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**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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Department of Security Studies

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**What are the Unveiling Factors Shaping the  
Outcome of Military Interventions in the  
Middle East?**

A Comparative Analysis of Syria and Libya

Master's thesis

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Study Programme: International Security Studies

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Year of the defence: 2024

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 30/04/2024

Luc de Vries

## **Bibliographic note**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis evaluates the outcomes of military interventions in the Middle East, with a focus on NATO's intervention in Libya and Russia's intervention in Syria. The study aims to test a comprehensively developed framework for assessing the outcome of military interventions. Consequently, this comprehensive framework allowed us to examine how certain factors determined the outcome of specific aspects of these interventions. This thesis is motivated by the absence of a qualitative, holistic approach in evaluating interventions and the often-oversimplified analysis of their determinants for success or failure. The study evaluates the success of military intervention based on the following criteria: political objective achievement, strategy effectiveness, acceptable cost, and the facilitation of long-term stability. Furthermore, it examines the socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional factors that have dictated the outcome of these interventions.

By demonstrating the applicability of the conceptual framework, the thesis argues that its theoretical implications could serve as a springboard for crafting a universally accepted standard for evaluating military interventions. Moreover, findings found that the success of military interventions is closely linked to the interplay of multiple factors, including the strategic alignment with political goals, the economic and political stability of the host nation, internal fragmentation, and regional geopolitical dynamics. Hence, this thesis argues for a nuanced understanding of military interventions, emphasizing the critical role of a broad conceptual framework in evaluating outcomes and underscores the importance of a comprehensive stance when investigating the factors that have contributed to this outcome. Accordingly, this study fills a critical gap in academic discourse and also offers pragmatic insights for policymakers and military strategists.

## **Keywords:**

Military Intervention, NATO, Russia, Success, Factors, Libya, Syria

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## 1. Introduction

Military interventions have perennially been at the forefront of International Relations and Security Studies, with their significance escalating post-Cold War. (Seybolt. 2007; Regan, 1996). These interventions have been executed both with and without internal government approval and their motivations are usually grounded in strategic or humanitarian reasons (Pearson, 1974; Seybolt, 2007; Lounsbery et al., 2011). During the Cold War, strategic motivations were the primary focus of military interventions. In contrast, contemporary motivations, particularly from Western states, lean more towards humanitarian reasons. Yet strategic interests continue to play a significant role.

However, it is not only the increase in frequency that made this topic relevant, but also its effectiveness opens a lot of space for debate. By some, military intervention is being judged as ineffective, only escalating the conflict and serving mainly the intervener's interest (Lounsbery et al., 2011). It can indeed be observed that some intervention efforts have been more successful than others. This ambiguity in success has opened the discussion about when and how states should intervene. However, despite its relevance in International Relations, the literature on the success of military interventions still suffers from some significant gaps. While some studies explore how intervening entities can be successful (Lounsbery et al., 2011; Kavanagh et al., 2019; Regan, 1996; Seybolt, 2007), research fails to establish a widely accepted comprehensive framework for evaluating the success or failure of military interventions. Additionally, academics fail to provide a thorough understanding of the factors that dictate this success or failure since studies concentrate on individual factors instead of adopting a holistic approach that accounts for the interplay of multiple factors.

Therefore, this thesis aims to create a comprehensive conceptualization of success that includes multiple criteria for deeming an intervention successful, thereby moving beyond the limited perspective of judging interventions based on a single criterion. Consequently, this broad approach enables this thesis to examine how circumstantial interconnected factors impact particular aspects of the interventions, moving beyond the simple correlations between these factors and the overall success or failure. Subsequently, this thesis aims to set the stage for a critical examination of recent international military interventions, aiming to develop a framework for evaluating the success or failure of these interventions and explaining the nuances that dictated this outcome.

