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IRS Think Tank, [publish@irscholars.com](mailto:publish@irscholars.com)

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## Table of contents

## Beyond the Constitution: The Surge in the Erosion of Presidential Term Limits in Africa

Oscar Nanjia Songe 1

## Manufactured Consent 2.0: Propaganda in the Globalized Public Sphere

A. Alperen Keskin 14

## Beyond Iraq: the US Invasion and its Implications

Joelle Alkontar 28

## Humanitarian Intervention: The Emergence and Impact of R2P After the Cold War

Hana Girma Mamo 38

## Beyond Multiculturalism and Globalization: Multilingual Societies

A. Alperen Keskin 50

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## Beyond the Constitution: The Surge in the Erosion of Presidential Term Limits in Africa

Oscar Nanja Songe<sup>1</sup>

# IR Scholars

### Abstract

This article examines the increasing trend of unconstitutional presidential term limit extensions in Africa and its implications for democratic governance, political behaviour, and regime characterisation. Once seen as crucial mechanisms for ensuring accountability, political turnover, and democratic stability, presidential term limits have increasingly been bypassed or abolished by incumbent leaders seeking to extend their rule. The study explores the historical and political background of this phenomenon, identifies the underlying factors driving term limit violations—including weak institutional frameworks, personalist rule, elite patronage networks, and constitutional manipulation—and illustrates these dynamics through key case studies from across the continent, such as Cameroon, Togo, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, and others. It further analyses how unconstitutional extensions correlate with regime hybridity and authoritarian consolidation, influencing elite strategies, voter behaviour, and civil society participation.

The article critically evaluates the African Union's (AU) legal and political response to these violations, highlighting inconsistencies, enforcement gaps, and the prioritisation of geopolitical interests over democratic principles. While legal instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance provide a framework for safeguarding democratic norms, the AU's weak enforcement mechanisms and reliance on quiet diplomacy limit its effectiveness. The article concludes that the persistent erosion of term limits undermines democratic consolidation, rule of law, and political stability across Africa, and calls for stronger institutional safeguards, more consistent continental enforcement, and greater citizen engagement to resist autocratic entrenchment.

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**Keywords:** Africa, political systems, term limits extension, democracy, rule of law, unconstitutional changes of government

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<sup>1</sup> UMCS, MA in International Relations, [realoc87@gmail.com](mailto:realoc87@gmail.com).

## Introduction

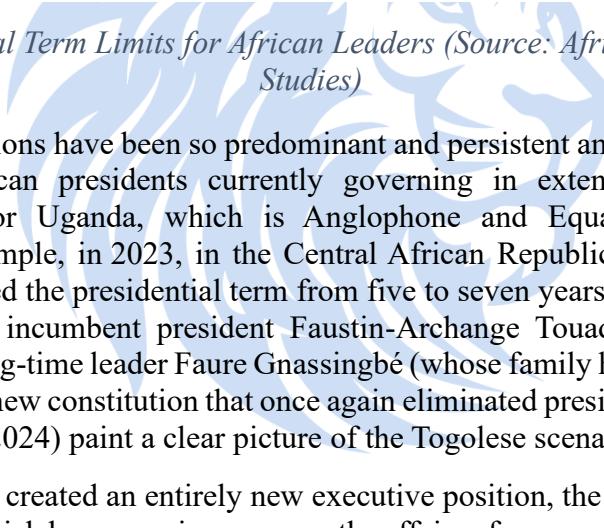
Presidential term limits in Africa, like those in other parts of the world, serve as important political checks and balances, providing agency and establishing essential rules to prevent the abuse of power. While they aim to safeguard democratic stability and ensure political continuity, recent years have seen a worrying trend in the rise of unconstitutional extension of presidential terms across Africa, often involving attempts to bypass or abolish term limits. This trend, which reverses a positive pattern observed between 2000 and 2015, is linked to a decline in democratic norms and a surge in authoritarianism on the continent. Many African leaders, especially those aspiring to dictatorship, detest constitutional restrictions as they limit their length of stay in power. Consequently, they find new and increasingly sophisticated ways to avoid executive term limits.

Research shows that these brand of leaders seek to stay in power beyond the constitutionally mandated two-term limit, either through their manipulation of electoral processes, illegal amendment of constitutions, or the creation of new positions of influence to maintain political power (Bature, 2010). More so, some leaders, facing waning popularity or fearing accountability for past socio-political actions, resort to extending their terms as a means to retain power and avoid potential legal challenges or prosecution (Cheeseman, 2010, pp. 139-153).

According to Ngwang (2021), the 1990s marked a period of significant transformation in political regimes across many African states, ranging from the decline of the one-party system and the fall of numerous military and civilian dictatorships to the introduction of presidential term limits, multi-party politics, the rule of law, and, most importantly, constitutionalism. However, the respect for democratic values, norms and principles has been fluctuating across the continent, with some states performing better than others. While some political systems, particularly in Southern Africa, have acted responsibly by respecting presidential term limits, thereby paving the way for new leadership, others in West, Central, and East Africa have increasingly sought to remove presidential term limits. This trend has grown in recent years (Fombad, 2017, p.46), with leaders in countries such as Cameroon, Gabon, Togo, Burundi, and, more recently, Côte d'Ivoire attempting to extend their time in power by amending the constitutionally mandated term limits.

According to the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2024), the unconstitutional extension of power has continued to influence Africa's governance landscape in recent years, with leaders of fourteen African countries, since 2002, holding onto power for more than two terms after avoiding term limits. This pattern of evading term limits has risen since 2015, reversing a growing trend of adhering to term limits from 2000 to 2015. Noyes and Reece (2024) support the preceding assertion, determining that "30 out of 54 African countries operate without such a constraint, even as term limits remain extremely popular among ordinary citizens." They add that according to Afrobarometer surveys, while "more than three-quarters of Africans across 34 countries support these constitutional restrictions on their leaders, recent efforts in Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo illustrate this worrying trend of term-limit evasion and how autocratic parties and leaders are inventing new ways to subvert constitutional restrictions."

Below is a table depicting countries with either no constitutional two-term limits or two-term presidential term limits that have been either modified or eliminated:



No Constitutional Two-Term Limit	Countries with Two-Term Limit in Constitution				
	Attempted Modification or Elimination of Limit			Left Office (First Leader to Adhere to Limit)	
	Extraconstitutional Succession / Suspension of Constitution	Limit Modified or Eliminated	Limit Challenged but Retained		
Eritrea	Zimbabwe (Chiwenga/Mnangagwa, 2017)	Togo (Eyadéma, 2002; Gnassingbé 2019, 2024)	Zambia (Chiluba, 2001)	Tanzania (Mwinyi, 1995)	Angola (2027)
Ethiopia	Mali (Goïta, 2020, 2021)	Uganda (Museveni, 2005, 2017)	Malawi (Muluzi, 2003)	Ghana (Rawlings, 2001)	Madagascar (2028)
Eswatini	Chad (Mahamat Déby, 2021)	Cameroon (Biya, 2008)	Senegal (Wade, 2012)	São Tomé and Príncipe (Trovoada, 2001)	DRC (2029)
The Gambia	Guinea (Doumbouya, 2021)	Algeria (Bouteflika, 2008, 2016)	Benin (Talon, 2017)	Cabo Verde (Monteiro, 2001)	Guinea-Bissau (2029)
Lesotho	Sudan (Burhan, 2021)	Djibouti (Guelléh, 2010)		Mauritius (Uteem, 2002)	Tunisia (2029)
Libya	Burkina Faso (Damiba, 2022; Traoré, 2022)	Equatorial Guinea (Obiang, 2011)		Kenya (Moi, 2002)	Seychelles (2030)
Morocco	Niger (Tchiani, 2023)	Burundi (Nkurunziza, 2015, 2018)		Mozambique (Chissano, 2005)	
Somalia	Gabon (Oligui Nguema, 2023)	Rwanda (Kagame, 2015)		Sierra Leone (Kabbah, 2007)	
		Republic of the Congo (Nguezzo, 2015)		Botswana (Mogae, 2008)	
		South Sudan (Kir, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2022)		South Africa (Mbeki, 2008)	
		Comoros (Azali, 2018)		Namibia (Pohamba, 2015)	
		Egypt (Sisi, 2019)		Liberia (Johnson Sirleaf, 2018)	
		Côte d'Ivoire (Ouattara, 2020)		Mauritania (Abdel Aziz, 2019)	
		Central African Republic (Touadéra, 2023)		Nigeria (Buhari, 2023)	

Updated June 2024

Figure 1: Constitutional Term Limits for African Leaders (Source: African Centre for Strategic Studies)

Presidential term extensions have been so predominant and persistent among francophone African countries that all African presidents currently governing in extension to term limits are francophone, except for Uganda, which is Anglophone and Equatorial Guinea which is Hispanophone. For example, in 2023, in the Central African Republic, voters approved a new constitution that extended the presidential term from five to seven years and got rid of a two-term limit. The vote allows incumbent president Faustin-Archange Touadéra to remain in power indefinitely. In Togo, long-time leader Faure Gnassingbé (whose family has ruled the country since 1967) signed into law a new constitution that once again eliminated presidential term limits in May 2024. Noyes & Reece (2024) paint a clear picture of the Togolese scenario by stating that:

“The 2024 Constitution created an entirely new executive position, the powerful President of the Council of Ministers, which has sweeping say over the affairs of government. The office does have a six-year term, but it is renewable so long as the ruling party maintains a majority in parliament. Considering the ruling party has never lost parliamentary polls, which are heavily skewed in its favour, Gnassingbé looks set to rule for life. Indeed, in the most recent parliamentary elections held earlier this year, the party won 108 out of 113 seats.”

In Africa, aspiring dictators are attacking term limits with a vengeance, finding new ways to avoid handing over power. But citizens are overwhelmingly against it, because the skirting of these term limits is misaligned with their will. It must therefore be stated that the unconstitutional extension of presidential term limits remains a determining factor in the breakdown of social and political peace in many countries in Africa (Posner et al., 2018). The agitation surrounding the question of a third or more term stirs passions and violence, sometimes resulting in fatalities, destruction of

public and private property, and paralysis of the country's economy (Amoah, 2023). In Senegal, for example, the ambiguity long maintained by former President Macky Sall regarding his candidacy for a third term exacerbated political tensions and created fertile ground for socio-political protests from 2021 to 2024, making this period one of the most tumultuous chapters in the country's political history.

According to Reyjens (2020, p. 275), it is worth noting that while term limit erosion patterns may be regarded as normal political stunts by autocratic leaders or dictators in Africa, they have far-reaching consequences and are directly responsible for the prolonged tenures of certain leaders, who have been in power for 23 years or longer. The rising and worrying trend highlights that extraconstitutional actions of one type (i.e., term limit eradication) create extraconstitutional actions of another (i.e., seizures of power via military coups). Moreover, according to Baturo and Elgie (2019), the term limit suppression impacts the sustenance of good governance, transparency and accountability, and consequently undermines democratic principles and tenets such as the rule of law, entrenching the restriction of civil and political freedoms, and the eroding of democratic norms, values, principles and structures.

Thus, this article examines the underlying factors driving the recent surge in term limits' violations, using key specific case studies in Africa that have been permeated and impacted by this undemocratic practice. The article further explains how presidential term limits are linked to regime characterisation and how they influence political behaviour. It concludes by examining the continental watchdog's (the African Union) role in managing the undemocratic practice and further opining on the way forward.

## **Underlying Factors Driving Term Limits' Violations**

Democracy in Africa continues to be dealt a heavy blow with the increase of presidents on the continent seeking re-election for third terms, and more, in office and in some cases, implementing legislative reforms that pave the way for life presidency. Some African Presidents, such as Paul Biya of Cameroon, Faure Gnassingbé of Togo and, more recently, Alassane Ouattara (in 2025) of the Ivory Coast, have made news headlines across the globe by their decision to seek extra terms. Cameroon's President Paul Biya, for example, is considered one of the world's oldest and longest-reigning president. He is 93 years old, poised to seek an eighth term in October 2025, and has been ruling the country for 43 years (since 1982). President Gbagbo, on his part, recently received widespread condemnation when he announced he wanted to run for a fourth term, going against the country's constitution. It is even more damning for the latter because he vehemently opposed such a move when his predecessor, Alassane Ouattara, toyed with the same idea. What then drives these leaders and their counterparts to hold on to power even after their constitutionally mandated terms have elapsed?

To start, Cassani (2020, p. 228-250) opines that the growth in presidential term limit violations in Africa is fuelled by a combination of factors, including, but not limited to, historical, political and social dynamics. She states that,

The act of 'tampering with the constitution to bypass term limits is harmful for democracy, as it implies the weakening of the main accountability agents that should check and counterbalance the power of the chief executive, including the parliament, the judiciary and civil society. Term limit

manipulation is typically pursued in three main ways. Some aspiring overstayers simply “asked” the constitutional court’s permission, taking advantage of some constitutional loopholes, including Wade in Senegal and Nkurunziza in Burundi. Others submitted constitutional amendments to parliamentary vote, as in Cameroon, Djibouti, Togo and Uganda, for instance. Finally, leaders such as Déby, Kagame and Denis Sassou Nguesso (Republic of the Congo) called a referendum to approve new constitutions. Despite their formal legal nature, these procedures conceal a great deal of court co-optation, legislative vote buying and biased electoral procedures.

Kieh (2018, pp. 40-41) further avows that the advantage of personalism and incumbency in the different political systems and environments in some African countries has led to what is termed the “hegemonic presidency”, where leaders accumulate excessive power and disregard constitutional constraints. While this phenomenon is often linked to historical and other colonial legacies, the absence of strong institutional checks on executive authority makes it worse. In addition, incumbent presidents are usually at a significant advantage because they wield the power to control state resources, as well as the unchallenged advantage of appointing subservient cronies who are weaponised to serve these dictators’ every command (Carbone and Cassani, 2023). This power, which extends to the dictators’ power and control over the media, is further used as a point of leverage to manipulate term limits. In Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Cameroon and Uganda, for example, political power is highly personalised with leaders believing that their stay in power is essential for regime survival, which is just a pretext to maintain power and control. Any opposition is therefore seen as a direct threat to the rule of these personalist regimes (Heyl, 2019, pp. 339-361).

Cassani (2020) posits that, where a president has already served substantially more than two terms, they may gain so much power that it becomes extremely difficult to dislodge them. They may enjoy strong public support and tight control over the military, and thus have a high capacity to withstand the threat of forcible removal from office. Dixon and Landau (2020, pp. 385-389) further advance that:

Presidents are confronted with a range of incentives not to leave office as they believe these term limits often prevent or delay the almost immediate reduction in a president’s power and privileges once they leave office. Even where they retain these privileges, these presidents inevitably face some loss in their power and influence when they leave office. In addition, leaving office inevitably means losing the ability to protect themselves from the threat of future prosecution, imprisonment, or confiscation of their assets due to an increasing trend globally toward holding former leaders accountable for international crimes, a risk which constitutions cannot “insure” former presidents against.

