2011.

preferring regime change:

And so we are strongly committed to seeing the job through, making sure that at a minimum, Qaddafi doesn't have the capacity to send in a bunch of thugs to murder innocent civilians and to threaten them. I believe we have built enough momentum that as long as we sustain the course that we're on, that he is ultimately going to step down.⁹⁹

Indeed, this issue about how long American moral responsibilities continued once intervention commenced would come to define the narrative of America's Libyan intervention long after it ended.

Although *Unified Protector* was supposed to create the sustainable success not delivered by *Odyssey Dawn*, Obama resisted introducing ground troops to hasten this outcome while simultaneously doubling down on his argument for regime change. The President gave his most fervent justification of this position in a statement released on 14 April 2011 during a meeting with NATO allies. In this statement published in the elite US press as an op-ed, Obama blurred the line he had drawn at the beginning of the intervention between protecting civilians within the remit of Resolution 1973 and regime change. In so doing, Obama began framing the US government's policy for regime change as not just consistent with, but a necessary component for enforcing Resolution 1973. Having started this intervention, Obama argued it was America's responsibility not to leave until it had 'finished the job', in this case hastening Qaddafi's denouement:

Our duty and our mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1973 is to protect civilians, and we are doing that. It is not to remove Qaddafi by force. But it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Qaddafi in power... It is unthinkable that someone who has tried to massacre his own people can play a part in their future government... It would be an unconscionable betrayal.¹⁰⁰

Obama maintained his regime change policy was linked to America's moral responsibility to promote political transformation in Libya by assisting the rebel forces seeking to overthrow the government. Obama argued the end state for this intervention was

99. Obama, *The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom in London*.

100. Obama, *Libya's Pathway to Peace: Joint Op-ed by Barack Obama, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy*.

Qaddafi's removal and replacement by these opposition forces:

[S]o long as Qaddafi is in power, NATO must maintain its operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds. Then a genuine transition from dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process can really begin, led by a new generation of leaders. In order for that transition to succeed, Qaddafi must go and go for good. At that point, the United Nations and its members should help the Libyan people as they rebuild where Qaddafi has destroyed, to repair homes and hospitals, to restore basic utilities, and to assist Libyans as they develop the institutions to underpin a prosperous and open society.¹⁰¹

Obama's language of democratic transition and nation-building echoed similar statements by earlier Presidents Bush and Clinton when they talked about American interventions in Somalia and Kosovo, respectively. Although Obama was careful to rule out using force to secure regime change, this was one of the practical consequences of the the US and its allies continuing to place pressure on the Libyan government in *Unified Protector*, as well as providing political, tactical and logistical support for opposition groups in Libya whose express goal was also regime change.

Obama's Secretary of Defense Robert Gates acknowledged this point in testimony he gave before the Senate's Armed Services Committee on 31 March 2011 in which he stated that enforcing the NFZ and participating in the NATO intervention would assist the rebels to achieve regime change:

So, [Qaddafi's] military, at a certain point, is going to have to face the question of whether they are prepared, over time, to be destroyed by these air attacks, or whether they decide it's time for him to go... [We] continue, and the alliance will continue, to degrade Qaddafi's military capabilities. It wasn't that long ago that there were uprisings all across Libya, and Qaddafi's forces were on the defensive... It was only because his military capabilities remained intact that he was able to put down those uprisings. So, there's clearly a lot of people across Libya that are ready to rise up against this guy. If we can sufficiently degrade his military capability, it seems to me that then gives them the opportunity to do that.¹⁰²

It is worth remembering the UNSC had attempted to constrain America's military options in Libya by focusing on civilian protection while prohibiting occupation.

101. Obama, *Libya's Pathway to Peace: Joint Op-ed by Barack Obama, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy*.

102. US Congress, "Operation Odyssey Dawn and the Situation in Libya," *Committee on Armed Services Hearing, 112th Congress, 1st Session*, March 31, 2011,

Despite its restrictions, Resolution 1973 paradoxically left open a wide range of options for the US, including supporting opposition forces in open, armed rebellion towards regime change.¹⁰³

Given America's dominance of NATO's operation, it is perhaps unsurprising NATO's public justifications for *Unified Protector's* exit strategy mirrored Obama's justifications. NATO issued a statement arguing that stopping the immediate threat posed by Qaddafi was insufficient to justify withdrawing troops. NATO members widened their interpretations of 'civilian protection' to include political transformation, arguing "the development of a transparent political solution [is] the only way to bring an end to the crisis"¹⁰⁴ promising the Libyan people NATO would "keep up the pressure [on Qaddafi] to see it through . . . to make sure that you can shape your own future".¹⁰⁵ Seeing the triumph of a credible opposition force against Qaddafi thus appeared to be the main criterion for NATO to consider withdrawing from Libya.

Lest regime change without follow-up sound far too similar to America's approach to its current war in Iraq, Obama distinguished his approach first on the basis his regime change policy was linked to his new transition exit strategy for US forces in Libya and second, because he used the language of preventing atrocities and civilian protection to justify it. Obama argued American forces would withdraw from *Unified Protector* once Libya's opposition replaced Qaddafi's government. Exit was justified because the new government would assume responsibility for sustaining America's success in Libya by creating the political conditions where the mass atrocities would not occur.

103. On the related issue of the prospect of humanitarian intervention creating an incentive for rebellion see: Alex J. Kuperman, "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2008): 49–80; Jon Western disagrees that this concern has borne out in reality: Western and Goldstein, "Humanitarian Intervention Comes of Age: Lessons From Somalia to Libya," 54.

104. NATO, *Statement on Libya Following the Working Lunch of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs with Non-NATO Contributors to Operation Unified Protector*, April 14, 2011; See also NATO, *NATO to Maintain High Operational Tempo as Long as Necessary in Libya*, April 14, 2011.

105. NATO, *Statement by the NATO Secretary-General on the Extension of the Mission in Libya*, June 1, 2011; NATO, *Statement on Libya Following the Working lunch of NATO Ministers of Defence with non-NATO Contributors to Operation Unified Protector*, June 8, 2011, See also.

Having previously referred to the NTC as a “partner” in civilian protection,¹⁰⁶ by the middle of May 2011, Obama identified Libya’s NTC as the “legitimate and credible” alternative to the sitting Libyan government.¹⁰⁷ Three months later the President’s support for the NTC solidified into recognition of this opposition group as the “legitimate governing authority in Libya”¹⁰⁸ and a “credible representative of the Libyan people”.¹⁰⁹ This support was more than just rhetorical; during *Unified Protector* the US and its NATO allies coordinated their military ‘civilian protection’ activities with the de-stabilisation actions of the NTC and rebel military commanders.¹¹⁰ NATO representatives denied any explicit coordination taking place, but journalists in Libya observed rebel forces often waited for NATO to “soften up” targets before moving in.¹¹¹

It is difficult to verify the true extent of mutual reliance between the rebel forces and US/NATO command but government documents reveal the French, UK, Italian and Turkish governments sent military advisers to train and organise insurgents¹¹² and the French government also sent weapons directly to rebel forces.¹¹³ Although Obama ruled out sending ground troops to participate in the intervention, the CIA and special forces operatives were active in Libya and neighbouring countries.¹¹⁴ Regardless of whether American commanders were working directly with Libyan rebels, there is little doubt the objectives of both operations had significant overlap. In any event, it is clear Obama and his NATO counterparts did not limit their humanitarian intervention to maintaining a NFZ but were rhetorically and practically

106. Barack Obama, *Memorandum on Drawdown of Commodities and Services To Support Efforts To Protect Civilians and Civilian-Populated Areas Under Threat of Attack in Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 26, 2011.

107. Barack Obama, *Joint Op-ed by President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, May 24, 2011.

108. Barack Obama, *Statement on the Situation in Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 21, 2011; Barack Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 22, 2011.