In doing so, this thesis will examine the success or failure of the military interventions in Syria (by Russia) and Libya (by NATO) and aims to identify the key factors that have



determined the success or failure of these interventions. Although a more detailed explanation of the case selection is discussed in Chapter 4, both military interventions in Syria and Libya were found to provide informative yet distinctive context with regard to military interventions in the Middle East - a region that arguably has experienced the greatest number of military interventions (from various actors). The thesis consists of a two-step analysis. Firstly, the success of the interventions will be assessed based on a developed conceptual framework consisting of different criteria for successful interventions. These criteria are the achievement of the stated political objectives, effectively employed strategies, acceptable costs, and the facilitation of long-term stability. Secondly, this thesis examines factors that influenced and nuanced these outcomes through the lenses of socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional variables.

To address the identified gaps in the literature, this thesis developed the following research question: *To what extent were international military interventions in Syria and Libya successful according to the criteria of military intervention, and what factors influenced their outcomes?* This question aims to bridge the two main gaps found in the studied literature. Firstly, it facilitates the testing of the developed framework for evaluating the success or failure of military interventions. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to gain a broad understanding of the interconnecting factors that have dictated this success or failure. Since this thesis is divided into a two-step process it consists of two sub-research questions:

1. To what extent can the military interventions of Syria and Libya be labeled as a success according to the established criteria of successful interventions?
2. How do the political, socio-economic, ideological, and regional factors contribute to the success or failure of these interventions?

This first sub-question tests the established conceptual framework and addresses the lack of a framework for assessing successful military interventions. The second sub-question is designed to expand our understanding of the influencing factors that determine the outcomes of these military interventions, moving beyond the limitations of analyses focused solely on single factors. By combining these questions, this thesis aims to successfully implement a framework for investigating military interventions resulting in two in-depth evaluations of the factors that have contributed to successes or failures. Such analysis provides a well-structured understanding of how these factors can influence the outcome of interventions. Ultimately, the findings should offer valuable insights and practical recommendations for future

policymakers and military strategists, highlighting effective tactics suitable across various scenarios.

The thesis will proceed with a review of the current literature on military interventions which zeroes in on the prevailing definitions and the frameworks developed to assess these interventions. Furthermore, it will demonstrate the current literature on the factors that influence the outcome of military interventions and delve into the current gaps in the literature. Chapter 3 highlights the theoretical underpinnings that inform this thesis, providing a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of military interventions. Additionally, it illustrates the conceptual framework that defines the established criteria for a successful intervention and outlines how the nuancing factors will be analyzed. The following chapter explains the selected methodology, addressing why a multiple case study design is chosen, how the methods of data analysis are conducted, and how the data is collected. This is followed by the analysis in Chapter 5, where both cases are examined with the assistance of the provided conceptual framework. Consequently, the findings are discussed and compared in chapter 6. Finally, it ends with a conclusion where the answer to the research question will be provided, and research limitations will be explained.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter provides a survey of the existing literature relevant to this thesis. It is divided into four sections to illustrate a comprehensive understanding of the crucial features of military interventions relevant to this thesis. Firstly, it produces a background concerning the concept of military interventions and thereby illustrates the acknowledged academic definitions. Furthermore, it shines a light on the motivations behind military interventions. Thereafter, it elaborates on the available literature that discusses criteria for successful interventions. It continues by demonstrating the current academic insights on the contextual factors that could shape the outcome of military interventions. Finally, it concludes with the identified gap in the scholarship.