Dixon and Landau (2020, pp. 385-389) further argue that since many fragile democracies lack strong, independent political parties with a long-term interest in the alternation of political power, parties are often a vehicle for a single candidate to run for office as they define their policies in terms identical to those of their president or leader. Rightly or wrongly, a political party’s electoral fate is often perceived by party members as tied to that leader. So, when it comes time for a president to leave office under a term limit, the party thus has little incentive to encourage a president to comply with the relevant constitutional limitation. Instead of encouraging a president to leave office, parties in a fragile democracy may actively encourage a president to stay beyond the constitutional term limit as a means of increasing the chances that the party itself will continue to hold power.

Consistent with Mangala (2020, pp. 15-23), the proliferation of weak democratic institutions in African countries is another major factor that drives the rise in term limit violations. Inefficiencies and other structural challenges impacting the electoral commissions, parliament, and the judiciary are contributory factors that make it easier for presidents to manipulate term limits through constitutional amendments and re-interpretation of the prescripts. These deficiencies, including non-credible and ineffective opposition parties lacking adequate capacity to effectively challenge incumbent presidents and the absence of strong, independent watchdog institutions, contribute to the problem, as they allow presidents to act with impunity, thereby eroding democratic principles and undermining the rule of law also (Dawson & Young, 2021). It must be noted that, even with organised opposition, incumbents can still manipulate term limits through constitutional amendments or re-interpretations, especially if they control key institutions like the judiciary.

## Establishing the link between unconstitutionally extended presidential term limits in Africa and their influence on political behaviour

Unconstitutional extended presidential term limits in Africa have a close connection to regime types, often reflecting traits of autocratic or semi-autocratic governance. This section, therefore, explores the implications of these constitutional extensions and establishes its connection to regime types and characterisation, and finally delineates the impact they have on political agency and behaviour within Africa.

Primarily, the practice of extending presidential term limits unconstitutionally across Africa, be it through legal loopholes, amendments, or blatant disregard for the constitutional frameworks, often signals a departure from democratic norms and principles. Thus, entrenched autocratic regimes where power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader and his socio-political cronies usually exhibit these actions, thereby undermining democracy and the rule of law and in the process preserving personal control over the state (Reyntjens, 2016, pp. 61 - 68). In trying, therefore, to analyse the connection between unconstitutionally extended presidential term limits and regime characterisation in Africa, Grauvogel & Heyl (2020) posit that it is essential to understand the concept of regime hybridity. African political systems are often described as “hybrid regimes,” combining both democratic and authoritarian elements. These regimes may have formal democratic structures (e.g., multi-party elections, regular voting), but they lack substantive democratic practices, such as genuine political competition, respect for civil liberties, and adherence to the rule of law.

Unconstitutionally extended presidential terms typically emerge in countries where the political system exhibits authoritarian characteristics. For instance, in countries like Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi and Rwanda, presidents have used constitutional amendments to ensure they stay in power indefinitely, often arguing that their continued leadership is necessary for national stability and economic growth, although the centralisation of power prevents meaningful opposition from developing. As a result, the absence of strong institutional checks on power and the manipulation of legal frameworks are hallmarks of dictatorship, power abuse and the erosion of democratic norms and principles. Contrasting this outlook with countries (especially in Southern Africa) where term limits are respected, such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Ghana (West Africa), it can be deduced that the latter scenario boasts relatively stronger institutional frameworks where the political system is considered stable with democratic practices upheld. This

stark contrast between the two political dispensations underscores how unconstitutionally extended term limits play a crucial role in determining the overall regime type of a country.

With regard to unconstitutional extensions of political term limits' influence on political behaviour in Africa, Dawson & Young (2021, pp. 276-290) believe that there are profound effects at all levels within a political structure. Considering that it relates to the actions, attitudes and decision-making processes of political actors, including but not limited to civil society, voters, political parties and leaders, these effects are often negative, breeding a political climate of fear, repression, manipulation and control. To start, the unconstitutional extension of term limits arises from elites trying to manoeuvre the political will and structure to serve their self-serving interests. These elites often align themselves with the executive to secure positions of power and privilege. Hence, this pursuit of political power tends to create a culture of patronage and clientelism where the elite's political alignment and support are rewarded with state resources. Therefore, in the absence of institutional checks and balances, elites become emboldened and are willing to lend support to the executive's power grab, even if it violates constitutional acts. This, in essence, weakens political competition with political parties becoming increasingly fragmented or coerced into the interests of the regime in power (Grauvogel & Heyl, 2020).

Moreover, unconstitutional presidential term extensions in Africa significantly impact voters' behaviour and the broader public's relationship with the political process. When political leaders manipulate the constitutional framework to remain in power, it often undermines public trust in the democratic process as well as fosters political apathy or disillusionment. For instance, the Ivorian President, Laurent Gbagbo's recent attempt to extend his rule beyond the required constitutional limits have sparked large-scale protests and global criticism. Despite the peoples' determination to denounce the illegal act in the Ivory Coast for example, such actions could lead to widespread skepticism about the legitimacy of the electoral process and the government as a whole. In other countries, such as Uganda or Burundi where voters' rights have been greatly marginalised and their political rights curtailed, their citizens become powerless or disengaged, leading to decreased voter turnout and increased political polarisation (Osei et. al., 2021, pp. 251-257).

Also, the repressive nature of regimes that extend term limits often leads to the suppression of civil society organisations and dissenting voices especially from the opposition. For example, the practice engaging security forces to clamp down on protests, arrest opposition leaders, and curtail free speech, creates an environment where political behaviour is shaped by fear, rather than free will. This repression discourages citizens from actively participating in democratic processes, thereby diminishing their capability to influence political outcomes in their respective environments.

From a geostrategic relation and political legitimacy perspective, it is vital to understand how the unconstitutionally extended terms of African presidents impact their countries' socio-political legitimacy and their relations internationally. Such impact is seen through the lens of broad-based sanctions, diplomatic isolation and condemnation from international and continental bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). On the one hand, while such condemnations and sanctions could, to an extent, slow down or partially deter 'wannabe' autocrats from pursuing unconstitutional political practices, on the other hand, they could actually reinforce the autocratic nature of these regimes, since defaulting leaders often become less willing to engage internationally, and therefore courting international isolation and

leaving their citizens powerless and more destitute. For example, after President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi sought an unconstitutional third term in office in 2015, his regime faced a range of sanctions, with international aid suspended or withdrawn completely. This not only isolated the country politically but also led to economic difficulties, affecting the lives of ordinary citizens and contributing to long-term political instability (Vandeginste, 2016: 52-53).

Summarily, many unconstitutional extended presidential terms in Africa remain intricately linked to the characterisation of regimes as either authoritarian or hybrid, often signalling a retreat from democratic ideals and institutional principles. These actions directly influence political behaviour by creating an environment where elites manipulate the political system for personal gain, voters become disillusioned, and civil society faces repression. By undermining democratic norms, presidential term-limit extension fosters political instability and entrenches autocracy, bad governance and lack of transparency and accountability across Africa.

### **African Union's Position vis-à-vis the Unconstitutional expansion of presidential term limits: Response and Limitations**

According to Wiebusch and Murray (2019), the AU's legal arsenal to counter the unconstitutional change of government is enshrined both in the AU Constitutive Act and in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG), with clear definitions of what constitutes coups and other types of unlawful and undemocratic power grabs. According to the AU (2007), this legal instrument explicitly prohibits constitutional amendments extending presidential term limits in ways that undermine democratic tenets, with Article 23 clearly stating that 'any unconstitutional change of government' is a violation of the AU's principles, which include upholding constitutional order and human rights.

Adebajo (2018) also adds that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), although non-binding, is an instrument designed to promote good governance, democracy, and the rule of law. Thus, all signatory countries are evaluated on their adherence to democratic tenets or norms. However, the APRM has not been hugely effective in enforcing compliance when term limits are altered. Schmidt (2019) views the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) as a structure designed to respond to crises and political instability in Africa. The African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) has upheld the principle that the making and amendments of constitutions must not be motivated by self or personal interests and should not be amended to subvert the people's will (AU Commission, 2009). However, it has been argued that the African Union's PSC's reaction to the unconstitutional extension of presidential term limits is often reactive rather than proactive, and it lacks the ability to impose meaningful sanctions on violators.

To add, Ani (2021) states that 'the AU has instituted several legal standards aimed at monitoring broad-based unconstitutional government changes on the continent. However, the practice has proven that the AU is more active with certain constitutional violations and passive with others, thereby signifying double standards.' He adds that ACDEG prohibits 'any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments that constitute an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government.' However, the fact that the AU has never made use of this provision despite the several constitutional coups observed across the continent between 2000 and 2024, and notably, where incumbents amend their constitutions to eliminate term and age limits is worrying (Ani, 2021). Deducing from the above, it can be argued that although the AU may have

called on member states to respect procedures in case of any constitutional amendment, it is seemingly too cautious to toughly engage with proponents, opting for quiet diplomacy in most cases which is highly ineffective.

Moffat (2023) acknowledges that 'the AU in a pre-emptive measure to deter authoritarian leaders from attempting to alter their term limits, formulated the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.' He adds that, 'the Charter, after much campaigning and support from civil society, came into existence in 2012 after the required number of countries ratified it.' Considering this, Moffat (2023) further acknowledges the document's importance, and highlights 'the comprehensive provisions for the promotion of the rule of law, the respect for human rights and the holding of democratic elections, the institutionalization of legitimate authority of the representative government as well as democratic changes of government.' Additionally, 'it binds signatories to best practices in the management of elections, and crucially acknowledges that unconstitutional changes of government are a threat to stability, peace, security and development.'

While the AU should be commended to an extent, for committing AU member states to refrain from the 'amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government' as one of the 'illegal means of accessing or maintaining power' by having these phrases included in the Charter; however, inconsistencies related to the continental body's handling of term limit violations have been mounting. One of the most prominent cases of how the AU handled an unconstitutional presidential term extension is Burundi, where President Pierre Nkurunziza in 2015 pursued a third term in office despite the Burundian constitution's two-term limits. The AU's response was initially cautious and diplomatic. While the AU condemned the decision, it refrained from taking strong action, citing concerns over regional stability and the risk of exacerbating violence (McGowan, 2015). While the AU sent a high-level mission to mediate the crisis that led to widespread violence in Burundi, the AU did not implement strong measures to hold him accountable (Osei-Hwiedie, 2014). Therefore, the failure of the AU to enforce the provisions of the ACDEG highlights its weak enforcement mechanisms and the complex political environment in which it operates.

Adebajo (2018) further points out that in Rwanda, President Paul Kagame's government amended the constitution in 2015, aimed at removing term limits, enabling him to hold on to power until 2034. While the AU did not immediately intervene in Rwanda's case, it faced significant international and domestic criticism. Critics, therefore, argued that Kagame's continued rule undermines democratic values and sets a precedent for other leaders to follow suit. Despite the AU's rhetoric in favour of democracy, it failed to take concrete action in Rwanda, possibly due to Kagame's leadership role within the AU and his influence in Pan-African affairs. This, in turn, highlights the AU's reluctance to challenge its most influential leaders, even when they violate fundamental democratic principles.

In Chad, President Idriss Déby, who had been ruling for over 25 years, amended the country's constitution in 2018 aimed at removing presidential term limits entirely. The AU's response was muted, as Déby was a key figure in the region's counter-terrorism efforts, particularly in the Sahel (Schmidt, 2019). In Guinea, President Alpha Condé altered the constitution in 2020 to allow for a third term, despite significant opposition within the country and across the continent. In both scenarios, the AU's response was limited to verbal condemnations, and no significant sanctions or interventions were put in place. The case of Chad and Guinea, alongside many others, underscores the AU's inconsistent application of its democratic norms. Resultantly, the AU's failure to take

decisive action in this case underscores the organisation's tendency of prioritising stability, peace and security over democratic principles when dealing with influential leaders who are seen as important in regional politics.

The key challenges and limitations of the AU's reaction or response regarding the rising cases of Africa's unconstitutional term limits can be attributed to a lack of enforcement mechanisms, geopolitical and strategic interests, changing regional dynamics and the role of Sub-Regional organisations and inconsistent application norms and practices governing democracy. From a geopolitical and strategic interest perspective, one of the key challenges the AU faces when responding to unconstitutional political changes is balancing democratic ideals against geopolitical and strategic interests. Usually, African leaders who alter presidential term limits are influential figures whose countries may hold strategic importance regionally. For instance, Déby's Chad is a key partner in counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, and Kagame's Rwanda is central to AU initiatives (Adebajo, 2018). These considerations often lead to a reluctance to take strong action against such leaders.

More so, while the AU has the power to suspend member states engaging in unconstitutional political changes through platforms such as coup d'états and unlimited presidential terms, it has rarely exercised this power, particularly in cases involving powerful or influential leaders. This could be the result of a lack of any credible or strong enforcement mechanism in the AU that imposes penalties on failing democracies. This enforcement gap continuously challenges the AU's political and democratic ideals as well as its ability to enforce significant policy and institutional frameworks on the defaulting countries.

## Conclusion and Way Forward

Constitutional amendments in Africa often challenge democratic tenets and principles such as constitutionalism, democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. Although constitutions are designed to be stable and reflect a nation's enduring values, amendments frequently focus on extending presidential terms, weakening the principle of the separation of powers, and undermining judicial independence. To worsen matters, domestic mechanisms to safeguard against such changes are often insufficient, with constitutional provisions and referenda susceptible to manipulation. These amendments therefore threaten and weaken African countries' judiciary independence, and further consolidate the executive's power. This untenable situation continues to erode any form of constitutionalism, accountability, transparent and good governance, the rule of law and democracy that regional and continental bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union respectively purports to uphold.

The rising cases of constitutional amendments with regards to term limits across Africa aimed at consolidating executive power, often concentrate authority in the hands of a few, especially the president. This concentration of power often leads to a lack of transparency and accountability, and further impairs checks on executive actions, thereby diminishing the role of other democratic institutions and hampering the functioning of a robust system of checks and balances. Resultantly, consolidating power in the executive branch becomes highly detrimental for democratic governance, as it diminishes people's participation in public discourse, as well as their representation in diverse socio-political practices or spaces. These impairments in the long term further limit civilians' ability to participate in free and fair elections and therefore, undermine

democratic institutions' credibility. This erosion, therefore, permeates socio-political spaces, with power becoming highly centralised, political competition stifled, and democratic principles hugely subverted.

Unconstitutional amendments of presidential term limits in Africa will significantly impact the values underpinning the Africa Agenda 2063, a long-term, ambitious pan-African vision and strategic action plan for transforming Africa in the next 50 years. With its lagging responses, inconsistency, weak or ineffective enforcement mechanisms, political pragmatism, and diverging geopolitical considerations, the AU's legal frameworks to check such violations have not been effective in strengthening its commitment to democratic principles. Therefore, the AU may need to reconsider its approach, potentially by enhancing the powers of its decision-making bodies, such as the Peace and Security Council and the African Peer Review Mechanism. Furthermore, the AU must address its reliance on regional bodies and develop a more coherent and unified response to unconstitutional term limit extensions if it is to enhance its credibility and effectiveness in promoting democracy across the African continent.