109. Obama, *Remarks on the Situation in Libya From Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts*.

110. Weissman, “Presidential Deception in Foreign Policy Making: Military Intervention in Libya 2011,” 681–82.

111. Tim Lister, “Analysis: As Libyan Conflict Grinds On, NATO’s Mission Shifts,” *CNN*, August 19, 2011, Derek Flood, journalist and analyst with the Jamestown Foundation quoted in.

112. John Barry, “America’s Secret Libya War: U.S. Spent \$1 Billion on Covert Ops Helping NATO,” August 30, 2011.

113. BBC News, “Libya Conflict: France Air-Dropped Arms to Rebels,” June 29, 2011.

114. Barry, “America’s Secret Libya War: U.S. Spent \$1 Billion on Covert Ops Helping NATO.”

committed to regime change as a marker of intervention success upon which exit depended in this second intervention phase.

Identifying a ‘credible’ alternative to Qaddafi’s government meant Obama could not just argue democratic transition was achievable, but it would occur in the reasonably foreseeable future. Ending America’s humanitarian intervention with a successful local transition would position America’s difficulties achieving the same outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq as failures of government action rather than reveal problems with the foreign policy’s normative foundations. The Libyan intervention thus provided an opportunity for Obama to demonstrate Afghanistan and Iraq were aberrations in US foreign policy history; under the right conditions it was possible to successfully use military force to promote human rights and political transformation, and to do so quickly, without an ongoing American troop presence.

One of the risks with relying on the NTC to justify American troop withdrawal was that a poorly-vetted, disparate group of opposition forces whose policies were not necessarily consistent with the American government’s expectations for democratic institution-building, may not deliver on the promise of a sustainable victory for US soldiers in Libya. This was in fact exactly what occurred in Libya when all American troops formally withdrew and Obama declared an end to the intervention in October 2011.

Shifting from *Odyssey Dawn* to *Unified Protector* allowed Obama to justify an exit that wasn’t, but it also enabled Obama to avoid the legal requirement to obtain Congressional approval for the operation under the *War Powers Resolution* within 60 days of engaging in hostilities overseas. The Resolution also provides a further 30 days in which the President can terminate operations before needing to bring the matter before the US Congress.¹¹⁵ When the 60-day deadline for Congressional approval mandated by the *War Powers Resolution* expired, a flurry of Congressional resolutions were introduced but the votes were inconclusive. On 2 June 2011 the

115. *United States Activities in Libya*, The White House, June 16, 2011.

House of Representatives criticised Obama for “failing to provide Congress with a compelling rationale” for the intervention in Libya, giving the President a further 14 days in which to seek that authorisation. On the same day, however, the House also *blocked* a resolution to withdraw US troops from Libya within 45 days.

Stalwart opponent of US foreign military interventions, Senator Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) led a bipartisan group of his fellow representatives in filing court proceedings on 14 June 2011 to force Obama to comply with his obligations under the *War Powers Resolution*. The following day the White House responded to the growing consternation in Congress taking the unusual step of releasing a 30-page document arguing Obama was not breaching the *War Powers Resolution* because US troops were not engaged in hostilities in Libya.¹¹⁶

The White House statement did not put Congressional debate to rest. On 23 June 2011, despite having the support of senior Republican Party figures such as Senator John McCain (R-AZ), the House of Representatives rejected a bill supporting intervention. On the same day, however, the House refused to use its budgetary powers to cut funding for the intervention. As the Libyan intervention stretched into its 97th day, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) said “we have drifted into an apparently open-ended commitment [in Libya] with goals that remain only vaguely defined.”¹¹⁷ While she was concerned the unspecified exit strategy would lead to mission creep, she was also not in favour of ending the intervention immediately because US soldiers needed to stay until they succeeded, despite the initial intervention being potentially unconstitutional. Her comments reveal the tension apparent in Obama’s public statements between delivering a quick exit strategy and a successful intervention that delivered human rights protections for the Libyan people were evident more widely in American public discourse:

I must underscore that I do not support a complete withdrawal from our commitments concerning Libya. That would be dangerous. That would be

116. *United States Activities in Libya*.

117. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, “Authorising Limited Use of Armed Forces in Libya: Proceedings and debates of the 112th Congress, First Session,” in *Congressional Record–House* (June 24, 2011), H2033.

ill-advised. A complete withdrawal of all US military assets from the Libya operations would undermine our intelligence efforts and our foreign policy goals, and would all but assure a victory for Qaddafi.... While a complete withdrawal is unacceptable, the resolution before us is also unacceptable. The resolution effectively ratifies all that the President has done, and it would grant him the blessings of Congress to continue on his present course. The resolution before us would enable mission creep, rather than setting clear parameters for US engagement.¹¹⁸

The initial international criticism of the Libyan intervention also intensified as the operation continued. Scepticism about the intervention's objectives heightened as President Assad's brutal oppression of the similarly Arab Spring-inspired Syrian uprising did not attract the same robust response from the US and its allies as Libya. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, of which China and Russia are key members, released its Astana Declaration on 15 June 2011, calling for the "cessation of military confrontation" in Libya.¹¹⁹ The AU also called for a ceasefire and only two African nations followed America's lead in accepting the NTC as a legitimate alternative government in Libya. The outgoing President of the LAS, the organisation that first called for a NFZ over Libya, now demanded an immediate ceasefire because of the civilian casualties caused by the US/NATO bombings.¹²⁰ Amr Moussa also said it was not possible for America and NATO's military campaign to produce "a decisive ending" to the crisis in Libya because President Qaddafi was not willing to surrender control of the Libyan government. Here we see Moussa tying military victory to America's exit strategy, demonstrating how far Obama's rhetoric influenced the way other world leaders also internalised the normative constraints on American intervention.¹²¹

Tripoli fell to rebel forces in August 2011 and in the following weeks American agents and those of its allies attempted tracking down Qaddafi, who had gone into hiding, apparently planning on seeking exile.¹²² In September 2011, Obama

118. Ibid.

119. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ed., *Astana Declaration on the 10th Anniversary of the SCO*, June 15, 2011.

120. Ian Traynor, "Arab League Chief Admits Second Thoughts about Libya Air Strikes," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2011, Rachel Shabi, "Nato Accused of War Crimes in Libya," *The Independent*, January 19, 2012, accessed October 10, 2012.

121. Traynor, "Arab League Chief Admits Second Thoughts about Libya Air Strikes."

122. Luke Harding, "Front: Libya: The Endgame Begins: Rebels Approach Tripoli and Trigger

addressed the UN and met with his British, French and Turkish counterparts, glossing over the mounting international and domestic pressure to stop the Libyan intervention.¹²³ Instead Obama praised the military operation as demonstrating “how the international community is supposed to work” to “prevent a massacre”.¹²⁴

President Obama also asked other countries to join in America’s project supporting democratic transformation in Libya because

all of us have a responsibility to support the new Libya, the new Libyan Government as they confront the challenge of turning this moment of promise into a just and lasting peace for all Libyans.¹²⁵

Obama reinforced his construction of intervention success as building democracy and political transformation. It was America’s moral responsibility to deliver these outcomes and there was no reason to end intervention until they were achieved.¹²⁶

Obama’s political transformation criteria and the prospects for a ceasefire as bases for justifying American troop withdrawal became moot, however, when Qaddafi was assassinated on 20 October 2011 after fleeing a convoy bombed by American Predator drones and French jets. Qaddafi’s car crashed and after a brief firefight with rebels the former Libyan President was brutally mutilated, sexually assaulted and killed. The circumstances surrounding the assassination attracted such controversy NATO’s operational command issued a statement clarifying its role in the attack. NATO claimed its airstrikes “likely contributed” to Qaddafi’s capture, but it had bombed the convoy to prevent a “significant threat to the local civilian population”,

Uprising in Suburbs; Gaddafi Calls on ‘All Patriots’ to Help Defend the Capital; Leader’s Location Uncertain as Bloody Final Battle Feared,” *The Guardian*, August 22, 2011, 1.

123. Barack Obama, *Remarks at a United Nations Meeting on Libya in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 20, 2011; Barack Obama, *Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 20, 2011; Barack Obama, *Remarks During a Meeting With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 21, 2011; Barack Obama, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 21, 2011.