### **2.1 Military Intervention: Definitions and Significance**

The importance of studying military interventions is profoundly relevant in the current landscape of International Security Studies. For instance, according to Pickering & Kisangani (2009), major wars have been rare in the last decades and have been replaced by the practice of military interventions. This shift can partially be explained through their increased

legitimacy since they can be framed for humanitarian reasons. However, even today, interventions are frequently conducted due to traditional security and strategic motives (resources, territorial gains, etc.). The rise in frequency was also noticed by Regan (1996), who stated that “between 1987 and 1992 there was a fourfold increase in the use of United Nations peacekeeping forces in intrastate conflicts around the globe” (Regan, 1996, p. 336). Middle Eastern and North African states have experienced the most external interventions as their regimes are vulnerable to military interventions (Portada & Billet, 2009). The majority of the recent interventions in this region can be traced back to the Arab Spring, which was a wave of popular uprising against authoritarian regimes.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the literature does not consist of one universally accepted definition of military intervention. Many large-N quantitative studies developed broad definitions to form a dataset that allows the inclusion of a substantial number of cases. Differences within these datasets primarily stem from the nature of the intervention and its methodological execution (Kushi & Toft, 2023). The origins of these datasets can be found decades ago and are constantly updated by scholars. Two prominent datasets are discussed in this literature review: the Military Intervention by Powerful States (MIPS) and the International Military Intervention (IMI) dataset. The MIPS dataset examines military interventions by powerful states and a definition of this dataset is illustrated by Sullivan & Koch (2009). They define a military intervention as the “use of armed force that involves the official deployment of at least 500 regular military personnel (ground, air, or naval) to attain immediate term political objectives through action against a foreign adversary” (Sullivan & Koch, 2009, p. 709). This definition is used to develop a dataset that could assess if military interventions succeeded in achieving their political objectives. An advantage of this definition is that it is uncomplicated to define what is considered a military intervention due to its quantitative nature. However, it also excludes military interventions that deploy fewer troops but are significant in other military means. For instance, many contemporary military interventions are executed with the assistance of proxies and thus would be excluded from this definition. According to Sullivan and Koch (2009), the end goal of a military intervention should be the termination of the fighting. Today, however, military interventions encompass much more than terminating military hostilities as intervening entities also have humanitarian or strategic goals. Nevertheless, this definition provides some valuable insights into the examination of the achievement of political objectives that should be taken into consideration when evaluating the success or failure of military interventions.

In contrast to the MIPS dataset, Pearson & Baumann (1993) developed the International Military Intervention (IMI) dataset. They built on the earlier work of Pearson (1974, p. 261) in which he defined military intervention as “the movement of troops or military forces by one independent country, or a group of countries in concert, across the border of another independent country (or colony of an independent country), or actions by troops already stationed in the target country”. Notably, in this definition, only interventions that include direct military action can be considered military intervention and these interventions can also be multilateral. Pickering & Kisangani (2009) further updated this definition to also include cases between 1989 and 2005. However, interventions that only consist of non-state actors are not included in this dataset. Significantly, a critique of this dataset from Sullivan & Koch (2009) emphasizes that it fails to identify the primary objectives of the intervening states and whether or not they succeeded in achieving them.

Based on these definitions it is clear that there are some differences in what is or is not a military intervention. The general understanding is that these datasets complement each other by offering different scopes through which military interventions can be examined. Irrespective of differences, all the definitions circle the use or threat use of force in a foreign state, initiated by a foreign state or group (Postmus & Rrustemi, 2023)

Furthermore, the concept of military intervention cannot be fully understood without explaining humanitarian interventions. Clarification is necessary as the literature tends to use the concepts of ‘humanitarian interventions’ and ‘military intervention’ interchangeably (Postmus and Rrustemi, 2022). This conflation can be explained due to the legal nature of military interventions since, based on international law, they are only allowed on humanitarian grounds. However, this is highly problematic as even today military interventions are conducted for strategic motivations, especially by non-Western states. Based on this misconception, Postmus and Rrustemi (2022) shine some light on the differences between the concepts. Firstly, they illustrate humanitarian interventions as “the threat or use of force across state borders by a state (or group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals other than its citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied” (Postmus and Rrustemi, 2022, p. 394 ). Conversely, they define military interventions as the use or threat of force across state borders, initiated by a foreign state or group of states (Postmus and Rrustemi, 2022, p. 394). The difference here is that military interventions could also have other implications than preventing human rights violations. They conclude by