The fact that the AU's predominant use of the ACDEG normative guidelines for the unconstitutional changes of governments has not been effective indicates that it must actively adopt a more practical or proactive normative framework that identifies and checks rogue political aspirations especially from dictators. This normative framework should contain rules of a legal nature that set out precisely how constitutional amendments with regards to presidential term limits are governed and how the African Union and RECs will respond in a situation where these rules are contravened. These rules must be clear and predetermined so that the institution responsible for an immediate response knows its obligations to act accordingly and avoid the African Union and a REC from proverbially pointing fingers at each other. There must be policy considerations in this normative framework aimed at uniting African states under the same united object of furthering the rule of law, constitutionalism, and democracy, and reaffirming the essence of a constitution and why it cannot be amended or replaced to advance one's political ambitions.

Another possible solution is the establishment of a commission or a similar body which is functionally independent of the executive branch of African states. It is widely recognised that upholding constitutionalism, democracy, and the rule of law calls for constitutionally entrenched institutions that are not under any legislative or executive control. This is to avoid a lack of political will from tainting the process of embedding a culture of constitutionalism in Africa. This may be seen as a body of experts whose primary role is to monitor, consider, develop, and implement broader and substantive conceptions of the rule of law, democracy, constitutionalism, and good governance.

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## Manufactured Consent 2.0: Propaganda in the Globalized Public Sphere

Ahmed Alperen Keskin<sup>2</sup>The logo for IR Scholars, featuring the word "IR" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font, and "Scholars" in a slightly smaller, regular blue sans-serif font below it. The background of the logo is a faint, circular watermark of a globe with latitude and longitude lines.**Abstract**

This article examines the transformation of propaganda and consent manufacturing in the age of globalized digital media. Building on Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), it revisits the propaganda model through the lens of contemporary technological, political, and cultural developments. The analysis begins with a conceptual overview of propaganda and collective consent, exploring their historical roles in state power and media systems. It then updates the original five-filter model—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology—to reflect the rise of platform capitalism, algorithmic targeting, and transnational corporate power. The article further investigates how consent is now produced through the interaction of multinational corporations, digital infrastructures, psychological manipulation, and entertainment industries. Case studies from Russia, China, the United States, and Turkey illustrate how propaganda operates within and across national boundaries to shape global public spheres. Ultimately, the paper argues that propaganda in the 21st century has become more decentralized, automated, and embedded within everyday digital interactions, making it both more pervasive and less visible than traditional state-led models.

**Keywords:** Propaganda, Manufacturing Consent, Chomsky, Digital Media, Platform Capitalism, Political Communication, Psychological Persuasion, Global Public Sphere, Information Warfare, Ideology.

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<sup>2</sup> UMCS, MA in International Relations, [a.alperenkeskin@gmail.com](mailto:a.alperenkeskin@gmail.com). <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3590-7388>

## 1. Introduction: From Propaganda to Perception Management

In the era of the Internet, the lines between truth, story, and manipulation are hopelessly muddled. Propaganda, it has long been known, is “whatever power wants us to believe as truth” (Ingram, 2016) But what exactly is this power, and how is it related or unrelated to the nation-state? In an age of platform capitalism, algorithmic targeting, and borderless digital media, propaganda is no longer merely weaponized by the state. It is co-produced by transnational corporations, elite institutions, media elites, and by algorithmic systems that work globally. That transformation demands rethinking how consent is engineered in a public sphere, especially in an environment in which media ecosystems are global and attention is commodified.

This article examines the contemporary floor upon which state propaganda stands, focusing specifically on the global manufacturing of consent. Referencing Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent* (1988, 2002)<sup>3</sup>, the article reconsiders the original propaganda model and extends it to reflect contemporary technologies, agents, and platforms. It also touches on how global corporations and social media systems are complicit in helping to forge ideologies and validate the powerful, not just within nations, but across them.

We are in a time when popular opinion can be swayed faster and on a larger scale than ever before. At the same time critical analysis and debunk has been retarded by over-load of information, algorithmic filter-bubble effects and a loss of belief in media. In this convoluted environment, perception management, not open discussion, has become the prevailing device for obtaining legitimacy and public cooperation (Ingram, 2016).

### 1.1. Propaganda

The concept of propaganda is often misunderstood. It’s not just about lies or blatant manipulation. Instead, it’s about any organized attempt to influence how the public thinks about, believes, or acts in furtherance of a political, ideological, or financial objective. Edward Bernays, the father of the public relations industry and a prime architect of modern propaganda, defined it as “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses” (Edward L. Bernays, 1928). Bernays didn’t believe that propaganda was inherently bad; He believed it was a necessary tool of modern democracy — a method of informing people that was not restricted by one of two choices: the “intellectual integrity of the taught” and the “moral integrity of the teacher (Edward L. Bernays, 1928).

Propaganda is inextricably with state power to such an extent historically (Snow & Taylor, 2006). Propaganda posters, patriotic movies, and radio broadcasts were called on during the First and Second World Wars to drum up national support and demonize the enemy. In fascist systems like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, propaganda helped to construct totalizing worldviews that eliminated dissent and constituted a common political self.

In liberal democracies, propaganda has been more covert. It occurs through media, schooling, advertising, and cultural production. It is not that it so much smashes opposition as marginalises it. It’s not a requirement to believe, but it does establish the limits of acceptable discourse. It works

<sup>3</sup> Mostly 2002 edition of *Manufacturing Consent* has been used for this study; however, the original publishing date of the first edition is 1988. The referencing might be confusing in this instance.

less by compulsion than by consensus-building and the emotional identification with prevailing values (Bakir et al., 2019).

## 1.2. Consent

By “consent” here, I do not mean an individual’s rights or a coerced agreement, but a collective consent to a political narrative, policy decision, or ideological frames. In their book, *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky and Herman suggested that the mass media help create such acceptance. It’s not just about reporting the facts but about how events are presented in a way that serves elite interests and marginalizes opposing views. This is not centrally planned so much as structurally driven—ownership, advertising, official sources, and ideological affinity with state power (Chomsky & Herman, 2002).

In contemporary society, consent is increasingly manufactured through gradual processes of normalization. It’s not that people are coerced into accepting visible falsehoods, but rather that they aren’t presented with effective counter-narratives. Some events are extensively covered by the media, and some others are not covered. Diverse voices are elevated and others are delegitimized, or made to disappear. The appearance of an open debate remains, but the scope of debate is rigidly proscribed.

Today, consent is not only produced by nation-states or media corporations. It is more and more the product of global platforms, algorithmic filtering, and digital echo chambers. Here, the levers of propaganda have become more sophisticated, more personalized, more powerful — and harder to see. We are seeing the development of a new transnational propaganda diet, this article argues, a site of a reissued critical focus, of theoretical revision.

## 2. Revisiting the Propaganda Model in a Globalized Context

The purpose of the propaganda model that Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman proposed in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), by contrast, was precisely the opposite: to debunk the mechanisms by which the media in liberal democracies routinely screened — and filtered for quality — the flow of information. The media were not always so much a check on power as the myth suggests. Instead, it largely went along with the interests of state and business, acting as a pipeline for elite messaging. The propaganda model of media also laid down five distinct distortions or "filters" that mediated news content:

1. media ownership,
2. advertising as the primary income source,
3. reliance on the government and corporate press releases and other powerful feeds,
4. flak (negative responses to media statements),
5. anti-communism as a governing political ideology.

This model was bold in 1988, but the world of 1988 has long been gone. “The development of globalised digital media, social media platforms, and transnational tech corporations has changed the landscape.” The model remains a useful analytic lens, but it needs to be revised for the highly dispersed, customized, and algorithmically filtered landscape of today’s media ecosystem.

## 2.1. Filter 1 – Ownership: From Conglomerates to Tech Empires

As Herman and Chomsky put it in their original model, the main news media were owned by a few massive corporations, which produced a structural-economic censorship of what news publications could report. Today, the power of ownership has even further filtered into far fewer owners and far more globally influential ones —tech titans like Alphabet (Google), Meta (Facebook/Instagram), Apple, and Microsoft (and more that cannot be listed in this article). They not only own or influence vast digital ecosystems but also the pipes through which information is funneled.

Unlike traditional media companies, this new breed of tech firms doesn't just curate news — they control what's visible in the first place. They are de facto censors and editors, amplifying some messages while drowning out others, both through algorithms and content moderation policies. Their role is not so much ideological in the traditional sense as it is profit-motivated, favoring content that maximizes engagement, frequently at the cost of the truth or democratic debate.

## 2.2. Filter 2 – Advertising: Surveillance Capitalism and Algorithmic Incentives

Herman and Chomsky focused on the demand for advertising income and its impact on the behaviour of the media. Today, advertising is more totalizing, but in the framework of surveillance capitalism. Platforms such as Facebook and YouTube make money by vacuuming up vast amounts of information about their users and then selling targeted ads. The upshot is that users are provided with personalized information ecosystems that fit the contours of their established biases — a dynamic that has led to the rise of what the internet activist Eli Pariser once called the "*filter bubble*."

This leads to a situation where an emotionally driven type of content, which is polarized, is promoted through the algorithm, and the nuanced and critical perspectives are punished by the algorithm. The idea is to keep people hooked, not educated. Consent operates as a kind of personal assembly line, in other words, and emotions self-replicate like artificial intelligence, which may just make propaganda more insidious than it's ever been.

## 2.3. Filter 3 – Sourcing: Government, Think Tanks, NGOs

Reporters have always relied on official sources — governments, companies, the military — for access to information. In the age of the internet, that filter has multiplied to include a host of PR companies, state-sponsored media, lobbyists, and international think-tanks. For example, the reporting on war abroad is typically that given by Western governments or NATO spokespeople, and oppositional views coming from a country such as Russia, China, or Iran are portrayed as propaganda, whether they are rooted in the truth.

The Syria conflict, for instance, was frequently reported using sources favorable to U.S. or UK policy objectives, and opposing sources were labeled as disinformation. This consensus serials dominant geopolitical alignments and marginalized counter-narratives, resulting in psychological operations at work disguised as journalism.

## 2.4. Filter 4 – Flak: Cancel Culture, Deplatforming, and Labeling

In the past, “flak” was a punitive response — lawsuits, complaints, or public outrage — that advised media to stay on dominant narratives. In the digital era, Flak takes many new forms: algorithmic deboosting, demonetization, shadow banning, and content flagging. Those who produce and consume content that is critical of U.S. foreign policy, Israeli militarism, or corporate capitalism risk having their content limited, demonetized, or barred from platforms.

That’s also how the flak is becoming more ideological: Critics get painted as “conspiracy theorists,” or “foreign agents,” or as “extremists.” These categories are not simply used to suppress dissent, but to discredit alternative knowledge systems. In the process, they narrow what can and can’t be said, much as flak did before it, in the age of traditional media.

## 2.5. Filter 5 – Ideology: From Anti-Communism to Pro-Western Liberalism

In the Cold War era, the prevailing ideological sieve was anti-communism. So today, the ideology has faded, but with it not so much the faith as a new dogma: pro-Western liberal internationalism. It is the belief that there are universal norms of free markets, human rights (those rights that apply selectively), liberal democracy, and global capitalism. Media that subscribe to this world view are normal; those that do not — whether from the Left, Right, or global south — will be accused of authoritarianism, populism, or destabilization.

It’s this ideological lens that colors coverage of things like the Venezuela crisis, Hong Kong protests, or Russian elections. And stories that bolster Western policy are cast as pro-democracy, and counternarratives are relegated to the dustbin of state propaganda, even when they have proven truths.

We conclude that although the original propaganda model is still tenable, it will need to be updated to incorporate a number of fundamental shifts brought about by globalization, the rise of digital media, and the new platform capitalism. In 2018, a few large tech companies controlled the flow of digital information along lines compatible with dominant political and economic doctrines. The result is a new architecture of consent production — one that is decentralized, increasingly automated, and far more difficult to see for what it is than the propaganda media systems of the 20th century.

## 3. Consent Production in the Global World

However, the emergence of consent in our contemporary world cannot be disentangled from the structural and technological shifts that have altered how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. Whereas Chomsky and Herman’s five-filter model described how media worked to serve elite interests in liberal democracies, we now consent to our rulers through a more complex interplay of digital infrastructure, global tech monopolies, corporate lobbying, entertainment, and militarized communication strategies. In this chapter, we further explore how MNCS and digital platforms actively influence global consciousness, using some of Chomsky’s commentary as a reference point, to contemporary (in this case, early 21st-century) conditions.

### 3.1. Platform Capitalism as a Consent Engine

Platform capitalism, or economic systems focused around digital platforms that broker large amounts of data, user interactions, and information flows, has been the key to the manufacture of consent today (Kunzru, 2019). Corporations such as Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), Alphabet (Google, YouTube), Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple not only host content; they build environments that track, shape, and sell attention. These companies make up the consent infrastructure of the global public sphere (Center for Humane Technology, 2021).

Take Google, for example. The world's largest video site and the dominant search engine for more than a billion users, Google is the behemoth gatekeeper of information online, with the ability to shape who sees what, when they see it, and in what order. SEO, PageRank, and algorithmically driven recommendation engines do not work on neutral terms – they systematically privilege certain types of content, and most especially content that is commercially safe and politically uncontroversial from the perspective of Western liberalism. Thus, what is widely perceived by the public as "popular" or "credible" content is often a consequence of invisible sorting based on financial and ideological incentives.

### 3.2. Examples from *Manufacturing Consent*

Chomsky and Herman dedicate a great deal of time in *Manufacturing Consent* to discussing of media treatment of U.S. foreign policy, and what they call the "worthy" and "unworthy" victims. The killing in 1984 of Polish priest Jerzy Popieluszko by the Soviet-backed Polish regime got extensive coverage in U.S. media, for example, while the assassination in U.S.-backed El Salvador of Archbishop Óscar Romero was underreported despite being as (if not more) politically relevant. The disparity in coverage, they said, was a consequence of the way in which American interests dovetailed with the tale of Soviet oppression, and El Salvador's right-wing junta was a United States ally.

Another form of this phenomenon prevails in today's interconnected global information economy, but in even more amplified and accelerated forms provided by platforms. For example, the media's treatment of Ukrainian civilian casualties in the 2022 Russian invasion was instantaneous, emotional, and international. The Western press published vivid, gory, and repeated images of human suffering imported from Ukraine. Meanwhile, Yemeni civilians killed by the Saudi-led coalition, with support from U.S. and British arms, have received consistently and have been given much less empathy.

This extension of Chomsky's "worthy vs. unworthy victims" paradigm is now manifested in the algorithmic visibility of some tragedies over others and has become normative. Events are not simply covered differently — they are ranked, circulated, and monetized differently. This way, platform companies amplify and heighten the biases of media while obscuring them behind the veil of neutrality.

### 3.3. The Rise of Corporate-State Hybrids

Consent manufacturing is not just government influence on the media anymore. Corporate and state power have ever more converged, fused into hybrid entities that co-produce a global narrative.

Think about the role played by Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, and Google Cloud in hosting the backend infrastructure for intelligence agencies, military, and police forces in the U.S. and its allies. These companies are not simply tech vendors; they are embedded in the state apparatus.

For example, Amazon's hosting of classified information on its AWS platform for the CIA illustrates how the lines between private and public actors in information control have become increasingly blurry. Google's brief but instructive participation in Project Maven—a Pentagon AI initiative—has shown that tech novices play an increasingly critical role in military messaging and targeting (Konkel, 2024).