124. Obama, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City*.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Barack Obama, *Remarks at the Change of Command Ceremony for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Fort Myer, Virginia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 30, 2011.

unaware it included a car carrying the former president.¹²⁷

Obama used this event to demonstrate America had finally achieved the victory it sought by permanently defeating the evil force responsible for human rights atrocities in Libya, justifying American troop withdrawal. US troops did withdraw but what began as a successfully implemented exit strategy was soon undermined by the deteriorating political situation in Libya.

8.7 Problems exiting from *Unified Protector*

In commenting on the impact of Qaddafi's death on the future of American intervention in Libya, Obama used *evil leader* frames to construct the event as the ultimate symbol of American victory. Obama asserted "the dark shadow of tyranny has been lifted" demonstrating the "strength of American leadership across the world" and proving "the rule of an iron fist inevitably comes to an end".¹²⁸ The fact Qaddafi's assassination equalled victory sufficient to warrant American exit from Libya was reinforced when Obama announced the following day the NATO mission would soon "come to a successful end". And while Obama left the assassination off the list of America's achievements in Libya, he argued Qaddafi's death morally vindicated the intervention, linking it directly to saving Libyans from mass atrocities. Obama said "the death of Muammar Qaddafi showed that our role in protecting the Libyan people and helping them break free from a tyrant was the right thing to do."¹²⁹

Countering previous statements from his advisers about America 'leading from behind' in *Unified Protector*, after Qaddafi's assassination Obama claimed America had "led from the front",¹³⁰ acting with the "world community" and not "unilaterally

127. NATO, *NATO and Libya: Operational Media Update for 20 October*, October 21, 2011.

128. Barack Obama, *Remarks on the Death of Former Leader Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi of Libya*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 20, 2011.

129. Barack Obama, *The President's Weekly Address*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 22, 2011, Obama's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's response was less circumspect, when she joked with a CBS Reporter about the news of Qaddafi's assassination: "We came, we saw, he died". Hillary Clinton, *CBS News Interview*, October 20, 2011.

130. Barack Obama, *Interview With Jay Leno on NBC's "The Tonight Show"*, ed. Gerhard Peters

making a decision to take out somebody”.¹³¹ At the same time however, Obama also acknowledged America’s intervention was what enabled regime change to occur; America’s “brave pilots and crews helped prevent a massacre, save countless lives and give the Libyan people the chance to prevail”. Obama thus saw the intervention as providing “a recipe for success in the future”,¹³² however this assessment would be revised in the months following America’s exit from Libya.

The day after Qaddafi’s death, NATO’s North Atlantic Council decided to end *Unified Protector* by 31 October 2011.¹³³ Following NATO’s announcement, the UNSC unanimously resolved to end its mandate for operations in Libya on 31 October 2011.¹³⁴ On the day NATO forces withdrew from Libya, NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen said his organisation had “answered the call” to “protect” Libyans with an intervention that was “effective, flexible and precise”.¹³⁵

In the months following Qaddafi’s death and US forces withdrawing from Libya as planned Obama made very few statements about America’s exit. When he did comment, Obama talked about American victory as “decisive”¹³⁶ because it “stopped the regime in its tracks”.¹³⁷ Obama dropped his earlier arguments about troop withdrawal being contingent on long-term institution-building and democratic transformation, and turned to using Qaddafi’s death as a significant enough achievement to justify exit. Obama argued America had “accomplished every objective” having “saved countless Libyan men, women and children”.¹³⁸ Obama contracted American moral responsibility back to his original terms of providing civilian protection arguing it was now over to the Libyan people to fulfil those larger nation-building tasks

and John T. Woolley, October 25, 2011.

131. Obama, *Interview With Jay Leno on NBC’s “The Tonight Show”*.

132. *Ibid.*

133. NATO, *Operational Media Update: NATO and Libya*, October 25, 2011.

134. United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2016*, S/Res/2016(2011), October 27, 2011; Rick Gladstone, “U.N. Votes to End Libya Intervention on Monday,” *The New York Times: World / Middle East*, October 27, 2011, accessed October 12, 2012.

135. NATO, “*We Answered the Call*” - *The End of Operation Unified Protector*, October 31, 2011.

136. Barack Obama, *Remarks at Cannes City Hall in Cannes, France*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, November 4, 2011.

137. *Ibid.*

138. Barack Obama, *Remarks at Cannes City Hall in Cannes*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, November 4, 2011.

without US military support. Qaddafi's death provided justification for Obama's new local transition exit strategy, where America "returned Libya to its people",¹³⁹ with Libyans "forging their own future".¹⁴⁰

Having suffered no US casualties, eventually implementing an exit strategy and delivering on America's obligations to protect civilians by precipitating Qaddafi's removal, Obama's claims of intervention success were not challenged by his domestic audience. Libya became Obama's narrative foil to America's other wars. The NTC filled the leadership void that seemed so elusive in Iraq with Saddam Hussein's demise and the failures to create a central government in Afghanistan. Libya demonstrated it was possible to successfully use military force to stop mass atrocities and Obama appeared to have overcome the difficulties his predecessors faced in implementing an exit strategy from earlier humanitarian interventions.

In reaching this outcome, Obama's rhetoric played an important role in shaping the contours of victory and thus the conditions for withdrawal. Obama started with a very limited American moral responsibility to stop an imminent atrocity but then gradually expanded this duty to include democratic transformation in Libya. Rather than maintaining this framing, however, Obama used the occasion of Qaddafi's assassination to revert back to a more limited moral responsibility to deter further atrocities. Thus Obama framed Qaddafi's death as the ultimate deterrent, which in turn provided the justification for the US to withdraw its forces. While these strategic narrative shifts provided immediate political and practical benefits, there were also risks Obama could be criticised for withdrawing too soon if the new government committed its own human rights abuses or Libya did not proceed towards democratic transformation.

Libya did not transition unproblematically towards democracy. The NTC resisted repeated efforts by various international organisations to provide international aid,

139. Barack Obama, *Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, November 11, 2011.

140. Barack Obama, *Remarks at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 23, 2012.

particularly a peacekeeping force. US-UK-French attempts to build a replacement force for the Libyan militias was ultimately abandoned due to lack of local support.¹⁴¹ For all its insistence to carve an independent post-Qaddafi future for Libya, the NTC ultimately proved far too fragmented and ill-equipped to assume the full gamut of responsibilities involved in governing Libya, let alone the capability to address underlying political tensions, religious fundamentalism and criminality stirred by the civil war. The rebels American troops trained were sympathetic to US adversaries such as Al-Qaida and had a slim grasp of international humanitarian law when dealing with pro-Qaddafi forces. There were 30 terrorist attacks in the year following American troop withdrawal from Libya,¹⁴² including two attacks on the US Embassy in Benghazi on 11 September 2012 that killed the American Ambassador and three other diplomatic staff. The attacks were politically significant, not only because an American Ambassador had not been killed on active duty since 1979, but because the attacks occurred on the anniversary of the 9-11 attacks, reminding Americans Al-Qaida's reach had extended into a nation the US had ostensibly set on the path to democratic transformation.

Congress convened a Select Committee to investigate the Benghazi attacks with deeply politicised hearings stretching over two years and casting an unshakeable pall over then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's reputation and subsequent Presidential campaign. As for Libya, institutional breakdown and insecurity increased in the years following American troop withdrawal.¹⁴³ The 2014 election results prompted renewed civil war that continues today, dividing the country and creating space for the expansion of global terrorist networks including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and Al-Qaida into Libyan territory with 1386 terrorist attacks in

141. Chollet, Fishman, and Kuperman, "Who Lost Libya? Obama's Intervention in Retrospect"; Commentators including James Dobbins and Frederic Wehrey were confident during the intervention that the rebels would require minimal assistance post-intervention: James Dobbins and Frederic Wehrey, "Libyan Nation Building After Qaddafi," *Foreign Affairs*, August 23, 2011, accessed October 12, 2012.

142. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Global Terrorism Database," 2016.

143. Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 66–77.

the four years following the Benghazi attacks.¹⁴⁴ Libya's instability also spilled over into neighbouring countries. Arms from the 2011 civil war flooded into Mali and contributed to rebellions, separatist campaigns and ultimately a civil war in which the French government launched its own military intervention.¹⁴⁵ Having withdrawn US soldiers from Libya in 2011, three years later Obama redeployed troops to support the Libyan government's campaign to remove ISIS from its territory.

Although the US/NATO humanitarian intervention may have saved the lives of Libyans threatened by the actions of then-President Qaddafi, many more have been lost or irreparably damaged by the violence following Obama's declaration of mission success. Obama justified his decision to end the intervention by setting clear limits on US moral duty and using his successful implementation of his transition exit to represent the point US moral responsibility for Libya's future ended. But despite crafting this strategic narrative the President could not personally or politically escape the normative expectations for America to *not* withdraw troops from a military operation until they have 'won'. In this case, it meant ensuring the successor government behaved 'better' than Qaddafi's government, violence was minimal, and geopolitical stability was achieved. Thus Obama was trapped by the competing expectations to, on the one hand, withdraw American soldiers quickly, and on the other, keep them engaged until long-term, sustainable political transformation occurred.

Before leaving office Obama stated that the "worst mistake" of his presidency was failing to pursue a "much more aggressive effort to rebuild" Libya.¹⁴⁶ Obama's assessment of his Libyan intervention failures matched those of other analysts who argued America should have been more deeply involved and taken responsibility for underwriting Libya's post-Qaddafi political transformation. Ironically, this failure to do 'nation-building', was at the time considered one of the main things underpinning

144. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Global Terrorism Database."

145. Stephen Burgess, "Military Intervention in Africa: French and US Approaches Compared," *JEMEEA*, 2019, 69.

146. BBC News, "President Obama: Libya Aftermath 'Worst Mistake' of Presidency," April 11, 2016.

the intervention's success because it justified Obama's decision to withdraw forces quickly and made his transition exit implementable. The NTC also insisted at the time that no US military support was required once the official transition occurred. Obama left office regretting his strategic choices in Libya and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's subsequent presidential campaign was criticised for her support for America's exit from Libya. These criticisms were based on Clinton's apparent failure to adhere to the normative expectations of America using military force to ensure military intervention delivered favourable political transformations and long-term human rights outcomes.¹⁴⁷

8.8 Conclusion

The problems with the aftermath of the Libyan intervention demonstrate the risks inherent in American presidents crafting strategic narratives for humanitarian interventions that focus on implementing a quick exit strategy, delivering on this normative expectation at the expense of fulfilling wide moral responsibilities to stop mass atrocities. Presidents have limited freedom to define victory in a way that does not include achieving political transformation goals. Even in a case like Libya where political transformation was not central to Obama's justifications for commencing the intervention, it was difficult for the president to transcend the normative expectation America has a responsibility to secure political transformation when it uses military force. Decisions to deploy and withdraw troops thus occur within this broader context of America's moral responsibility to secure political transformation around the world.

Given the centrality of the language of mass atrocity prevention to justifications for commencing the intervention,¹⁴⁸ it might be expected these ideas about civilian

147. Robert Entman and Sarah Stonbely, "Blunders, Scandals, and Strategic Communication in U.S. Foreign Policy: Benghazi vs. 9/11," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 3037.

148. Kathryn Kersavage, "The "Responsibility to Protect" Our Answer to "Never Again"? Libya, Syria and a Critical Analysis of R2P," *International Affairs Forum* 5, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 31, accessed April 24, 2015.

protection would permeate other decisions about the intervention's conduct, especially for a president who was personally committed to atrocity prevention. What we see in Libya, however, is rather than R2P guiding decision-making,¹⁴⁹ its rhetorical protection frames were subsumed into the pre-existing normative frameworks circumscribing American decisions to use military force. Consequently, Obama's decision to end the intervention had more in common with exit strategy decisions in earlier humanitarian interventions where concerns about protecting civilians had to be balanced against moral obligations to defeat evil and promote political transformation, and only exiting after these objectives are achieved.

Obama followed the existing guidance on the best ways to conduct an intervention, including that outlined by the MARO authors,¹⁵⁰ and yet, as he pointed out at the end of his presidential term, Libya was still "a mess".¹⁵¹ The limitations of these prescriptions for conducting intervention is they do not take into account the normative context within which presidents conduct interventions. Existing guidance does not acknowledge presenting a clear exit strategy for American soldiers is limited by the normative expectations of what an American humanitarian intervention is supposed to achieve. Once military intervention has begun R2P also does not provide a framework for how that intervention can address the underlying issues that gave rise to the atrocities.

Criticism of Obama's intervention in Libya demonstrates that even after America's failed contemporary experiments with nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq, and pressure to turn inwards after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the normative expectations about the power of American military force to save people from evil rulers and bring about political transformation remains. Even when a president recognises the limitations of American military power, attempts to move US forces into the

149. Liliانا L. Jubilut, "Has the 'Responsibility to Protect' Been a Real Change in Humanitarian Intervention? An Analysis from the Crisis in Libya," *International Community Law Review* 14 (2012): 309–35.

150. Sewall, Raymond, and Chin, *MARO - Mass Atrocity Response Operations: A Military Planning Handbook*.

151. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. President Talks through His Hardest Decisions about America's Role in the World," *The Atlantic*, April 16, 2016.

background of coalition operations and deliver on his promise not to deploy ground forces as part of a humanitarian intervention, the success of the intervention will ultimately be judged by the extent to which the intervention meets those wider normative expectations. More than a decade after Kosovo and twenty years after the first post-Cold War humanitarian intervention, an American president still struggled with balancing competing normative expectations of fulfilling moral obligations, achieving victory and assuring troops would not be stuck in a quagmire but be guaranteed to withdraw.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

Three months into President Donald Trump’s term, on the morning of 4 April 2017, a 14-year-old girl in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in western Syria told *The New York Times* she saw a plane drop a bomb on a single-storey building causing a yellow mushroom cloud. Later, other community members, activists, local journalists and emergency service workers reported cases of people lying on the ground, unable to move or choking on the street. The victims’ symptoms were consistent with experiencing a chemical weapons attack. After examining samples taken from three victims, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-UN Joint Investigation Mechanism reported on 19 April 2019 the victims had been exposed to Sarin or a Sarin-like substance.¹ Reports issued by Turkish and French authorities confirmed the OPCW’s findings.² Total numbers of individuals killed or injured in the attack have not been confirmed but the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights put the initial number of people killed at 72. Subsequent reports from CNN, the French government and organisations run by Syrian opposition groups placed the number killed as high as 100 with up to 600 injured.³

1. Office for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, “OPCW Director-General Shares Incontrovertible Laboratory Results Concluding Exposure to Sarin,” April 19, 2017.

2. BBC News, ed., “Syria Chemical ‘Attack’: What we Know,” April 26, 2017.

3. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ed., “Syria chemical weapons attack toll rises to 70 as Russian narrative is dismissed,” April 6, 2017.

At the start of the Syrian civil war in 2012, the Syrian government acknowledged it possessed chemical weapons but denied ever using or intending to use them against Syrians. Shortly after the Syrian government confirmed the existence of chemical weapons, US President Barack Obama drew a proverbial “red line” on chemical weapons use in Syria, saying if the US saw “a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised” this would influence his view on whether America should intervene militarily in Syria.⁴ The incident in Khan Sheikhoun was not the first use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war. Such actions are arguably war crimes under the *Rome Statute*, especially if the chemical weapons are deployed indiscriminately or otherwise deliberately target civilian populations. Regardless of whether the attack was a war crime, its effects placed it within the realm of a mass atrocity, similar to those that prompted the humanitarian interventions I examined in northern Iraq, Kosovo and Libya.