stating that human intervention can be part of a military intervention, but a military intervention is not always a humanitarian intervention.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge additional forms of interventions. In the literature, two other forms of intervention are mainly discussed: economic and diplomatic. According to Regan (1996, p. 396) “Economics can be, and has been, a forceful tool with which to intervene in ongoing domestic disputes, both through positive inducements and punitive sanctions”. He emphasizes the possible positive effects of economic efforts to excerpt international influence. Another strategy that is neglected by Regan (1996), but highlighted in other literature is diplomatic intervention. The significance of this form of intervention is illustrated by Ilgaz (2021) who emphasizes the efficiency of diplomatic efforts. Still, it should be noted that most interventions consist of a mix of strategies between military, economic, and diplomatic efforts (Ilgaz, 2021; Wolff & Dursun-Özanca, 2012). Nevertheless, this thesis, while taking into consideration economic and diplomatic intervention, will mainly focus on military interventions.

Before diving into the success literature, it is also important to illustrate the motivations for military interventions. Motivations are important since they shape the objectives of states and also the context in which military interventions are conducted. Firstly, there is a disagreement in the current literature on the question of whether military interventions are conducted for strategic or humanitarian motivations. The paper of Clare & Danilovic (2020) deals with this question and focuses on the question of why states selectively intervene in certain conflicts and not in others. In their work, they concluded that political motivations are more significant than humanitarian motives. A study by Schiemdl & Prouza (2021) confirmed the relevance of strategic motives by stating that most interventions in Africa occurred due to economic interests. This is further underscored by Kavanagh et al. (2021) & Frederick et al. (2021) who arrived at the conclusion that the decision of major powers to intervene today is still motivated by geopolitics.

There is also research that emphasizes the importance of humanitarian interventions above strategic motivators (Lounsbery et al., 2011; Olsen, 2022). They argued that interventions used to be executed for strategic means, but are now conducted as tools of conflict resolution and/or liberalization. Furthermore, Ichani et al. (2019) share this view and argue that states now mainly conduct interventions for humanitarian purposes. Additionally, Regan (1996), also adopts a more humanitarian focus and states that the main motivation of the third parties to intervene is to end the violence that materializes within conflict and ensure political stability. This is also in line with the view of Seybolt (2007), who argues that

military intervention without a just cause is always unjustifiable and therefore pleads for the humanitarian focus within intervention motivations.

Some academics are less distinctive in explaining the motivations for military interventions and consider them equally important. For instance, Pearson (1974, p. 262) emphasizes territorial acquisition, protection of social groups and/or economic interests, protection of military interests, ideology, and regional power balance as prime motivations and states that these are interconnected. This stance is underscored by Sullivan & Koch (2009) who explore motivations by examining the political objectives of an intervening entity, which could be grounded in both strategic and humanitarian motives.

Finally, it should be noted that it is difficult to truly identify the intervener's motives. This was already detected early by Pearson (1974) and is also underscored in more recent work of Kavanagh et al. (2019) & Cunningham (2010) who recognize this complication and argue that intervening parties often hide strategic motives and frame an intervention as a humanitarian mission despite having different interests.

## **2.2 Literature on Military Success**

Based on the examination of the available literature, it seems that the research suffers from the lack of an accepted definition of successful interventions. The definitions that do exist tend to be vague, at times contradictory, quantitative, and often limited in scope. For instance, according to Lounsbery et al. (2011): “The literature on multilateral interventions contains a variety of standards for measuring outcomes, with substantial disagreement on what factors matter most” (p. 236). This supports this thesis’ argument that there is an academic disagreement regarding the measurement of successful interventions.