Such alliances show us that multinationals are not a passive reflection of hegemonic ideologies but are a determinant of them. The everyday tech platforms we use are tangled up with geopolitical imperatives, and the content they elevate can be shaped by these alliances.

### 3.4. Hollywood and the Cultural Apparatus

The entertainment industry, and Hollywood in particular, is another key component in the global consent-manufacturing machine. By way of movies and series, and even the new streaming platforms like Netflix, American foreign-policy aims and assumptions are normalised around the world.

As Chomsky noted, the role of the media is to “mobilize the population for war, even against their populations.” This is also done by storytelling...and by making people cry. In the digital age, it goes beyond news to culture. Take movies such as American Sniper or Zero Dark Thirty, which present U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan as moral conflicts with no deeper reflection on the legality of the wars or their consequences. The result is a movie that provides a cinematic rationale for violence, making audiences across the globe believe that the U.S. is a necessary global police force.

But even seemingly apolitical shows help subtly reinforce dominant ideologies. An absence of critique of capitalism, of scandalous lifestyles of the elites, and of the idea that state power is not a machine of benevolence, all reinforce the image of a world where power relations, as they are, seem natural or fair.

## 4. Psychological Agents of Manufacturing Consent

As propaganda's production of consent migrates from the timeless world of legacy media to the internet and to the behavioural manipulations of surveillance capitalism, the psychological side of propaganda is taking over. In the old days, propaganda would often involve mass spectacle, patriotic imagery, or ideological slogans. Today, it is more personal, covert, and parasocial, conveyed in a torrent of highly tailored content and influencer-suggested thought that runs below the register of conscious apprehension. The psychological agents of consent are now not only state-controlled broadcasters or editorial boards but woven into the very fabric of platforms, the ethos of algorithms, and the idiom of social media.

This chapter examines how digital media, and particularly social platforms and influencers, instrumentalize psychological mechanisms to influence public perceptions and emotions, and,

eventually, the political and ideological accord. We discuss the cognitive impulses and emotional buttons such tools press, and how influencers, the trusted micro-propagandists of the age of platform capitalism, wield them.

#### 4.1. Social Media and Behavioral Engineering

Social media aren't just neutral platforms for free expression, which we can use as we like — they are multbillions of dollars of engineered systems for the creation and extinction of psychological convictions. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), digital theorist Shoshana Zuboff details how platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram hoard unimaginable amounts of user data, which are then fed into predictive algorithms. These systems are designed to maximize engagement, often by facilitating outrage, fear, identity-based tribalism, and confirmation bias (Zuboff, 2019).

This behavioral programming replaces reason with emotion, which is low-hanging fruit for propaganda. Rather than providing a comprehensive ideological package, platforms serve users emotionally intense shards of content that direct them toward particular worldviews. This effect is compounded by personalization: No two users get the same simulated "reality," which is customized for their psychological profile.

In this hyper-personalized world of content consumption, where attention is scarce and algorithms filter reality, the public sphere is fragmented into self-reinforcing echo chambers. In these bubbles, people see the same emotionally charged messages over and over again, creating a feeling of social proof and normalcy, key components of psychological persuasion.

#### 4.2. Cognitive Biases and Consent Manipulation

Digital propaganda preys on a number of implicit biases and mental shortcuts we use to navigate facts. Some of the key ones are:

- a. Confirmation Bias: Humans look for and accept evidence that supports their already formed opinions. Social media algorithms compound this by repeatedly presenting content that aligns with a user's worldview.
- b. Availability Heuristic: We judge the relative importance and frequency of events based on the ease with which we can remember examples. When clips of isolated incidents go viral, they can create the impression that such behavior is widespread and prompt an overreaction.
- c. Bandwagon Effect: Observing that others believe in or support something makes it more likely that a person will also adopt that belief, particularly when indicators such as likes, retweets, or views communicate popularity.
- d. Emotional Priming: A lot of the content that these platforms and propagandists put out triggers people's fear, anger, or empathy. Emotional priming diminishes critical thinking and enhances acceptance of the intended message.

The object of modern propaganda is not to persuade a new belief but to instill a new intonation to imperialist bullshit. Such strategies derail reasoned debate and make people more receptive to being led down the path of least resistance to what somebody else thought was best.

### 4.3. TikTok, Instagram, and the War for Attention

Platforms such as TikTok illustrate how the psychological machinery behind propaganda has become real-time, data-driven, and has merged with the entertainment economy. TikTok's algorithm is set up to quickly analyze what a user likes and then feed it to them: an endless stream, in real time, of highly, highly optimized content that matches their micro-emotional responses. This results in what researcher Tobias Rose-Stockwell recently called a "weaponized dopamine economy." (Rose-Stockwell, 2023).

Due to the platform's viral logic, some ideologies or memes can quickly flood the public discourse, especially among young people. Consider, for instance, the 2023 Israel-Gaza conflict, during which the TikTok users were given different storylines, depending on the first accounts they followed. Some users were sucked into pro-Israel, Zionist content loops; others were funneled into pro-Palestinian activist content. Each cohort was made to feel like their perspective was not just the majority view, but an ethically clear one, ossifying argument, destroying nuance.

In authoritarian states, the potential of TikTok and the like is all the more thoroughly harnessed. TikTok's Chinese version (Douyin) censors political content and surfaces educational or patriotic videos, while the global version is more chaotic and less monitored, meaning that the platform functions themselves can even be ideologically customized for different geographies and objectives.

## 5. Public Sphere

The idea of the public sphere formulated by Jürgen Habermas refers to a sphere of debate in which citizens gather to talk about social problems, deliberate about matters of common concern, and influence political decisions through reasoned discussion. Normatively, it is a sphere of communicative reason and democratic participation. But in reality — and this is especially true now — the public sphere is very much influenced by power, ideology, and propaganda.

The globalized and digitized public sphere of today is fractured, unequal, and highly manipulable. It's not a national or even a place-based thing anymore; it's out in digital space, in international media, in algorithmically constructed micro-communities. <sup>iii</sup> On this new terrain, both state and non-state actors use propaganda to influence public opinion, rationalize military interventions abroad, silence dissent, and build hegemonic narratives. This chapter considers the use of propaganda by significant state actors — Russia, China, the United States, and Turkey — to influence the global public sphere during well-known conflicts.

### 5.1. Russia: Ukraine and the Disinformation Ecosystem

Russia's propaganda efforts in and around the Ukraine war may be the most widely discussed example of information warfare in the 21st century. The Kremlin's playbook has advanced from Soviet style censorship to a sophisticated disinformation ecosystem using state-owned media, troll farms, bots, and hybrid warfare tactics.

RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik News generate an alternative version to that presented by Western media, telling a story of Russia as a victim of NATO encroachment and Ukraine as a fascist, Western puppet regime. These outlets not only transmit lies; they mix facts and fiction and construct behaviours and conspiracies to create (what some say) is called “cognitive confusion” by the scholars. The point is not so much to persuade as to erode the credibility of all narratives — a tactic called “firehosing.”

On top of this, Russia’s Internet Research Agency (IRA) ran a vigorous campaign generating divisive social-media content designed for Western consumption. Russian-linked accounts have also spread anti-establishment views on both the left and the right, during the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the 2022 Ukraine war, widening polarization and undermining confidence in Western media and democratic institutions. This propaganda consciousness is adaptable, decentralized, and it’s intended to make the most of the digital public sphere’s openness.

## 5.2. China: Censorship and Global Image Management

For all that Russia disrupts and sows disinformation, China’s model of propaganda is based instead on controlling an image and maintaining internal coherence. Censorship and surveillance by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are also highly effective in controlling the domestic public sphere. Tiananmen Square, Taiwan independence, and the fate of Uyghur Muslims are either censored or presented slantingly as a nationalist struggle.

China also spends heavily on global image management: Externally, that is. TV channels such as CGTN (China Global Television Network) and China Daily are used to push China’s growth model, paint the CCP as a source of global steadiness, and bark at the West’s doublespeak about human rights. For the Uyghur crisis, Chinese state media have tried to change the narrative around the internment camps into “vocational training centers,” releasing documentaries and testimonials that have portrayed the facilities as benign educational enterprises.

And China’s officials and diplomats have deviated more and more toward “wolf warrior” diplomacy, firing off truculent rhetoric on platforms like Twitter (now X in China) as they fight back against Western criticism. This new assertiveness is an attempt to recover the authority over narrative in the global public sphere from that of Western hegemony in human rights discourse and international legitimacy.

China is also a major funder of Confucius Institutes around the world, where Chinese culture and language are promoted, but critical academic discussion on political issues is often restricted. It shows how soft power institutions can be long-term propaganda devices, ingraining authoritarian values under the guise of cultural exchange.

## 5.3. United States: Kosovo, Vietnam, and the Narrative of Humanitarianism

Even the United States, a nation we Americans like to think of as the backer of free speech and democracy, has an extensive record of propaganda, particularly abroad. From the Cold War to the Global War on Terror, U.S. foreign policy has long hinged its interventions not on the grounds of geopolitics but as moral imperatives.

During the Vietnam War, U.S. authorities relied upon propaganda distributed through embedded journalists, staged press briefings, and the cover-up of crimes such as the My Lai Massacre. Then and only then was public support preserved through appeals to anticommunism and national security — until the Pentagon Papers, leaked by Daniel Ellsberg, revealed the scale of official lies. Vietnam became a laboratory test of the limits of that propaganda as public confidence eroded in the face of increasing disparities between rhetoric and fact (Antonenko, 1999; Harland, 2010).

The U.S. and NATO intervened in the Kosovo War in 1999 on humanitarian grounds to prevent Serbian ethnic cleansing. But as real as the atrocities were, the establishment of the conflict as a simple moral crusade against evil has served to obfuscate the geopolitical calculations that underpinned it. Chomsky has noted, for example, that the media dutifully parroted the official story and minimized the impact of NATO bombing civilian casualties, a demonstration of the precise kind of humanitarian propaganda used selectively (Jashari, 2022; Kay, 2000).

American media environments perpetually illustrate what Chomsky and Herman termed “worthy victims”—those whose plight undergirds U.S. policy—and “unworthy victims,” who are shunned or dismissed. Civilian deaths in Palestine, Yemen, or Somalia hardly get the kind of focused attention that deaths in Ukraine or Israel do. This asymmetry isn’t unintentional; it mirrors the strategic imperatives woven into the production of U.S. information.

#### 5.4. Turkey: Nationalism and the Syrian Civil War

Turkey offers a fascinating case of how a rising power deploys both nationalist propaganda and the manipulation of the digital sphere as mechanisms for forging public opinion. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP(JDP), Turkey has become a country with an atmosphere of domestic media silencing of the critical and the dominance of the pro-government media discourse (Kaya, 2023).

As the war in Syria unfolded, Turkish state media continuously portrayed the conflict primarily as a security threat, namely posed by Kurdish militias (YPG/PKK), and the need to protect Syrian ‘brothers and sisters’ from the grasp of Assad’s regime. The government whipped up public support for military incursions into northern Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Peace Spring) with a blend of religious discourse, nationalist fervor, and anti-Western posturing.

Pro-Erdoğan publications like A Haber and TRT World have played a large role in creating a narrative of national unity and existential threat, often depicting refugees as pawns of Western inaction or the terrorist group the PKK. At the same time, those voices in opposition—journalists, academics, opposition politicians—that advocated skepticism towards or solidarity with Kurdish autonomy were branded terrorists or traitors.

Turkey has also taken part in online propaganda campaigns, employing troll armies and bot accounts to disseminate government narratives and attack critics on the internet. These online campaigns dovetail with traditional state propaganda, which shows how the public sphere can be fabricated by both censoring and fanatically spreading a hyperbolic message.

## 5.5. Fragmentation and the Crisis of the Global Public Sphere

The result of all these propaganda methods is a fractured global public sphere. Instead of a shared space for information and rational debate, we have enclaves that don't communicate with one another. Russian, Chinese, American, and Turkish media produce fundamentally different realities for their audiences, and each is underpinned by different ideological aims and claims to legitimacy.

And there is, furthermore, the emergence of nation-branding propaganda models, which undermine the potential for a universal truth or justice. Instead, the truth is subordinated to power, and public opinion is a battleground. Consent is produced here not just by persuasion, but also by isolation, confusion, and identity engineering.

That digital public sphere, so long promised as the new commons of human freedom, has proved, in this fraught and momentous year, to be deeply untrustworthy, swamped with disinformation and deceit. The “battle over meaning” does not create better informed citizens; it breeds more compliant subjects, more divided publics, and larger bodies of passive, ideologically-infused consumers.

## 6. Conclusion

The modern era has not banished propaganda; it has perfected it. In a world of transnational information flows, platform capitalism, algorithmic personalization, and psychographic targeting, propaganda is not an appendage to the state; propaganda is the lifeblood of the infrastructure of everyday existence itself. The universalized online public sphere, at first described as a sphere of democracy and mutual comprehension, has turned into a narrative battlefield, orchestrated by states, corporations, and micro-influencers who do not vie for truth per se, but for attention, loyalty, and emotional superiority.

This article opened the re-reading following the Chomsky and Herman propaganda model, an iconic work in the media studies field, which critically measures sender-oriented factors and systemic factors that filter media content to serve elite interests. Their model is still relevant, but it needs to be revised to take into account the fact that we live in a world in which traditional media sit alongside digital platforms oriented towards new surveillance, data monetization, and behavioural nudging logics. Today's media consumers are not only the passive recipients of propaganda but also its producers, amplifiers, and data points, as a system continually learns how to manipulate their beliefs and behavior most effectively.

We have observed that the manufacture of consent is now the result of a complex interplay of different processes: the algorithms of the platforms that prioritise content that triggers emotions; the influencers who act as ‘informal propagandists’; the cognitive biases that render users susceptible to ideological manipulation; and corporate-state hybrids that filter global conflicts through selective storytelling. These intermediaries not only report but also interpret reality. And, in the process, they generate public authorization for policies, ideologies, and actions that otherwise would inspire resistance or dialogue.

The case studies from the Kremlin disinformation echo chamber, to China's global image management, to the U.S. humanitarian interventionist narratives, to the Turkish nationalist media assemblage show how states articulate propaganda strategies in both domestic and foreign contexts

to deflect distrust, reinforce trust, and generate consensus. They also reveal that even truth has now been transformed into a strategic resource ripe for manipulation, dissection, and weaponization.

This analysis suggests a world in which the lines between information and manipulation are more indistinct by the day. The digital public sphere, whose democratic potential was once hailed, is now a factory of consent of unprecedented scale. Instead of increasing democratic capacity, it has fueled polarization, misinformation, and public exhaustion — conditions that favor authoritarianism and elite control.

But this is not a call to cynicism or resignation. By contrast, we must learn how propaganda functions in today's world to renew democracy. It requires a new literacy — a literacy not in reading media critically, but in looking critically at the structures and incentives that form our information environment. It calls for a new way of thinking about what it means to have an open public sphere that is not only preserved but enlarged by education, regulation, and technology.

Now that we live ever deeper into the 21st century, the discussion is no longer does propaganda exists. It's this: Whose propaganda are we consuming? How do we recognize it? And how do we push back against some of its more manipulative varieties without sliding into nihilism or disconnection?