The US, UK, French and Turkish governments held the Syrian government responsible for the attack on Khan Sheikhoun.⁵ The Syrian government denied involvement and was backed by the Russian government. Not waiting for confirmation from independent organisations or his own intelligence authorities, less than 72 hours after the attack, US President Donald Trump authorised 59 cruise missiles launched from warships USS *Ross* and USS *Porter* targeted at the Shayrat Airbase, the military installation from which Trump believed the chemical weapons attack originated.⁶

Trump announced his decision to the American people in a short televised address in which he classified the military strike as part of his plan “to end the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria”, calling on “all civilised nations to join us”, arguing “as long as America stands for justice, then peace and harmony will, in the end, prevail”.⁷

4. Barack Obama, *Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Following a Press Briefing by White House Press Secretary James F. ‘Jay’ Carney*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, August 20, 2012.

5. Somini Sengupta and Rick Gladstone, “Nikki Haley Says U.S. May ‘Take Our Own Action’ on Syrian Chemical Attack,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 2017,

6. Rex Tillerson and H.R. McMaster, *Press Briefing by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor General H.R. McMaster*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 6, 2017.

7. Donald J. Trump, *Remarks on United States Military Operations in Syria from Palm Beach, Florida*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 6, 2017.

Trump used the language of atrocity to talk about the “horrible chemical weapons attack”, which was all the more “barbaric” because “even beautiful babies were cruelly murdered”.⁸

Trump expanded on his position in his characteristic disjointed stream-of-consciousness justification in an interview on 11 April 2017 on the *Fox Business Network* that is worth quoting verbatim:

I will tell you that when I looked at the pictures on any show or any newspaper but especially when you see them on television and you see these beautiful kids that are dead in their father’s arms or you see kids gasping for life, you know, it’s over it’s over for them. They’re hosing them down. Hundreds of them. When you see that, I immediately called [Secretary of Defense] General Mattis. I said “what can we do” and they came back with a number of different alternatives and we hit them very hard. Now, are we going to get involved with Syria? No. But if I see them using gas and using things that I mean even some of the worst tyrants in the world didn’t use the kind of gases that they use and some of the gases are unbelievably potent. So, when I saw that, I said we have to do something. You should have peace in Syria. It’s enough and frankly you know we talked the chemicals because you know people just don’t see this the level of brutality. The level of viciousness. But when they drop barrel bombs and bombs of any kind, right on top of a civilian population, that’s the worst thing. I’ve never seen anything like it. And frankly Putin is backing a person that’s truly an evil person and I think it’s very bad for Russia. I think it’s very bad for mankind. It’s very bad for this world, but when you drop gas or bombs or barrel bombs. They have these massive barrels with dynamite and they drop it right in the middle of a group of people. And in all fairness, you see the same kids no arms, no legs, no face. This is an animal and I really think that there’s going to be a lot of pressure on Russia to make sure that peace happens. Because, frankly, if Russia didn’t go in and back this animal you wouldn’t have a problem right now.⁹

The following day, Trump would again justify his attack on the basis that “the vicious slaughter of innocent civilians with chemical weapons, including the barbaric killing of small and helpless children and babies, must be forcefully rejected by any nation that values human life.”¹⁰

Trump’s public discussion of the response to the chemical weapons attack continued well after it was over. Trump had reduced America’s humanitarian intervention to stop this particular human rights atrocity to a single missile strike launched from

8. Ibid.

9. Donald J. Trump, *Interview with Maria Bartiromo on Fox Business Network*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 11, 2017.

10. Donald J. Trump, *The President’s News Conference With Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, April 12, 2017.

warships in the Mediterranean Sea. This humanitarian intervention was as short and as sharp as could be possibly imagined, completed while Trump ate dessert with China's President Xi Jinping. It had an immediate effect and while it did not stop human rights atrocities from continuing in the civil war, it did stop that specific Syrian base being used to launch future strikes, chemical or otherwise, for a limited time. The intervention was not authorised by the UNSC and Syrian authorities stated the intervention killed at least seven people, including four children, but the death toll was not independently verified. America's allies including the UK, Australia, Italy and Japan supported the intervention, with the UK Defence Secretary Michael Fallon calling it "wholly appropriate".¹¹ US forces were not drawn into formally participating in the wider Syrian conflict (although American soldiers continued to act in an 'advisory' capacity to some rebel forces and subsequent bombing raids continued on a sporadic basis into 2018). Restricting the intervention to airstrikes meant US troop withdrawal was assured; the operational exit strategy was not only promised, it was implemented.

Despite having been elected to office in part on the strength of his outsider status and his commitment to reduce America's involvement in military operations in the Middle East, Trump proved as willing as his predecessors to use military force to respond to mass atrocities overseas. Although Trump is known for his iconoclastic approach, delivering unpolished policy pronouncements over Twitter, and his unwillingness to adopt rhetorical positions similar to presidents before him, the language he used to talk about his humanitarian intervention was remarkably similar to the kind I identified other presidents—Democrat and Republican—used for the previous quarter century when talking about humanitarian interventions. Trump used the language of atrocity to justify his framing of a military response in Syria as morally incumbent, consistent with the normative expectations America could and should use force to stop atrocities and defeat evil.

Trump did, however, laud the mission for achieving its very limited objective, noting

11. Anushka Asthana, "Syria airstrikes: UK offers verbal but not military support to US," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2017,

all of the missiles hit their target, which was “unbelievable...Amazing. Really it’s so incredible, it’s brilliant, its genius”.¹² Although he saw the intervention as acting on behalf of all “civilised” countries, Trump, like Obama in his Libyan humanitarian intervention, did not embrace the normative expectation for the US intervention to politically transform Syria, an objective requiring a much longer-term troop commitment. But like Obama, Trump’s failure to fulfil these wider moral responsibilities to stop the atrocities altogether drew criticism because it did not neutralise Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad.¹³ Syria rebuilt its destroyed air base and resumed combat missions, Assad cemented his control on power and continued to use chemical weapons for strategic ends.¹⁴

Trump’s rhetoric also included references to how this military operation came with the promise of troop withdrawal. His exit strategy was built into his operational approach. Like Bush, Clinton and Obama before him, Trump justified his exit strategy on the basis he was restricting his humanitarian intervention to an airstrike, repeatedly saying America was “not going into Syria”, by which he meant he would not deploy US ground forces into Syrian territory.¹⁵ For all the promise Trump had shown in breaking the foreign policy mould of presidents before him, when it came to humanitarian intervention, the Syrian case demonstrated that even Trump was as likely to frame his justification rhetoric by referring to normative expectations of using force to address mass atrocities.

The issue prompting my investigation is exactly the issue Trump and every US president since the end of the Cold War has faced when attempting to use military force to respond to mass atrocities or gross violations of human rights: how can a president both respond effectively to stop these mass atrocities while also ensuring

12. Trump, *Interview with Maria Bartiromo on Fox Business Network*; Following a subsequent attack on Syria Trump also declared “Mission Accomplished!” on Twitter, apparently unfazed by the association of the phrase with George W. Bush’s announcement I noted at the beginning of this thesis. Donald J. Trump, *Tweet at 5:21am on 14 April 2018*, April 14, 2018.

13. Jonathan Marcus, “Syria Air Strikes: Will West’s Attack Sway Syria’s Assad?,” *BBC News*, April 14, 2018,

14. Tobias Schneider and Theresa Lûtkefend, *Nowhere to Hide: The Logic of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria*, research report (Global Public Policy Institute, 2019).

15. Trump, *Interview with Maria Bartiromo on Fox Business Network*.

there is a clear, implementable exit strategy that convincingly assures the American people soldiers will be brought home?

In Chapter 2 I demonstrated that current foreign policy and strategic studies literature does not adequately address the issue of exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. There are three main reasons for this. First, although humanitarian interventions are military operations, conventional war termination theories cannot be effectively applied in these cases because they do not sufficiently account for humanitarian intervention's peculiar normative foundations as a constraint on decision-making. I argued the moral responsibility motivation for humanitarian intervention affects operational choices and strategic calculations, including justifiable grounds for troop withdrawal. Maintaining the character of humanitarian interventions as 'humanitarian' requires troops remain only so long as the moral benefit of their presence outweighs the moral cost of their withdrawal. This assessment, however, is affected by discursive constructions of moral benefit that can and do change over time, as well as trade-offs between competing moral obligations, for example force protection versus minimising civilian casualties.