The manufacture of consent has gone through a major upgrade as well, becoming more diffuse, more participatory, and more dangerous in its subtlety. Understanding this transition is the initial step of restoring control of oneself within a system designed to obfuscate it.

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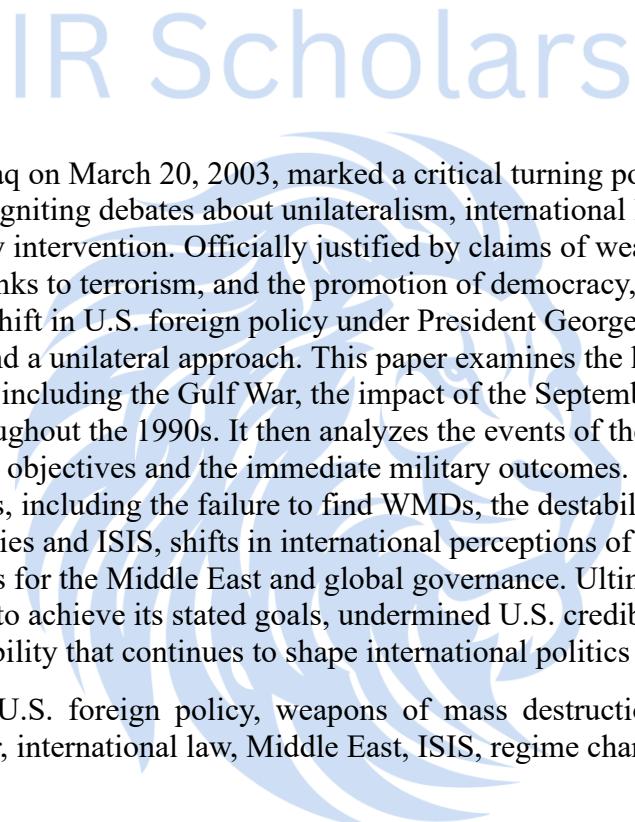
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## Beyond Iraq: the US Invasion and its Implications

Joelle Alkontar<sup>4</sup>

# IR Scholars

**Abstract**

The U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, marked a critical turning point in contemporary international relations, igniting debates about unilateralism, international law, and the effectiveness of military intervention. Officially justified by claims of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), links to terrorism, and the promotion of democracy, the invasion represented a decisive shift in U.S. foreign policy under President George W. Bush, characterized by preemptive action and a unilateral approach. This paper examines the historical background leading to the invasion, including the Gulf War, the impact of the September 11 attacks, and U.S.–Iraq tensions throughout the 1990s. It then analyzes the events of the invasion itself, exploring U.S. strategic objectives and the immediate military outcomes. Finally, it evaluates the long-term consequences, including the failure to find WMDs, the destabilization of Iraq, the emergence of insurgencies and ISIS, shifts in international perceptions of the United States, and the broader implications for the Middle East and global governance. Ultimately, the study argues that the invasion failed to achieve its stated goals, undermined U.S. credibility, and produced enduring regional instability that continues to shape international politics today.

**Keywords:** Iraq War, U.S. foreign policy, weapons of mass destruction, unilateralism, Bush Doctrine, War on Terror, international law, Middle East, ISIS, regime change

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<sup>4</sup> UMCS, MA in International Relations, [joellealkontar@gmail.com](mailto:joellealkontar@gmail.com).

## Introduction

On March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq by claims of weapons of mass destruction and regime change. In invading Iraq, Bush and his advisers began an era in which the United States renounced the lessons of the Vietnam War, going much further than at any time since the Second World War to use military force. The war is considered one of the most controversial wars and had implications that last to this day, all these years later. In order to properly understand the 2003 invasion, it is worthwhile to go back to years before that. Indeed, there has been longstanding tensions between the United States and Iraq, going back to Iraq's invasion of the small oil-rich nation Kuwait in 1990, where the US-led coalition of 35 nations launched a massive air and ground campaign and were successfully able to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Heavy UN sanctions were imposed, where Iraq was banned from exporting its oil exports, crippling both the Iraqi economy and society as poverty and hunger became widespread. Additionally, under resolution 1441, the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) was tasked with dismantling president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, of his weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Saddam has had chemical and biological weapons which he used in his invasion of Iran in 1980 and against his own people in 1988. However, due to lack of compliance and the obstruction of the dismantling efforts by Iraq, the UN withdrew on 1998, and the United States, under president Bill Clinton, announced Operation Desert Fox, a three-night military bombardment campaign on Iraq's military facilities. The Iraqi Liberation Act<sup>5</sup> passed by US congress in 1998, officially made the concept of regime change a US policy as it made it its duty to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power and replace it with a democratic one, through supporting Iraqi democratic opposition forces in various ways such as humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people amidst the democracy transition period. The bill also urged the president to establish an international criminal tribunal to prosecute and imprison Saddam Hussein and any Iraqi officials who committed crimes against humanity and other violations. Although the bill did not authorize military force, the Bush administration later used it to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 1999, UNSCOM was replaced by the United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) which continued disarmament efforts until the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Building upon the tense history of US-Iraqi relations, my research hypothesis aims to explore if the US invasion of Iraq was justified, and if it succeeded in achieving its intended goals. To answer my research question, I divided my research paper into 3 parts: the first part will cover the background and causes of this invasion. The second part will discuss the invasion itself, and thirdly, its consequences will be examined.

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## Background and Causes

### A. 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq

On 11 September, 2001, a key turning event occurred that shocked the United States and the international community. Al-Qaeda, a pan-Islamist militant organization and terrorist group led by Sunni jihadists, hijacked two US passenger planes and flew them into both trade centers in New York and one in the pentagon in Washington D.C., killing almost 3,000 people. The idea that the greatest military and economic power in the world could be attacked to that degree on its own

<sup>5</sup> *Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, Public Law 105-338, U.S. Statutes at Large 112 (1998): 3178–3182, available at <https://www.congress.gov/105/plaws/publ338/PLAW-105publ338.pdf> (accessed 21 January 2025).

shores was unheard of. This attack had made not only the United States but also governments worldwide reassess the real threat of international terrorism. All that has been stated so far leads to the main question, which is: what was the link between 9/11 and Iraq? As it turned out later, there was none. However, according to the US president at the time George W. Bush and his administration, al-Qaeda was present in a number of locations in Iraq. As Deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz stated “Saddam is helping terrorists around the world, and getting rid of him would almost be like cutting off the head of the snake, and the rest of the body will go.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to that, Bush and his administration insisted that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein’s violations of human rights cannot be overlooked. In other words, Iraq needed saving from its dictator. There was also the popular democratization principle, rooted in idea that a stable democratic US ally could provide a potential counterweight for the influence of Iran in the region and potentially make the entire region friendlier to US interests. On January 29, 2002, in the state of the union address, president George W. Bush infamously referred to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as states constituting an “axis of evil”, aiming to threaten the peace of the world. The secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld urged that the United States needed to think more broadly than a war against al-Qaeda and removing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; it needed to consider other countries that provided safe havens, funding, and support to terrorist activities. In order to successfully protect Americans, he argued, Washington needed to “impede others from thinking that terrorism against the United States could advance their cause.” Vice president Dick Cheney said that the administration’s policy would be to administer “the full wrath of the United States” upon nations providing sanctuary and support for terrorists. The elimination of terrorist safe havens would go beyond physical territory to include legal, cyber, and financial systems that allowed terrorists to operate and prosper. Indeed, President George W. Bush announced the “War on Terror” during a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, stating that the campaign aimed to eliminate terrorism globally, with a particular focus on groups like al-Qaeda and nations harboring terrorists. This declaration was followed by military actions starting with Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, as the ruling Taliban government was providing a sanctuary to the al-Qaeda leader, Saudi born Osama Bin Laden. Hence, the United States had three key objectives in mind: Get rid of Bin Laden, destroy al Qaeda, and dislodge the Taliban. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was justified partly under the “War on Terror” narrative.

## B. President Bush’ Unilateral Foreign Policy

Before discussing the events of the invasion itself, it is worth looking into President Bush’s overall foreign policy approach. Leading up to the invasion, the United States’ actions under his presidency had signified a strong unilateral approach. For example, in December 2001, the US announced that it will withdraw from the anti-ballistic treaty<sup>7</sup> of 1972 so that it can build a new missile defense system capable of protecting itself from limited nuclear strikes by “rogue” states. The United States’ National Security Strategy (NSS) 2002 version was particularly significant as it formalized the Bush Doctrine, emphasizing preemptive strikes and the promotion of democracy to combat terrorism. This combination of preemptive action and democratic promotion was central to the Bush Doctrine, the framework for justifying the invasion of Iraq.

<sup>6</sup> 1 W. Schneider, 'The Head of the Snake', *The Atlantic*, 1 April 2003, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2003/04/the-head-of-the-snake/377855/> (accessed 21 January 2025).

<sup>7</sup> The anti-ballistic treaty was a treaty signed between the United States and the USSR during the cold war in 1972 that aimed to limit the deployment of missile defense systems

On September 2002, Congress passed Authorization for Use of Military Force<sup>8</sup>, which authorizes the President to use all necessary and appropriate force against those he determines were involved in the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or those who harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States. This unilateral approach conflicted with the United Nations approach. On 12 September 2002, Bush made his initial case for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in a speech to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), by which he argued that Iraq refused to cooperate with United Nations in its disarmament efforts. This led to the passing of the UNSC resolution 1441, which gave Iraq a "final opportunity" to comply with disarmament obligations and required it to allow UN inspectors to verify the absence of WMDs. Although it did not explicitly authorize the use of force in case Iraq didn't comply, this resolution became the primary justification for the U.S.-led invasion. In November 2002, UN sent weapon inspectors to Iraq, but they didn't find any<sup>9</sup>. Still, the United States was not convinced. The following year, in February, US secretary of state Colin Powell, made his case for invading Iraq to the UN security council. He claimed that US Intelligence had concrete proof that Saddam is hiding weapon of mass destruction, and is planning to use them against his neighbors and his own people, and that he has already authorized his field commanders to use them. By March, even though inspections were still ongoing, the US, supported by Britain and Spain, submitted a resolution authorizing the use of force, but faced with a likely veto from France and Russia, the Americans later withdrew the resolution, but the preparations for the invasion still went ahead. Bush's message to the world on September 12 was "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". When he spoke to the General Assembly in September 2002, his language suggested not that the US needed UN support for military action, but that the UN was being given a last chance to prove its 'relevance' and usefulness to the US. In a press conference held on 6 March 2003, President Bush insisted that the US would put the proposed second resolution to a vote 'no matter what the whip count is', implying he would feel no compunction about going to war regardless of the outcome. It is also worth discussing the incredible polarization in the international community in response to the prospect of invasion. The world was indeed divided as 14 million people were protesting in almost 800 cities around the world in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. In addition to that, there was serious polarization between transatlantic allies within Nato. Experts often describe the situation as a "crisis" in transatlantic relations<sup>10</sup>, as many US allies, mainly Germany and France, firmly opposed the invasion. For example, former French president heavily citizen many central European countries' support for the United States, such as Poland and the Czech Republic. Of the 192 countries then recognized by UN, Only UK, Denmark, Australia, and Poland were willing to commit to troops from the start, and there were only 2500 troops committed by the 4 countries combined, compared to 165,000 by the US and the UK. Moreover, it was clear that the invasion would not be another grand multilateral commitment like the Gulf war or the operation in Afghanistan.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kimball, 'Disarming Saddam: A Chronology of Iraq and UN Weapons Inspections From 2002-2003', *Arms Control Association*, October 2023, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/disarming-saddam-chronology-iraq-and-un-weapons-inspections-2002-2003> (accessed 21 January 2025).

<sup>10</sup> P. H. Gordon, 'The Crisis in the Alliance', *Brookings Institution*, 2003, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-crisis-in-the-alliance/> (accessed 21 January 2025).

## Events of the Invasion

Moving on to the invasion itself, on March 18, 2003, Bush gave his infamous ultimatum: a 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq under “Operation Iraqi Freedom”. The invasion was launched on March 20, 2003, and Baghdad was attacked with missiles and bombs in an attempt to target Saddam Hussein and bring down the government. According to the US general who was leading the invasion, Tommy Franks, the invasion had 8 main goals<sup>11</sup>: Getting Rid of Saddam, finding and getting rid of WMDs, getting rid and looking for terrorists in the country, gathering intelligence to destroy global terrorist networks, gathering intelligence to find WMDs around the world, ending sanctions and getting humanitarian support to Iraqi citizens presumably hurt under Hussein’s control, securing Iraq’s oil fields “for the Iraqi people”, and helping Iraqi people transition to a representative democracy. On April 9, 2003, American troops stormed Baghdad, and the statue of Saddam was toppled in a symbolic collapse of his government. Finally, Saddam’s home city of Tikrit fell on April 13. Isolated groups of soldiers loyal to Hussein continued to fight in the remaining of days, but by the end of the month the US had controlled basically most of Iraq. The initial invasion cost the lives of nearly 13,000 Iraqis and just 172 coalition soldiers. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, Bush made his infamous televised speech: “Major combat operations in Iraq have ended, the US and its allies have prevailed.” Furthermore, on December 14, 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured hiding in a bunker and he was executed three years later, on December 30, 2006. Just one year after the invasion on January 2004, the search for WMDs had stopped and it was confirmed that Saddam didn’t have any weapons of mass destruction, and the US justified it as simply an intelligence failure. So the very reason that primarily justified this invasion turned out to be completely false. Also, in 2002, just before the invasion, secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld assured everyone that the entire invasion and process of democratization would be brief: “Five days or five weeks or five months”. When Bush made that “mission accomplished” speech, little did he and his administration know that this war would go on for next 8 years. The killing of Saddam Hussein, perceived as initial victory, left a huge power and security vacuum, and this allowed extremist and rebel groups to flourish in Iraq. Planning for post-invasion Iraq was widely criticized as insufficient and poorly executed. The U.S. did not have a comprehensive, effective strategy for stabilizing the country after Saddam’s fall. L. Paul Bremer III, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, was appointed on May 11, 2003. By the 16th, he issued his first decree, signing an order disbanding the Iraqi army and intelligence services, sending hundreds of thousands of well-armed men into the streets, coupled with an earlier decision to purge Baathists from the government in the process called “De-Baathification”. As a result, 400,000 Iraqi men were rendered out of a job. These actions proved to have long lasting repercussions, driving the purged to join the extremist groups that will later flourish in Iraq.

<sup>11</sup> J. Finck, 'Reviewing: "American Soldier: General Tommy Franks"', *Historically Speaking*, 30 May 2024, available at <https://historicallyspeaking.blog/2024/05/30/reviewing-american-soldier-general-tommy-franks/> (accessed 21 January 2025).