The second reason is that inherent in most analyses of exit strategies is a presumption that exit requires victory. The idea of victory itself is not particularly problematic, especially as scholars have recognised victory is multi-dimensional and is broader than crude metrics of battlefield success. Nevertheless, most scholars studying military operations continue to position victory as the ultimate goal of military engagements and argue decision-makers can achieve this goal by clearly defining victory parameters from the outset. It is not especially helpful to apply these ideas about victory to humanitarian interventions however, because what constitutes intervention success is linked to nebulous ideas about moral responsibility that frequently defy concrete measurement and evolve throughout the course of an intervention.

Third, to the extent that scholars have tried to explain why humanitarian interventions have proved notoriously difficult to end, they frequently rely on the concept of 'mission

creep'. Indeed scholars have identified instances of mission creep in each of the four case studies I investigated in this thesis. However, despite efforts to more clearly define the term, mission creep remains a thin description of an observable phenomenon rather than an explanation of the dynamics that give rise to it. Existing mission creep analyses do little to identify how mission creep occurs, whether or not making different strategic choices could have avoided mission creep, the extent those choices were even available, or whether mission creep was the determinative factor for explaining why decision-makers did not withdraw troops from humanitarian interventions.

My thesis goes some way towards filling the gap in the international relations and strategic studies literature on understanding exit strategies in humanitarian interventions. I did this by bringing together the insights of three groups of scholars: foreign policy analysts who seek to understand the dynamics of foreign policy decision-making; scholars of the rhetorical presidency who explore how American presidential rhetoric reflects and shapes the landscape for political action; and public justification theorists and those who see the importance of public speech acts as enabling and constraining possibilities for political action. In this research project I synthesised the three theoretical strands through the lens of normative concepts analysis and discourse tracing.

By centring discourse and public justification I could better account for the way in which humanitarian intervention considerations are unlike those in other military operations and thus why the exit strategy dynamics differed for a chief strategic decision-maker in these circumstances. Normative concepts provided a reference point against which I could judge the decision-making dynamics within and between interventions, accommodating context but still allowing for comparisons between cases and public justifications. In addition, centring speech acts in my analysis helped demonstrate their consequential relationship with strategic decision-making, showing that to the extent that speech acts are constrained, so too are the foreign policy decisions those speech acts are about. Ultimately, my research lends weight to

the intuitive understanding that public justifications matter, especially in decisions about how to use military force.

In this thesis I examined transcripts of more than 700 verbal texts by three US presidents since the end of the Cold War in which they discussed their exit strategy plans for four humanitarian interventions: northern Iraq (George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton), Somalia (George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton), Kosovo (Bill Clinton, and to a lesser degree George W. Bush and Barack Obama) and Libya (Barack Obama). Through a line-by-line analysis of this material, I explored how presidents justified to the American people why they were withdrawing US soldiers from humanitarian interventions, or, as was more often the case, why they were unable to implement the exit strategies they promised. My thesis is the only current comparative investigation of exit strategies in these four interventions, revealing significant continuity between the exit strategy justifications of presidents across time.

My methodological approach followed the work of Uriel Abulof and Markus Kornprobst, using normative concepts to centre my analysis and as the point from which to explore public justifications. Despite its grounding in the well-established field of discourse analysis, normative concepts analysis is an emerging methodological approach but I found it particularly useful for studying the large corpus of verbal texts. It allowed me to conduct a thick, comparative analysis of the texts that captured nuances but also allowed me to identify themes, patterns and changes in a way that would not have been as effective had I restricted my inquiry to focusing on either a smaller number of texts or semantic word analysis. Working with normative concepts helped me reveal connections between public justifications and strategic decision-making as well as the wider context within which exit strategies are crafted, justified and implemented.

In my investigation I found that the problem of ensuring an implementable exit strategy in a humanitarian intervention is not primarily a function of presidents needing to plan more effectively or possess a more nuanced understanding of the

challenges an intervention may experience, although these are definitely important considerations and without them there would be little chance of an exit strategy being implemented in the manner and at the time promised or desired. Instead I discovered that among the roots of this problem is a normative issue, peculiar and yet fundamental to humanitarian interventions. A major problem in crafting, sticking to and effectively implementing an exit strategy is the conflict between collective normative expectations about how America should respond militarily to humanitarian crises. These normative expectations make the humanitarian intervention justifiable in the first instance but they also shape the imagined possibilities for the conditions under which deciding to end an intervention would be considered similarly justifiable. My research provides evidence for why international relations theory needs to account for the real world consequences that normative constraints place on presidential action, even in instances where more 'rational' considerations may be expected to take precedence in decision-making.

American historical experience is collectively understood and made sense of through political myths that include normative expectations for how America should respond to gross human rights violations or mass atrocities abroad. As I noted in Chapter 3 these three myths are US exceptionalism and manifest destiny, World War II and the Vietnam War as archetypes of 'good' and 'bad' wars respectively, and winning as moral vindication. In this thesis I show how these three myths reinforce each other, feature in all presidents' justifications for decision-making in humanitarian interventions, and frame the grounds upon which the interventions can be justifiably ended. It is tempting to caricature these three myths or dismiss their use by US presidents—or even the myths themselves—as cynical, however they consistently frame domestic public discourse about how military force is used. More importantly, these myths give rise to normative expectations about using force for humanitarian purposes and therefore constrain the possibilities for action, including when troops can be justifiably withdrawn. Those observing US foreign policy behaviour, including US allies and intergovernmental institutions, also accept these political myths and normative expectations are critical to American foreign policy behaviour and the

dominant liberal international order that America is expected to champion. This order is something of which US allies and international institutions have also invested. These actors can be observed judging US actions in part by the extent to which they adhere to these moral ideas. International relations scholars must therefore take these myths and expectations seriously.

US exceptionalism and manifest destiny tropes are observable in the way presidents construct the moral responsibility they argue America must discharge through military intervention. The nature of this moral responsibility is to stand up for human rights, to defend vulnerable people from oppression and to assist communities in the process of democratic transformation. This moral responsibility positions American military action itself as benevolent, emancipatory and a public good. The myth of WWII as a 'good' war demonstrates how military force can and should be successfully used to pursue American values defeating an evil foe and the world it represented. The Vietnam War as the 'bad' war archetype on the other hand, does not undo the myth of American exceptionalism or question the wisdom of resorting to armed force, but is interpreted as proof military force must be overwhelming enough to ensure unmitigated success, and must be in service of a 'righteous' cause. Vietnam demonstrated that the American public needs any military success to be grounded in a morally righteous cause if 'winning' is to be truly constructed as victory. A quagmire is not so much a concern about embroiling soldiers in interminable military operations as it is about fears US forces will not emerge victorious. At the same time, however, winning military engagements provides moral vindication for deciding to use force, particularly important in humanitarian interventions, which expressly foreground moral considerations in choosing an armed response. Winning is also integral to American culture and identity beyond military operations.

Having decided to initiate a humanitarian intervention, the grounds upon which a president can justifiably withdraw troops are threefold and should ideally be satisfied simultaneously: first, a president must demonstrate that US troops have fulfilled the moral responsibilities that made their intervention incumbent in the first instance;

second, as with all other military engagements, US forces will be victorious; and third, US troops will not be an occupying force, withdrawing quickly so as to avoid being mired in a quagmire. The first group of expectations regarding moral responsibilities requires US forces to, at the very least, prevent an impending mass atrocity or stop human rights violations currently underway. What it means to ‘stop’ or ‘prevent’ an atrocity, however, is a matter presidents construct through their discursive action. Presidents understand that such incidents of mass violence are not isolated occurrences but embedded within a wider social and political context of grievances that gave rise to that violence. Hence we can observe every president noting that fulfilling America’s moral responsibility to halt an atrocity quickly takes US policy into areas of removing the root causes of the violence, be that individual perpetrators (President Hussein in northern Iraq, General Aidid in Somalia, President Milosevic in Kosovo and President Qaddafi in Libya), or promoting the kind of political transformation that will address the structural problems, inequalities and oppression in which those grievances have been allowed to marinate (Kurdish oppression in northern Iraq, state collapse and famine in Somalia, post-communist transition in Kosovo, grassroots pressure for political reform in Libya).

A president’s decision to widen the scope of American responsibility is deliberate but it is also difficult for a president to avoid making it. When a president attempts to ‘read down’ or limit the scope of American moral responsibility to stop an immediate atrocity, they do so at the risk their military operations will not be considered successful. Thus in each intervention I examined presidents began with a relatively restricted operational approach for their mission that would address the humanitarian crisis. The problem was, however, that they struggled to convincingly keep America’s moral obligation in each case limited, largely because these duties were connected both practically and normatively to wider moral responsibilities, the successful fulfilment of which necessarily meant their initial exit strategies could not be implemented as planned. To have any rhetorical room to manoeuvre, presidents are driven to intensify their rhetoric about the moral consequences of inaction and the concomitant costs of failure.

Achieving mission success is the second expectation of a humanitarian intervention and frames the grounds for a justifiable exit. The prospect US troops would be withdrawn from an operation before they have 'won' is beyond the realm of presidents' imagined possibilities because anything short of victory brings the decision to have resorted to force in the first place into question. Exiting without victory challenges deep notions within the American collective narrative about the righteousness of American military action and the nobility of its soldiers. Winning is important in and of itself and for what it represents, but what constitutes victory, winning and success in the context of humanitarian interventions is very difficult for presidents to articulate. In large part this is because the moral responsibilities of intervention are broadly construed and thus it is very difficult to explain the appropriate threshold for success that would justify an exit and identify when sufficient success is achieved. As moral responsibilities become increasingly nebulous, the president's ability to clearly articulate how the American people will know their moral responsibilities have been fulfilled and the mission has succeeded also become increasingly imprecise. Consequently, knowing when to claim the requisite degree of victory in a humanitarian intervention to justify withdrawing American soldiers also becomes more challenging.

It is possible for presidents to simply exercise their rhetorical power and define the bounds of success themselves but they do so at the risk of challenging the dominant narrative about what American armed forces should be seen to achieve in military operations. This is exactly what happened with President Obama in Libya with he and others ultimately criticising the intervention as a failure. In Somalia, Clinton attempted to walk back his definition of victory by reading down America's moral obligations to the Somali people, but this decision had limited public cachet because the wider moral obligations were already entrenched in the intervention narrative. Clinton withdrew troops under conditions of defeat, despite his efforts to frame it otherwise; but even if the public questioned Clinton's declaration of victory, they did not question the moral impetus behind the intervention. More often than not, presidents hedge against the risk that they will withdraw troops too early before the intervention has succeeded leading to repeated failures to implement exit strategies,

as was the situation for Presidents Bush and Clinton in Iraq and Somalia, and President Clinton in Kosovo.

Although presidents are constrained in their moulding of definitions of victory, there is some historical 'learning' that arguably takes place, resulting in changes over time in how presidents claim victory ought to be demonstrated. Humanitarian interventions have thus been central to contemporary interpretations of what constitutes victory and success in US military operations. H.W. Bush constructed victory in Iraq, at least initially, as not necessarily requiring regime change, in part because America's moral responsibility to the Kurds could be discharged without actively removing Saddam Hussein. In Somalia and then Kosovo, Clinton began with a view of victory that did not require regime change but later argued that conditions of victory required neutralising capacity of individual protagonists. By the time Obama intervened in Libya, regime change as a condition of victory was unquestioned as a practical representation of stopping an atrocity in its tracks and a morally symbolic achievement of bringing justice to a perpetrator. Thus exit strategy discourse in humanitarian interventions have, over time, become one in which the concept of 'victory' has been distilled into a single objective of removing an 'enemy'. Today, regime change has become synonymous with military and wider American foreign policy success, be it in Syria, Iran or Venezuela.

In addition to the challenges posed by expectations that US troops will succeed in fulfilling wide moral responsibilities, there is the expectation that US troop exit will be assured. This concern about providing a demonstrable exit date is in part linked to the myth that the United States is not an imperial power and its military forces are only used for defensive or benevolent purposes. But the expectation of an assured date for troop withdrawal is also strongly influenced by experiences in Vietnam and the fear of US troops being stuck in a quagmire. This fear manifests in the way in which the *quagmire* trope permeates presidential rhetoric, regardless of an individual's political hue, as well as the public commentary about every humanitarian intervention. It is the reason for presidents committing to exit timetables and emphasising at

the outset, as well as throughout an intervention, that American soldiers will not remain engaged indefinitely. However, this commitment to a quick withdrawal, or even providing a timetable for withdrawal, conflicts with the two other groups of normative expectations with respect to how America should respond in the face of a humanitarian crisis. It is very difficult to provide a clear exit date or commit to troops withdrawing within a relatively short period of time when there are wide moral obligations to fulfil and the criteria for knowing when those obligations have been discharged and the mission has succeeded is hard to establish or shifts over time.

Indeed so pervasive are these myths and expectations that all US presidents I examined in this thesis, be they Democrat or Republican, reference them. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, for example, persisted with referencing the expectation that US troops could not withdraw being victorious in Somalia, despite the fact this expectation had previously complicated their planned exit strategies in earlier intervention in northern Iraq. Even Barack Obama, governing in a post-9/11 climate that affected every other conceivable aspect of American foreign policy, can be observed referencing these three groups of expectations when justifying his exit strategy for his intervention in Libya almost to the exclusion of any more contemporary foreign policy considerations. I suggest the pervasiveness of these myths in presidential discourse arises because of the power these myths have to locate foreign policy actions—particularly the use of armed force—within a predictable, cognitively consistent narrative, which contains within it justifications for decisions to use military force. As humanitarian interventions are decisions to use military force that do not arise from existential threats or other clear self-interest motivations, the idea of using military force and risking the lives of American soldiers to defend the lives of others or humanitarian ideals can only really be justified to the extent that it is consistent with larger value propositions about American foreign policy action. While this narrative and its constituent myths and expectations facilitate humanitarian intervention, they also constrain a president's possibilities for action.

The tension between all three groups of normative expectations is evident in the presidential rhetoric of each of the four humanitarian interventions I investigated for this thesis. In each intervention presidents Bush, Clinton and Obama struggled to satisfy all three groups of normative expectations but the balance was almost impossible to strike. To the extent these men were able to craft a strategic narrative through an intervention and justify their exit strategy decisions, there were five main consequences: first, in all four cases, every president was, more often than not, unable to justify withdrawing troops within a specified period of time or stick to their initial exit strategy plans because it was manifestly clear withdrawing would be under conditions that were short of victory and left moral responsibilities unfulfilled. Second, in Somalia and Libya, Clinton and Obama withdrew troops as planned but at the cost of meeting America's moral obligations, leaving questions about whether the missions could be classified as successful. Third, in Iraq, Somalia and Libya presidents attempted to redefine victory as the intervention progressed but were ultimately challenged by the intervention's failure to fulfil wider moral responsibilities. Fourth, in northern Iraq, Somalia and Kosovo, presidents attempted to limit the scope of America's moral obligations to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, but humanitarian assistance did not address the cause of the crisis or promise atrocities would not recur once the US withdrew. And finally presidents chose an operational approach in every intervention—specifically an exclusively aerial mission—that would enable rapid exit, but these tactics alone could not deliver sustained human rights protections, let alone widespread political transformation. Thus any initial exit strategy proved to offer only a temporary pause in American military intervention in these countries.