## Post-Invasion: Unintended consequences

### A. Insurgencies and the Emergence of ISIS

Soon after Bush's declaration of victory, the first armed insurgents began to attack American soldiers. Many of the insurgents were Iraqis mad about occupying forces refusing to leave. Kidnapping, murders, car bombs, and suicide bombings became much more common and increasingly put American soldiers at risk. An example of these brutal acts include the incident that occurred on August 19, 2003, where a suicide bomber driving an explosives-filled cement mixer destroyed the UN headquarters in Iraq, killing UN special representative to Iraq, and twenty-two members of his staff. On 2003, leaked footage of American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, referred to as the "Abu Ghraib Scandal"<sup>12</sup>, led to even more public outrage. This all further exacerbated the flood of Islamic militants into Baghdad. There was no proven connection between al-Qaeda and Iraq before the invasion, but after the invasion, all these incidents have allowed Al-Qaeda to establish a foothold in Iraq, exploiting Sunni resentment against the U.S. occupation and the Shia-majority in the country. On March 31, 2004, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) mounted a wave of suicide bombings, striking against Shia Muslim holy sites in Baghdad and Karbala. In 2005, there appeared to be a glimmer of hope as it was an election year for Iraq, where Iraqis voted for their first full-term government, giving Shiites majority control of parliament. However, on February 22, 2006 Sunni Muslim extremists destroyed the gilded Shiite shrine in Samarra, unleashing waves of sectarian violence that spread across the country. This sparked the Iraqi sectarian civil war that lasted till 2008. On July 2007, the US government released a report stating that, despite many military campaigns and counter-terror operations against it, al-Qaeda had not only managed to regroup but was, in fact, now stronger than at any time since the 11 September attacks. On January 10, 2007, George Bush announced the "new way forward" in Iraq, known as the surge, where he deployed 20,000 additional US troops to Iraq. Although that ended up being the deadliest year for American forces since 2004, but stability did follow and insurgent attacks went down afterwards. Under Obama, almost as soon as American troops left in 2011, power vacuum happened and insurgency was rising again. Sunni extremists stepped up against Shia majority and so many of them teamed up with Islamist extremists in Syria, which had its own civil war. This ultimately led to another war in Iraq where by December 30 2013, insurgency turned into guerrilla warfare all across western Iraq with the rise of Islamic state of Iraq and Syria also known as ISIS. By 2014, ISIS controlled 40 percent of Iraq and also third of neighboring Syria. This terrorist organization conducted terrorist attacks all over the world and in different continents<sup>13</sup>, such as the 2015 Paris attacks which killed 130 people, along with other terrorist acts in many other countries such as Belgium, United Kingdom, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Australia, and others.

### B. International, Regional, and Domestic Consequences:

Another major consequence of the invasion was the rise in anti-American Sentiment which still persists to this day, especially in the Arab world. In the perceptions of many, democratization became synonymous with the exercise of American military power. The invasion ultimately led

<sup>12</sup> S. M. Hersh, 'Torture at Abu Ghraib', *The New Yorker*, 10 May 2004, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib> (accessed 21 January 2025).

<sup>13</sup> T. Lister et al., 'ISIS goes global: Mapping ISIS attacks around the world', *CNN*, 17 December 2015, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html> (accessed 21 January 2025).

to a decline in both domestic and global trust in U.S. foreign policy and weakened its diplomatic standing<sup>14</sup>. Many nations viewed the invasion as an example of Western imperialism, affecting global political dynamics. The torture at Abu Ghraib also caused international outrage and raised broader questions about U.S. interrogation practices during the War on Terror, which contributed to deteriorating the reputation and soft power of the country that often preached morality and democratic values. The invasion also led to major decrease in trust in the United Nations and its ability to curb unilateralism, as Secretary General Kofi Annan himself later described the invasion and the occupation of Iraq as illegal from the UN charter's point of view. The general perception became that super powers will only comply with the UN's decisions and rules when it is convenient, was further perpetuated by the invasion. Another important consequence was on the responsibility to protect (R2P) Doctrine<sup>15</sup>, which states that when a government is unable to fulfill its responsibility to provide basic protections to its people, then other states have a responsibility to step in. This applies to "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity," according to the UN. Bush's administration has argued that Saddam Hussein's brutal treatment of many Iraqis was one reason to overthrow him, as well as promoting democracy, but the invasion has led to global skepticism of military interventions on humanitarian grounds. Russia in particular has expressed skepticism about R2P and to this day, it sees R2P through the lens of US and European attempts to impose Western values on the rest of the world. Domestically, the invasion has had a significant drain on US economy. Three months before the Iraq War began, the Bush administration's top budget official estimated the war would cost \$50-60 billion. By 2007, the United States was spending \$10 billion per month in Iraq and the lowest approximate cost of the Iraq War is \$3 trillion. In 2008, US experienced a severe and prolonged economic downturn and the invasion has depleted America's energy, setting it back in its long term competition with China, who had been experiencing unprecedented economic growth for years at the time. An even more significant consequence was that the Iraq war strongly shaped the US foreign policy choices of Bush's successor, president Barack Obama. President Obama was very hesitant in intervening in Syria in 2011, despite former president Bashar al Assad's use of chemical weapons against his citizens. Barack Obama has overtly stated that the lessons they learned from Iraq have made him very skeptical to intervene in Syria, even on the basis of humanity and the R2P doctrine. Also, President Obama foreign policy decisions were more centered towards diplomacy and multilateralism than his predecessor, showing reluctance against the unilateral approach that Bush often took. In addition to that, the invasion proved the negative consequences of the United States' military overreach and limits to its military power, proving that it is not enough to bolster the US' ability to impose democracy and to remake the world according to its preferences. Similarly, public opinion in the U.S. shifted significantly against large-scale military interventions aimed at regime change, showing growing skepticism about the effectiveness of regime change and nation-building as foreign policy strategies. According to an American analytics and advisory company "Gallup", Bush's public approval rate was 90 percent before the invasion<sup>16</sup>, but decreased to reach 20 percent by 2008. This shows the disillusionment of the American people by the invasion and US interventionism. When it comes to the destabilization of the middle east region, the invasion

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Maiolo, J. M. Hanhimäki, A. Best, and K. E. Schulze (eds.), *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Routledge, 2008), chapter 22, 'The War on Terror in a Globalized World'.

<sup>15</sup> 'What is R2P?', Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, available at <https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/> (accessed 21 January 2025).

<sup>16</sup> 'Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush', Gallup News, available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx> (accessed 21 January 2025).

heavily contributed to the rise of one of the United States' main enemies in the region; Iran. In fact, Iran ended up benefitting most from invasion of Iraq, since Iraq was a buffer against Iran's presence in the Arab world. After the invasion, Iraq became a foothold for Iranian influence to spread in neighboring countries. For example, Iran was able to create a supply line across Iraq to Syria, where backed Iranian groups fought alongside Bashar al Assad in the Syrian civil war. Iran's main goal after the U.S. invasion was to prevent the establishment of a government in Baghdad that was hostile to Tehran, and it did so by bolstering proxies and other supporters in Iraq. Today, Iranian commerce dominates Iraqi market and Iraq's security forces include powerful militaries trained, supported, and sometimes led by Iranians. The number of Iraqi civilians killed will never fully be accounted for since many studies estimate different numbers, but one study done by Iraq Body Count<sup>17</sup> estimated between 112,000 to 122,000 civilian deaths. Other studies such as the Lancet report, a study by a leading medical journal "The Lancet", estimated the number to be close to 1 million deaths in its 2006 report. According to a project done by Brown University in Rhode Island, USA, titled "Cost of War Project"<sup>18</sup>, America's war on terror displaced 37 Million people and the number of people displaced in Iraq were estimated to be the highest at 9.2 million compared to the 7.1 million in Syria and 5.3 million in Afghanistan, for example. In terms of the estimated number of deaths, the highest was also by Iraq at 308,000 deaths compared to 179,000 in Syria and 157,000 in Afghanistan. This estimate includes civilians, security forces, humanitarian workers, and opposition fighters. There was also a huge number of Iraqi refugees and according to UNHCR, the largest portions of Iraqi refugees spread to Syria and Jordan ranging from 500,000 to 700,000 refugees, in addition to other countries such as Lebanon and Egypt. In Iraq today, sectarianism is rife, poverty is widespread, the economy is weak, and the security situation is in many places still dangerous.

## Conclusion

As discussed above, Iraqis are still dealing with consequences of this invasions to this day. Many people believe that the U.S. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney weaponized American patriotism to invade Iraq, and it is still widely considered as one of worst foreign policy decisions. In the words of US senator of Vermont, Bernie Sanders, one of the few people who voted against the invasion back in 2003: "I am deeply concerned about the precedent that a unilateral invasion could establish in terms of international law and the role of the United Nations. If the US believes it can go to war at any time against any nation, what moral or legal obligation can our government raise if another country chose to do the same thing." Many people have suspected that oil was the primarily reason the United states invaded. However, there is insufficient direct evidence to prove that. For example, it was not proven that big US oil companies were lobbying for the invasion of Iraq. However, it is important to also note that while the price of war and invasion is often tragic to civilians, there is ample evidence that proves how the military industrial complex in the United State have made millions from the US invasion, such as Lockheed

<sup>17</sup> The Iraq Body Count is a project that tracks and documents civilian deaths in Iraq resulting from violence since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

<sup>18</sup> 'Summary of Findings', *Costs of War*, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, available at <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/summary> (accessed 21 January 2025).

Martin.<sup>19</sup> The reality is that the military industrial complex cannot thrive without ongoing wars and conflicts. According to the PEW Research Center, 64% of the US war veterans described the invasion as “not worth fighting”. Eric Sofge, an Army infantry officer who was deployed in Iraq in 2007 has stated: “Although we disposed a dictator, we ruined the whole country in the process.” Based on the findings of my research paper, The US invasion of Iraq, initially justified by the need to eliminate weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and combat terrorism, ultimately failed to achieve its long-term goals and worsened regional instability. The absence of WMDs in Iraq and the failure to establish a stable, democratic government left a power vacuum, leading to prolonged violence, sectarian conflict, and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. While the regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled, the prolonged consequences of the invasion demonstrate that the decision was heavily flawed.

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<sup>19</sup> W. D. Hartung, ‘Profits of War: Corporate Beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 Pentagon Spending Surge’, *Costs of War*, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University (13 September 2021) <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2021/ProfitsOfWar> [accessed 21 January 2025].

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## Humanitarian Intervention:- The Emergence and Impact of R2P After the Cold War

Hana Girma Mamo<sup>20</sup>The logo for IR Scholars features the word "IR" in a large, bold, black font above the word "Scholars" in a smaller, regular black font. A faint blue circular graphic is visible behind the text.

# IR Scholars

**Abstract**

The end of the Cold War marked a significant shift in global security dynamics, highlighting the inadequacy of the traditional Westphalian notion of sovereignty in addressing mass atrocities. Events such as the humanitarian crises in Somalia, Bosnia, the Rwandan genocide, and the Kosovo intervention exposed the limitations of existing international mechanisms and raised pressing moral questions regarding humanitarian intervention. These failures catalyzed the development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, introduced by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001. R2P reframed sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a right, emphasizing the international community's duty to act when states are unable or unwilling to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This paper examines the emergence of R2P in the post-Cold War era, its core principles and criteria, and the political dynamics influencing its implementation. Through key case studies—including Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Crimea—it evaluates the doctrine's successes, limitations, and frequent misuse by powerful states. The analysis concludes that while R2P represents a significant normative evolution, its practical application remains constrained by geopolitical interests and the structural limitations of the international system.

**Keywords:** Responsibility to Protect (R2P); Humanitarian Intervention; Sovereignty; Post-Cold War; ICISS; Genocide; Libya; Syria; Rwanda; Kosovo; International Law; UN Security Council; State Responsibility.

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<sup>20</sup>UMCS, MA in International Relations, [yeabzelni@gmail.com](mailto:yeabzelni@gmail.com).

## Introduction

The world system before the post cold war era is a world which stands for securing the sovereignty of any nation and this notion as a principle and as a practically applicable concept have never been challenged by any other idea. The convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide came into effect on 12 january, 1951. This document is the first treaty that challenged the principle of sovereignty which has a strong foundation after the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. This treaty requires signatories to take preventive measure to prevent genocide crime from happening, stop genocide crimes committed in their territories, and prosecute those who are responsible for the act. If a state fails to do such a thing it gives authority for the global community to act and protect the civilians even without the consent of the given state. This convention fuels the debate around humanitarian intervention after world war two. Events like the rwanda genocide, kosovo and syria raise a question of morality whether it is okey to watch atrocities committed in states and the international community turns its back because of sovereignty. In 1999 the Secretary General to the United Nation Kofi Annan, addressed the General assembly with a big speech with a challenging question to be answered by the international community. This led to the establishment of the Canadian sponsored international commission on intervention and state sovereignty which conducted a study on humanitarian intervention and came up with a new perspective to look at. This report made sovereignty as a responsibility of state not only as a right and rather than looking at intervention as a right of the international community to intervene, it shifted the notion of right to a responsibility to protect not as a right to intervene. So after the post cold war era the name humanitarian intervention was replaced by the new doctrine called the “responsibility to protect”. This idea of responsibility to protect was an effort to create a common ground as to how the international community should respond to mass atrocities without the erosion of the principle of sovereignty. Even though it has some new ideas and perspectives to look at, it was basically the same with the previous humanitarian intervention doctrine. In this short writing i will try to explore the emergence of responsibility to protect in the post cold war era, key elements shaping the practical use of responsibility to protect, success and limitation of responsibility to protect in mitigating grave human rights violation, political dynamic and their influence on the application of responsibility to protect, and the obstacle of balancing intervention with national sovereignty will be briefly discussed.

## Post-Cold War Development of R2P

As we all know after the cold war so many nations were newly independent countries. Because of this, those nations while trying to stand by themselves face ethnic inequality, corruption and bad governance which led to internal conflict. The post-Cold War era witnessed several humanitarian disasters that demonstrated the limitations of existing international mechanisms in addressing human rights violations. These events, ranging from genocides to ethnic cleansing, sparked intense debate whether the international community fully focus on state sovereignty or try to protect human lives irrespective of the fact that they are the citizens of a specific country. Below I tried to discuss the main events which showed the defect of the existing international system immediately after the cold war.

## Somalia (1992-1993)

The early 1990s saw a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Somalia. The country had descended into civil war following the overthrow of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. As the Somali National Alliance and rival factions waged war, famine and disease spread across the country, with over 300,000 people dying from hunger. The United Nations, led by the United States, intervened in December 1992 through Operation Restore Hope.<sup>21</sup> However, the intervention was at first said to be humanitarian; it became really difficult to distribute the humanitarian aid. Due to this reason the humanitarian aid changed into direct conflict with the local warlords. Scholars characterized this situation as the UN peacekeeping mission had Unclear mandate and mission creep.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this the action of the peacekeeping mission intensified the debate over the challenge of state sovereignty Vs Humanitarian action. Furthermore the humanitarian intervention failed to protect all civilians which was the first aim of the intervention. Lack of local understanding also contributed to the failure of the mission meaning the community was religiously and culturally tied which led to lack of support for the peace keeping force.

## Bosnia (1992-1995)

The Bosnian War was the ideal conflict which represented ethnic cleansing conflict. It was a tragic demonstration of how ethnic violence and the collapse of state structures can lead to mass atrocities. In the 1990s, Bosnia-Herzegovina sought independence from Yugoslavia, which provoked violent reactions from Bosnian Serb forces. Over the course of the conflict, widespread ethnic cleansing occurred, most infamously in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre where more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were killed.<sup>23</sup> The UN, with peacekeeping troops stationed in the region, failed to prevent these atrocities claiming that their mandate does not allow them to intervene militarily. From the result it was clear that the peacekeeping force failed to do its main task because of a lack of a clear and coherent understanding of the situation and the mission in the first place. Despite warnings and calls for intervention, the international community hesitated to act decisively, and only the intervention of NATO forces in 1995, after years of inaction, brought the violence to an end. The Bosnian conflict revealed the inadequacy of traditional peacekeeping and the need for a new framework that would allow for more forceful and timely interventions to prevent atrocities.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Restoring Hope: In Somalia with the Unified Task Force 1992-1993* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 1994)

<sup>22</sup> Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008)

<sup>23</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières, *Speaking Out: Srebrenica 1993-2003* (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2003), [https://www.msf.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/MSF%20Speaking%20Out%20Srebrenica%201993-2003\\_1.pdf](https://www.msf.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/MSF%20Speaking%20Out%20Srebrenica%201993-2003_1.pdf) p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "A New Perspective on Peacekeeping: Lessons from Bosnia and Elsewhere," *Global Governance*, 3.1 (1997): 1-15

## Rwandan Genocide (1994)

This event was highly influenced by the “Moqadisho effect”.<sup>25</sup> USA, a country who is considered as the world police due to its influence, was very reluctant to intervene because the Somalia event was considered a mistake. The event was the most infamous example of international failure to prevent mass atrocities. In April 1994, ethnic violence erupted between the majority Hutu and the minority Tutsi population. Over a span of 100 days, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by government-backed militias.<sup>26</sup> Despite early warnings and calls for intervention from UN peacekeepers already on the ground, the international community, including the United Nations and major Western powers, failed to act. The scale and speed of the genocide, coupled with the lack of political will to intervene, demonstrated the failure of existing international mechanisms to respond to such large-scale atrocities. Furthermore it was a reflection of how humanitarian intervention was used in a selective manner. Mostly the powerful states intervene in the internal affairs of a state when they have geopolitical or other interests at stake. The lessons of Rwanda emphasized the need for a more comprehensive and decisive international response to prevent genocides and mass crimes against humanity.

## Kosovo (1999)

In 1999, the conflict in Kosovo between ethnic Albanians and the Yugoslav army under Slobodan Milošević escalated to the point where NATO intervened militarily without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council. The intervention was framed as an attempt to prevent widespread ethnic cleansing and atrocities committed by the Yugoslav forces against Kosovo Albanians.<sup>27</sup> While NATO’s intervention halted the immediate violence, it raised significant concerns regarding the legality and legitimacy of military action without UN Security Council approval.<sup>28</sup> The time can be characterized as a time where the European continent is trying to fully integrate and due to this fact NATO can just stand and see the situation escalate. Even though the intervention was considered to be a successful intervention it was also a clear indication of how intervention is affected by the other external factors besides from the existing humanitarian crisis. The Kosovo intervention thus illustrated both the promise and the danger of humanitarian intervention. It demonstrated the growing recognition of the need to act in the face of mass atrocities, but also exposed how powerful states' decisions can be influenced by their own interest.

## The Blair Doctrine

In the wake of Kosovo, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, championed the idea that the international community had a moral responsibility to intervene in situations where governments were committing atrocities. His speech in 1999 emphasized that humanitarian intervention should

<sup>25</sup> Philip Benjamin Dotson, *The Mogadishu Effect: America's Failure-Driven Foreign Policy* (University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2023), <https://openspaces.unk.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=hist-etd>, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Emily A. Milnes, “The Rwandan Genocide: A Study for Policymakers Engaged in Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, and International Development,” *Pepperdine Policy Review*, 13 (2021), <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/ppr/vol13/iss1/5> [accessed 9 February 2025], p. 1

<sup>27</sup> Edward Newman and Gëzim Visoka, “NATO in Kosovo and the Logic of Successful Security Practices,” *International Affairs*, 100.2 (March 2024): 631–653, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae014>, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

not be hampered by concerns over national sovereignty if it meant preventing genocide or mass suffering. His main speech was:-

“The most pressing foreign policy problem we face ... to identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people's conflicts and to do so by bringing together a more subtle blend of mutual self interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish.”<sup>29</sup>

He characterized the Kosovo intervention as a “Just War” based not on any territorial ambition but on values. His speech later contributed to identifying when and whether to intervene in the formulation of responsibility to protect, especially when the intervention is going to be militarily.

### **The Emergence of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) After the Cold War**

After the end of the cold war in the early 1990s when the tension between the two superpowers decreased the world's focus came to other challenges like ethnic conflict, civil war and humanitarian disasters which was limited to a territory of specific states. A highly profiled events like the Rwandan genocide, the Srebrenica massacre showed the limitation of the traditional notion of sovereignty and raised the question whether the international community has a responsibility to intervene in the internal affairs of a state in case the state is unable or unwilling to protect its own citizen. In 2000, Kofi Annan the Secretary General of the United Nation , in his millennium report raised a question to the members of the UN as follows:-

“... if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to Rwanda, to a Srebrenica, to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?”<sup>30</sup>

In response to this question and challenge the government of canada sponsored an independent commission called international commission on intervention and state sovereignty (hereinafter ICSS). The main aim of this commission is to find a common ground between intervention and the principle of sovereignty so that the international community can be on the same page for responding to grave human rights violations.<sup>31</sup> In 2001, the commission came up with a report which incorporated the notion of “Responsibility to Protect” (hereinafter R2P). The notion of R2P was a groundbreaking in reshaping the discourse on humanitarian intervention. In addition to conceptualizing the notion of R2P, the report articulated 3 pillars of the R2P, criteria for intervention, the role of the UN and addressed the tension between the norm of non intervention which is deeply rooted in the principle of sovereignty and the need for intervention in human made humanitarian crises. From the report we can understand that the R2P is inherent in the traditional principle of state sovereignty, which first and foremost respects a state's sovereignty, while also obligating the state to protect its civilians from grave human rights violations. When a state is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens from atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic

<sup>29</sup> Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008)

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century* (United Nations, 2000), [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/We\\_The\\_Peoples.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/We_The_Peoples.pdf) [accessed 11 January 2025].

<sup>31</sup> Evans, Gareth, Mohamed Sahnoun, Gisèle Côté-Harper, Lee Hamilton, Michael Ignatieff, Vladimir Lukin, Klaus Naumann, Cyril Ramaphosa, Fidel Ramos, Cornelio Sommaruga, Eduardo Stein, and Ramesh Thakur, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (International Development Research Centre, December 2001)

cleansing, or crimes against humanity, the international community has a responsibility to intervene, provided that certain conditions such as just cause, right intention, and the authorization of the United Nations are met.<sup>32</sup> To deeply understand this doctrine we need to briefly look at the pillars of the concept and the criteria for intervention. In 2005 the United nation conducted a world summit and the commission report won a unanimous vote by 150 heads of states in the 2005 world summit outcome document.<sup>33</sup> Even though this document is a political declaration or simply a statement of intent, it showed that the international community was not strictly attached to the traditional principle of sovereignty as in the previous decades. Key Elements Shaping the Practical Use of R2P in Humanitarian Crises

## Basic principle of R2P

The first basic principle of this principle dictates that state sovereignty implies responsibility and this responsibility primarily lies in the state itself. Traditionally states consider sovereignty as their right and this right can not be questioned by anyone. Whatever a state does in its territory is considered to be its business even if it is killing its citizens. The responsibility to protect shifted this idea and reminded states that they shouldn't take sovereignty as a grant to do crime or fail to prevent a crime on their territory. The second basic principle is, if a population is suffering serious harm due to internal war, insurgency, repression, or state failure and the state is unable or unwilling to address the crisis the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.<sup>34</sup> This basically means the failure of a state fulfilling its responsibility will result in the erosion of its sovereignty and the state can't really do anything about it.

## Basic elements of R2P

### *Responsibility to prevent*

Responsibility to protect gives the first priority to this basic element.<sup>35</sup> Prevention of a crisis is primarily the responsibility of a state through creating a system which ensures accountability, good governance, protection of human rights and through promoting social and democratic rights. Even though it's the primary responsibility of a state, most developing nations need support to achieve those things. So R2P emphasizes that the international community must step up by providing support for local initiatives to achieve their mission. According to the ICISS 2003 report development assistance, mediation effort and inducement could be the form of support expected from the international community to address the root cause of the conflict before it escalates on a large scale.<sup>36</sup> But the international community specifically countries who have the power to prevent a given crisis prefer to invest their resource on the preparation of war, military intervention and to peace keeping thinking that rather than wasting money in prevention let's wait and see how the event is going to turn out and if it's something dangerous for us we will intervene. This kind of

<sup>32</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome* (A/RES/60/1) (2005),

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001), p XI-XII

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

understanding not only fails to prevent the crisis but in most cases it will be a late response reflecting the failure of the international system. This was reflected in the Rwanda genocide. According to the commission report for effective prevention method to be implemented there has to be three vital conditions to be met:-<sup>37</sup>

- There must be an already established knowledge of the fragility of the situation and the risk associated with it
- There must be a specific understanding of the policy measures available that are capable of making a difference to the situation, the so-called “preventive toolbox”.
- There must be a political will to apply those measures.

### Responsibility to react

If the first measure which is responsibility to react fails, responsibility to react comes into picture. Reaction involves the use of diplomatic, humanitarian, or economic measures to halt or prevent atrocities. If the situation requires the responsibility to react may also include military response but it's only when the situation is extreme and there is no other way to avoid the crisis. . as a first principles, in the case of reaction just as with prevention, less intrusive and coercive measures should always be considered before more coercive and intrusive ones are applied.<sup>38</sup> In case of reaction the first priority must be given to those coercive actions which are less than the military intervention. Economic sanction, using an already established international judicial institution like the international criminal court (ICC) can contribute to limiting the spread of the crisis by showing that the international community is watching and will not keep silent to what is going on in a specific country. If it comes down to military intervention, the four criteria which are the just cause threshold, precautionary principle, right authority, and operational principle must be met. The criteria for the military intervention will be discussed in detail below.

### Responsibility to rebuild

The responsibility to protect does not just end after stopping the atrocity by any means. This is especially important when military intervention took place in a state. The idea is that in the first place the intervention took place because the state lacked the capacity to prevent the crisis so even after the crisis the state should not be expected to have the capacity to rebuild its nation so that such kind of thing would not happen again. Because of this the concept requires the intervening party to take some effort in the reconstruction of the nation so that the action can be fully considered under the R2P. This rebuilding process can take the form of peacebuilding, justice and reconciliation as well as development. During this time the intervening authority should keep in mind that staying too long after intervention could also have some negative aspects. To name some, it could be considered as an erosion of sovereignty and it may cause the feeling of dependency

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Christian Bundegaard, 'The Normative Divide in International Society: Sovereignty versus Responsibility' (2010) Danish Institute for International Studies

from the local government to the intervening authority. So a balance must be made between the international and local actor's responsibility.

### **Basic criteria or principles for military intervention to be implemented**

The ICISS report provides 4 criteria to be met for a legitimate military intervention and those criterias are the just cause threshold, the precautionary principle, right authority and operational principle. Let's discuss them one by one.

#### **The just cause threshold**

As I said in the previous pages the just cause threshold was derived from the britain prime minister tony blair speech. According to this criteria military intervention is justified if the intervention conducted to halt or avert a huge amount of loss of life with a genocidal intent or not and a state were unable or unwilling to act. Secondly the if it is to avoid ethnic cleansig which most of the time carried out by killing, forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape.<sup>39</sup> If one of the situations exists, military intervention is acceptable but the main problem with the report is that it does not define what large scale or huge amount of loss of life mean. This leaves a big space for interpretation and can be a reason for a late response. Most of the time states don't want any military intervention from outside and due to this they tend to hide the number of incidents and the level of the crisis. In addition to this a lot of misinformation can also be a cause of military intervention where intervention is not necessary. So this should be assessed in a precautionary way. The other issue is the issue of a failed state, where there is no government who has the responsibility to protect the people. In case of a failed state the fact that the civilians are in danger because of the action of a non-state actor does not make a difference when it comes to the just cause criteria meaning the international community must intervene if the above indicators exist.

#### **The precautionary principle**

Under this principle there are four conditions that must be fulfilled namely right intention, last resort, proportional means and reasonable prospects.<sup>40</sup> Right intention means the military intervention's primary purpose should be to halt or avert the man made crisis not due to other political reasons. For example, changing a regime is not acceptable but if the cause of the crisis is the regime, minimizing its power and facilitating election for the civilian would be the right action. In addition to this changing an existing border using military intervention is also an act which is not covered under this concept. Even with the right authority the right intention might be manipulated due to political reasons. Secondly there is the last resort criteria which dictates that before military intervention takes place other available measures must be taken into account to stop the crisis. Available measures could include diplomacy, economic sanction and using ICC to

<sup>39</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001),p 32

<sup>40</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001),p 35

achieve justice. Without going through those processes jumping into military intervention can be considered as misuse of the concept which leads to a much more crisis than averting one. Thirdly there is proportional means which is deeply rooted in international humanitarian law which is regulated by the four geneva conventions and additional protocol one. Those laws regulate international armed conflict and any conflict must follow the principles laid out under those laws. One of the main principles of those laws is the use of proportional force. Proportionality dictates that the aim of any war is to win and using excessive force to inflict unproportional damage is in violation of the rules and regulation of war. Finally there must be a reasonable prospect of military intervention, meaning before the intervention, the plan must predict a chance of success which can be visible after the intervention. The success relates to the protection of civilians, if the intervention can not see a way for the protection of civilians or if the intervention is predicted to cause a much more crisis it is in the best interest of the concept to intervene.

### **Right authority**

Right authority relates to who will decide when to apply the responsibility to protect in a given crisis. The commission report actually does not suggest any new perspective with regard to the right authority. According to the United Nations charter the United nation security council was given the responsibility to keep the peace and security of the world. The commission report also gave the authority to decide when to apply the responsibility to protect to the UN security council. This is actually confirming the problematic international system where the decision of the council is hard to implement unless the permanent members interests are the same. The commission simply by giving responsibility to the council, it urges the council to act responsibly and morally. Furthermore in the case the UN security council fails it gives the authority to the UN general assembly and regional organization but in reality it is difficult to put it into practice. Also what if the country who needs intervention is actually the USA, China, Russia or any powerful state who would intervene for the sake of humanitarian intervention? What if the decision of the UN general assembly and the regional organization affects the interest of the powerful state? All this makes the second authorities less reliable.

### **Operational principle**

Before the intervention took place the military force must have a clear objective to achieve so that there would not be a mission creep which would lead to a negative outcome of the intervention. In addition to this all the intervening actors must follow a common military approach which can be achieved by having a unity of command and finally the military force should have a maximum possible coordination with humanitarian organization so that the civilian can get the appropriate necessary aid.