The difficulty in balancing the three groups of normative expectations did not mean presidents stopped trying to achieve this balance. In part this was because although achieving the balance is difficult, the payoff in terms of the president's personal reputation, political capital, and positive reinforcement of the national collective narrative is enticing. In examining the discourse I identified a shifting relationship between battlefield conditions, the domestic and international debate

and public justification as each president tried different ways to satisfy all three groups of normative expectations. Ultimately, however, all presidents needed to make a choice to focus on delivering one group of expectations and this necessarily came at the expense of satisfying the other requirements. This means the scope for presidents to construct a strategic narrative that subverts these expectations is limited. The normative expectations constrain the imagined possibilities available to presidents when crafting their exit strategies. Actions have to be explained as consistent with these normative expectations and that includes decisions about when to withdraw troops. Although decision-makers matter, I found these continuities persisted regardless of whether presidents were Democrat or Republican, whether they oversaw one or more interventions during their presidency, or whether there was a significant external shock affecting the American foreign policy landscape, such as the Rwandan genocide or the terror attacks of 9-11.

This point I make about the conflicting groups of normative expectations and the limited agency presidents can exercise within these normative constraints is connected to a wider observation about the nature of mission creep. My findings build on the work of Adam Siegel and Michael Robinson¹⁶ but instead of identifying and classifying instances where mission creep occurred I uncovered the discursive dynamics in each case that gave rise to mission creep. While I agree with Siegel and Robinson that it takes deliberate decision-making on the part of American presidents to change the missions over time, these changes occur in the context of the imagined possibilities for exit. Those imagined possibilities arise from normative expectations but also from the ways in which presidents have observed those normative expectations featuring in previous humanitarian interventions. Thus we see ideas about operational exit strategies and transition exits modified with each successive intervention as presidents build on prior experience, even when those interventions occur in vastly different contexts. Obama's strategic narrative drew on the successes he observed in Kosovo; Clinton's narrative in Kosovo was grounded in his experience in Somalia; and Bush's

16. Siegel, "Mission Creep or Mission Misunderstood?"; Robinson, "Military Operations in Kosovo and the Danger of 'Mission Creep'."

narrative in Somalia was based on the challenges he experienced in northern Iraq. This analogical bridging¹⁷ allows for some learning but it also amplifies and reinforces the salience of normative expectations as these are never abandoned.

There are some important limitations in my investigation that affect the generalisability of my results and suggest opportunities for future research. In the first instance my research focused specifically on the American experience. As I noted throughout the thesis, the normative foundations of American foreign policy are unique and while I consider it fair to say that normative expectations affect all governments' decision-making in humanitarian interventions, exactly *how* those expectations affect decision-making dynamics requires more targeted, country-specific investigation. Wider cross-national comparative research between the US and other nations also undertaking humanitarian interventions—for example France or the UK—would also likely yield interesting findings regarding the extent to which normative expectations differ and how these affect decision-making. My research focused on presidential discourse and while I have looked at the way in which this discourse reflected and responded to wider domestic and international discourse on humanitarian intervention I did not isolate or quantify audience effects, an avenue of investigation that would round out my findings and create a fuller picture of humanitarian intervention exit strategy discourse. In addition, I selected four case studies over a twenty-year period for this thesis primarily because I argued they provided a sound basis for making comparisons and identifying instances of continuity and change. In making this selection, however, I omitted other cases like Bosnia, which was very similar to Kosovo, East Timor, where America did not play a leading role, and Iraq (2015) where humanitarian intervention was essentially a military evacuation. Future research on exit strategies could include or substitute these cases for comparisons and perhaps contrast them with instances where humanitarian intervention did not occur, such as Rwanda, Darfur, Myanmar or North Korea.

The findings in this thesis and their basis in strong methodological and empiri-

17. David Patrick Houghton, "Historical Analogies and the Cognitive Dimension of Domestic Policymaking," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 2 (1998): 279–303.

cal foundations do, however, suggest refinements to theoretical frameworks used to understand military exit strategies and humanitarian interventions. My work builds on the contribution of scholars like Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney¹⁸ in demonstrating that ideas of victory are not just discursively and normatively constructed but victory itself comes with its own normative cachet. What constitutes victory in a humanitarian intervention may not be possible to settle at the outset because it is contingent on fulfilling moral responsibilities that are themselves fluid and difficult to limit justifiably. While tempting because of its concreteness, it is also not always desirable to reduce victory to a calculation between lives saved versus lives lost like that in Thomas Seybolt's pioneering study evaluating the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions.¹⁹ This equation does not account for all the other variables contributing to making a humanitarian intervention a success or, more importantly, creating the requisite level of success to justify troop withdrawal.

Despite *jus ex bello* scholars urging recognition of opportunities for wars to end short of victory, for this approach to percolate into the way countries like the US make decisions in humanitarian interventions requires disconnecting victory and exit. In this thesis I demonstrated this connection is embedded in the collective narrative about why and how military force is used overseas and is thus very difficult to undo. My thesis confirms Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler's observations that the promise of victory is what underpins American public support for the kinds of long-term military deployments required to fulfil the moral responsibilities of humanitarian interventions.²⁰ Exiting without winning is not a simple matter of adhering to just war principles or refusing to hinge exit on success. It requires re-imagining the purpose of using military force, disconnecting the idea of soldiers' nobility from military triumph, and removing sentimentality from collective narratives about military operations.²¹ Normative expectations frame foreign policy decision-

18. Johnson and Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics*.

19. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure*.

20. Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War*.

21. Elizabeth Samet, "Can an American Soldier Ever Die in Vain? What Shakespeare, Lincoln and 'Lone Survivor' Teach us About the Danger of Refusing to Confront Futility in War," *Foreign Policy*, 2014, 74–78.

making including during military operations and especially during humanitarian interventions. Consequently, exit strategies in humanitarian interventions are not just practical matters but political questions constructed, mediated and answered through discourse. How leaders talk publicly about exit strategies and intervention more generally matters because they have the potential to foreclose some exit options and make yet others seem unavoidable.

For American policy-makers and military strategists, therefore, exit is not just a matter of needing to plan better or ‘finish the job’. A decision to embark on a humanitarian intervention must be made with the knowledge it will be very difficult to satisfy all the normative expectations for how America uses military force to respond to mass atrocities. Decision-makers should be prepared to identify which set of normative expectations they are prepared to leave unfulfilled, knowing that efforts to read down or limit the scope of those expectations may not deliver the successful mission outcomes they seek.

I began this thesis with a reference to President George W. Bush declaring ‘mission accomplished’ long before the 2003 Iraq War was anywhere near completed. I noted one of the reasons Bush’s statement was so memorable as a political *faux pas* is that it laid bare the normative expectations Americans have that US soldiers will always triumph in their endeavours and their victory will be a pre-requisite for exit. Two years before his mission accomplished speech, Bush gave another speech launching the War on Terror, explaining to the American people that, although they would win this war, victory would not look like it had in previous wars, nor would there be a definite end point to which Americans could look forward where US troops would be guaranteed to return home. According to Bush, “Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen”, with no “decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion”.²² Bush justified this ‘war without end’, deliberately sacrificing the assurance of troop withdrawal and a

22. George W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, September 20, 2001.

predictable exit strategy in favour of America successfully meeting its responsibility to “fight for our principles” because “the advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us”.²³ According to an ABC poll, 80 percent of Americans overwhelmingly supported Bush’s call to war with 57 percent accepting such a war would last for several years and 37 percent believing it would result in significant US casualties.²⁴ In January 2015, almost the same proportion of Americans—72 percent—continued to support the War on Terror.²⁵ It is true that unlike humanitarian interventions, the War on Terror was framed as a response to a direct threat to America not the protection of others from mass atrocities, but the threat was far from existential. Whatever criticisms one may have of the War on Terror, it shows that even when exit strategies may be difficult or impossible to implement in any military operation—including humanitarian interventions—this does not present as significant a foreign policy dilemma as a military operation in which American soldiers are not victorious in delivering on their moral responsibilities.

23. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11*.

24. John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

25. Pew Centre for People and the Press, ed., “Terrorism Worries Little Changed; Most Give Government Good Marks for Reducing Threat,” January 12, 2015.

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Chapter 7 Presidential Texts

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