### **Responsibility to protect Vs Sovereignty**

The Westphalian concept of sovereignty seems to be challenged by the responsibility to protect in the post cold war era. The responsibility to protect concepts always apply without the consent of a state and if a state willingly invites or asks help from outside the responsibility to protect would

not come into picture. This means the application of responsibility to protect always results in the erosion of state sovereignty. R2P argues that this sovereignty is conditional upon the state's ability to protect its population from atrocities. If a state fails in this regard, the international community has the right and duty to intervene. The ICISS work shifted sovereignty from the right of a state to the responsibility of a state and this shift seems a sound common ground. But the concept problem does not emanate from its contradiction with sovereignty but with the misuse and wrong usage of the concept by the powerful states.

### **Criticism of R2P**

#### *Selective Application*

One of the key criticisms of R2P is its selective application. Many argue that the international community often applies R2P only to weaker, more isolated countries while overlooking the actions of powerful states. For example, NATO intervened in Kosovo but did not take similar action in the Rwanda crisis, despite similar levels of violence and human suffering. This inconsistency undermines the legitimacy of R2P as a universal principle.

#### *R2P is just another name for humanitarian intervention*

Because of the misuse of the concept most people think that the concept is the same with humanitarian intervention except its name. But as we discussed in the above pages the responsibility to protect put military intervention as a last resort and even focus on a rebuilding process after the crisis stopped.

#### *R2P applies only to weak and friendless countries never the strong*

These criticisms so far can not be debatable because we have not seen the concept applied to any powerful states yet. Even in the future it is really hard to predict this principle would be much stronger in the international system and applied to any nation regardless of its economic and military power. The world did not arrive in a place where humanity is the most important thing which needs protection more than anything.

### **Case studies: Libya, Siria, 2003 US intervention in Iraq and Russia claim to the crimea**

In the case studies I choose only to focus on how the concept was misused and how it is wrongly used to legitimate the action taken by the intervening parties. The first ideal case is Libya. The 2011 intervention in Libya under the auspices of R2P is one of the most controversial cases. The initial purpose was to protect civilians from Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's forces as they attacked rebel-held areas. However, the intervention quickly morphed into a broader campaign aimed at regime change. The collapse of the Libyan state after Gaddafi's removal has led to a power vacuum and ongoing instability, fueling violent militias and leading to mass displacement. Critics argue that the intervention had a hidden agenda and all the intervening forces had their own interest. For example France wanted to re-engage in North Africa and correct past failures, prevent refugee and migrant surge to the EU and remove Gadhafi due to his support for militant groups which led to regional disruption. On the side of the US, it had the intention of maintaining regional influence and countering extremism in North Africa, cooperation with France and UK as well as managing

oil resources and regional stability. In Libya even though the concept of responsibility to protect raised and used the regime change and the lack of diplomacy which led to the immediate use of force makes it the ideal example for the misuse of the concept. Secondly Despite widespread evidence of atrocities, including chemical weapons attacks, the international community has been unable to agree on a coordinated intervention in Syria. The geopolitical complexities, especially the involvement of Russia and Iran on the side of the Syrian government, have hindered action at the UN Security Council. This shows the selective application of the concept in general. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq claiming that the country was developing weapons of mass destruction can be categorized under the wrong use of R2P because the first aim of intervention was not humanitarian in the first place. The US started to raise the concept after it was found out that there is no weapon of mass destruction in Iraq and it wanted to justify its action. The same is true for the Russia annexation of Crimea in 2014 claiming the action was intended to protect ethnic Russians. I believe there is a big difference between the Libya intervention and the intervention in Iraq and Crimea. The Libya intervention was authorized by the UN security council and the only problem with the action was lack of right intention and mis-steps while using the concept. But when it comes to Iraq and Crimea the action can not be categorized under the R2P because it does not have the authorization of the UN security council and the invasion was merely conducted because the countries wanted to sustain their interest. After the development of the concept those events highly influenced the minds of states where they see the concept as a means of colonization.

## Conclusion

The emergence of R2P after the Cold War was a response to the failures of the international community to prevent mass atrocities. Events like somalia civilwar, bosnia, rwanda genocide and Kosovo had an influence in turning the attention of the international community to look at the existing system. The work of ICISS contributed to minimize the debate over humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty by bringing a new concept to the table namely responsibility to protect. The concept provides a clear framework for the application of the concept to achieve the necessary outcome after intervention. Unlike humanitarian intervention this concept recognizes military intervention as a last resort. While the framework represents a significant development in international law and humanitarian action, its implementation has been inconsistent, often shaped by political considerations and the interests of powerful states. The R2P after its construction was either misused as the case of Libya shows or it was wrongly claimed by powerful states as a justification for their wrongful act as the case of Iraq and Crimea showed. Even Though the concept by itself is a proper response to atrocities committed in the world, the international system which is the result of world war two and the cold war makes the pure practical applicability of the concept difficult. The 2001 ICISS report did not solve this problem even though it tried to stipulate an alternative choice by giving the secondary authority to the UN general assembly and regional organization. Currently ongoing conflict in Africa and Asia can also be a best example to the problematic international system where human rights are only implemented and enforced as a secondary agenda. In the current world where there is so much interconnectedness the atrocity committed in one state can not be contained there, rather it will bring the problem to neighboring countries, the continent and before we know it, it will become a world problem. The best example is irregular migration where people flee from their home to escape atrocities. The emergence of terrorist groups which at first make the life of local people and then become a world threat can also be the motivation of the international community to focus on the R2P concept in a correct

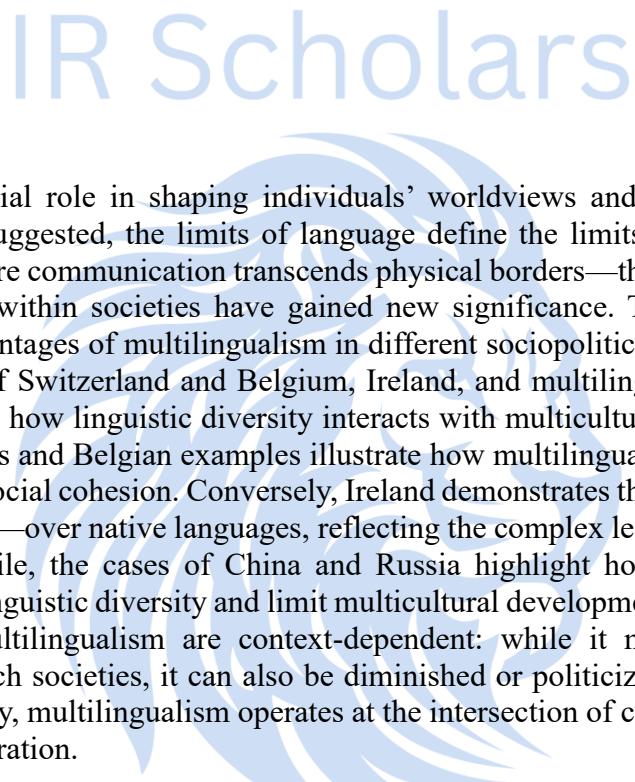
manner. R2P, to be fully effective, the international community must overcome its selective application, ensuring that interventions are not driven by geopolitics but by a genuine commitment to preventing atrocities and promoting human rights.

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## Beyond Multiculturalism and Globalization: Multilingual Societies

Ahmed Alperen Keskin<sup>41</sup>IR Scholars**Abstract**

Language plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' worldviews and societal structures. As Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested, the limits of language define the limits of thought. In today's globalized world—where communication transcends physical borders—the presence and function of multiple languages within societies have gained new significance. This paper explores the advantages and disadvantages of multilingualism in different sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Through case studies of Switzerland and Belgium, Ireland, and multilingual dynamics in China and Russia, it examines how linguistic diversity interacts with multiculturalism, state policy, and globalization. The Swiss and Belgian examples illustrate how multilingualism can enrich cultural bonds, education, and social cohesion. Conversely, Ireland demonstrates the dominance of a global lingua franca—English—over native languages, reflecting the complex legacy of imperialism and globalization. Meanwhile, the cases of China and Russia highlight how centralized language policies can suppress linguistic diversity and limit multicultural development. The analysis reveals that the effects of multilingualism are context-dependent: while it may foster intercultural understanding and enrich societies, it can also be diminished or politicized by state policies and global forces. Ultimately, multilingualism operates at the intersection of cultural identity, political power, and global integration.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism; Globalization; Multiculturalism; Language Policy; Cultural Identity; Switzerland; Belgium; Ireland; China; Russia; Linguistic Diversity; Language and Power; Global Lingua Franca.

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<sup>41</sup> UMCS, MA in International Relations, [a.alperenkeskin@gmail.com](mailto:a.alperenkeskin@gmail.com). <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3590-7388>

## 1. Introduction

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

More than one hundred years ago Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher used these words in his only book “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus” to argue that the limits of philosophy are bordered by our world, while our world is bordered with our words. For his time, the argument that Wittgenstein claimed was extraordinarily assertive because if he was right, it meant that philosophy was over. Everything that we can think about consists of the words we know. That means if we have different ways to explain and think about a specific concept, we are able to have different perspectives to analyze a particular concept or idea.

In our post-modern world, we live in a global village with the rise of globalization. With the complex communication tools, and especially with the internet, the borders between different societies are almost invisible. In comparison with several decades before our time, communication and communication tools have been developed drastically. People with different backgrounds and different cultures can communicate immediately in any language. This development brought us new forms of challenges and opportunities. For example, people can share their opinions with other people who have completely different cultures based on their own cultures in their own languages. On the other hand, lots of people do not have sufficient educational background to understand and empathize with different people which leads to an enlargement of the communication gap between people.

Taking globalization and languages as the origin, this essay aims to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the usage of more than one language in societies which are examples of both positive and negative aspects. Without any biases, understanding different societies and their cultural construction in terms of language will help us to create a mindset about the advantages and disadvantages of using more than one language in different societies.

## 2. Literature Review

Multilingualism is commonly defined as the ability to use or possess proficiency in more than one language. This definition can be further refined to encompass varying degrees of fluency or usage across different languages (Clyne, 2017). In today's world, we can see examples of multilingual societies in different regions commonly. The examples of multilingual societies suggest that it is a dynamic, multifaceted, and endlessly fascinating phenomenon (Aronin, 2018). In modern times, its importance has expanded beyond local and personal contexts, gaining a much wider global significance, making it one of the most vital social practices worldwide (Aronin, 2018). To understand the effects of multilingualism, it will be helpful to investigate societies with different levels and shapes of multilingualism.

### 2.1. Switzerland and Belgium

Both in Switzerland and Belgium, people have used a variety of different languages for centuries. Modern Switzerland was founded in 1848 when the federal constitution officially declared the

nation multilingual (Issa et al., 2022). Today, Swiss people may use either Italian, French, German, or Romansh as the official language. In terms of cultural richness, Switzerland presents us with a valuable example of using multilingualism (Stępkowska, 2020). One of the aspects of multilingualism in Swiss society that contributes to the country's cultural richness is constructing the educational backgrounds of new generations and helping them to build their multicultural mindsets (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022).

When we look at multilingualism in Belgium, we see very similar outcomes related to the bonds between multiculturalism and multilingualism in Switzerland. Similar to Switzerland, the people of Belgium have been using more than one language officially: German, French, and Dutch. In Belgium, multilingualism helps people to enrich their cultural bonds in the region (Wilde et al., 2016). In terms of art, communication, historical heritage, and even academic development, Belgium is a valuable example of representing and using different languages in the globalized world (Vogl & Hüning, 2010).

## 2.2. Ireland

When we look at the example of Ireland, we see a different perspective on the effects of the usage of more than one language in a society. In Ireland (Republic of Ireland), there are two official languages, namely, Irish and English; however, the number of people who actively use Irish as their native language has been decreasing for decades due to British imperialism (Reg Hindley, 2012). According to the 2022 Irish census, 1,873,997 people, or 39.8% of the Republic of Ireland's population, reported having some ability to speak Irish, reflecting a 6% increase from the 2016 census. However, the number of daily Irish speakers declined by 2% during the same period, with 71,968 individuals in 2022 identifying as daily speakers of the language (Ó Caollaí, 2023). Contrary to Switzerland and Belgium, in the Irish example, it is visible that multilingualism has become unnecessary. One factor that supports this change is that English is the lingua franca of our world, and the need for a second language in Ireland has decreased (Smokotin et al., 2014).

## 2.3. The examples of China and Russia

The official language in China (People's Republic of China) has been Mandarin for hundreds of years. Additionally, similar to China, the official language of Russia (Russian Federation) has been Russian for centuries. However, we can see people using a variety of different languages and dialects in both China and Russia. For example in China, hundreds of different dialects such as Yue (Cantonese), Xiang (Hunanese), Min dialect, Gan dialect, Wu dialect, and Kejia or Hakka can be heard even though none of them are recognized as official dialects in China (Tang & Heuven, 2008). To add on, in China, different minorities of different regions use their own languages frequently; however Chinese government has been trying to push down and limit the usage of languages such as Uyghur (Han & Cassels Johnson, 2021).

On the other hand, in Russia, while the official language of the country is Russian, different minorities often use their native languages in a de facto way such as Chechen, Tatar, Bashkir, and Chuvash (Baranova & Fedorova, 2019). After almost seventy years of communist rule in Russia, the spoken languages in the region could not contribute the multiculturalism in different societies in Russia due to the forced centralization of the USSR (Garipov & Solnyshkina, 2015).

### 3. Analysis

Taking into consideration the examples mentioned above, the advantages and disadvantages of using more than one language can be interpreted in different ways due to the differences between societies. In the example of Switzerland and Belgium, multilingualism, directly and indirectly, helps the multiculturalism level of the society by strengthening their bonds with the region and providing valuable aspects to them in terms of art, history reading, and even conducting academic research. Hence, we see clear advantages of multilingualism at a globalized level.

The example of Ireland shows us the dominance of globalization over regional values. A lingua franca, in this example English, has become more dominant than the native tongue of an entire nation in Ireland. As I stated previously, we cannot overlook the role of imperialism in the case of Ireland; however, this specific example suggests that multilingualism does not always have any advantageous or disadvantageous perspectives, sometimes the nature of human development can pave the way for the fall of multilingualism.

Lastly, the examples of China and Russia suggest relatively more disadvantaged situations about the usage of more than one language in a society. In both China and Russia, the power of centralized governments suppresses the possible multicultural acquisitions of multilingualism. The histories of those countries led to deeply centralized -or centralized tryouts- social policies nowadays. Even though dozens of different minorities with different histories, cultures, and languages could contribute to their countries' cultural atmosphere; because multilingualism is suppressed -in some cases prohibited-, cultural diversity could not become an issue.

### 4. Conclusion

When we investigate the role of multilingualism in different societies in today's globalized world, we cannot entirely talk about an absolute advantage or disadvantage. The impacts of using different languages in a society rely on the structure of the particular society. For example, In some countries, people speak different languages and this situation helps them to develop different understandings of their cultures and mindsets. From the point of the opposite view, multilingualism may be very ineffective or even prohibited due to the social policies of a specific society. In this case, due to the consequences of globalization, we cannot say that those societies are underdeveloped, slow, or going backward; however, we can say that using different languages can cause irritation for the non-minority society of the country due to policies and laws. In the long term, using different languages can harm the vision and the status of the culture of a minority population. Last but not least, in some special cases like Ireland, multilingualism does not affect society. This case can be interpreted as the absolute win of globalization over multilingualism in terms of possible advantages of disadvantages for a society.

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