Despite these challenges, the literature still consists of some definitions that define success and several are discussed below. For instance, the literature review revealed that the measurement of success in interventions is commonly based on the achievement of predefined objectives. For example, Ichani et al. (2019), state that the success of the military intervention is defined by achieving the stated objectives (regime change, rescue troops, etc.). This is also shown by Kavanagh et al. (2019) as they evaluate the success of an intervention based on the achievement of the stated political objectives. Furthermore, Wolff & Dursun-Özanca (2012) developed a framework for evaluating success and their first pillar is to evaluate whether the objectives were achieved. It could be an issue, however, to mainly rely on achieving political objectives as a measurement since it may underestimate other factors

that also determine success. Additionally, it should be noted that studying political objectives has not always been done correctly as they are examined based on Western moral standards rather than the actual objectives of the intervener (Mattoon, 2017; Kavanagh et al., 2019).

Another definition of success is developed by Regan (1996), who argues that successful interventions are the ones that succeed in ending the conflict before the fatality rate exceeds a thousand and end the hostilities for the next six months. While this definition provides a quantifiable measurement of immediate success in terms of conflict resolution, it focuses primarily on the short-term cessation of violence. Therefore, it does not take into account the impact that it had on the host country in terms of stability, which could be problematic as instability could eventually lead to conflict recurrence. Furthermore, Seybolt (2007) illustrates a more humanitarian definition and evaluates the effectiveness of an intervention based on the number of lives saved. However, it should be noted that this research focuses solely on humanitarian military interventions. Finally, Lounsbery et al., (2011) provide a broader lens for assessing the success of military interventions, considering their impact on security and stability. They build on the work of Picker and Kisangani (2009) and explore successful stability according to three components: political regime, economic growth, and physical quality of life for a significant period. This scope is interesting since it is one of the few studies that examines the broader consequences rather than focusing on the short-term outcomes. However, their strong focus on democracy may be questioned as this is not always the goal of those who intervene.

### **2.3 Contributing Factors**

The significance of studying the factors that contributed to the outcome of military intervention is illustrated by Frederick et al. (2021) and Kavanagh et al. (2019). They emphasize the fact that the outcome of a military intervention is strongly influenced by the environmental context in which it occurred and therefore deserves academic attention.

The literature suggests that the socio-economic conditions of a host nation are crucial and can significantly influence the outcome of a military intervention. For instance, Doyle & Sambanis (2000) assert that the economic condition of a country can significantly impact the success of an intervention since a country with limited economic growth may face challenges in post-conflict reconstruction. Additionally, significant economic development also decreases the likelihood that a conflict will recur for the same motivations (Collier et al., 2008). Based on these assumptions, Kavanagh et al. (2019) implied that the intervener's

ability to achieve its objectives is related to the economic condition of the host nation. However, they could not confirm the level of correlation in this relationship.

Moreover, the available literature highlights the likely relationship between the existing political structures of the host nation and the intervention outcome. For instance, Goldstone et al. (2010) concluded that the intensity and severity of a conflict are less significant in countries with a higher degree of political stability. Similar conclusions are found by Vreeland (2008), who stated that unstable bureaucracies are often at high risk of war and intervention. Furthermore, Wolff & Dursun-Özanza (2012) argue that the willingness of politicians to end the conflict significantly influences the chances of success, while studies from Edelstein (2004) & Cunningham (2010) concluded that military interference is more successful when civilian populations are repressed by the government. In addition, Sullivan & Karreth (2015) and Gent (2008) concluded that an intervention that supports rebels is more likely to succeed than government-biased ones. This tendency can be explained by the decision-making process of the interveners, who are likely to carry out pro-government interventions in scenarios that are particularly complex and fraught with intensity. Still, according to Kavanagh et al. (2019), the existing body of literature lacks in-depth examinations of the correlation between political factors and intervention outcomes.

Furthermore, according to Kavanagh et al. (2019), there is a disagreement in the literature to what extent ideological differences play a part in the success of the military intervention. They found some work that supports the hypothesis that ethnic diversity does not affect the outcome, while other scholars argue that ethnic homogeneity supported nation-building efforts (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; Dobbins et al., 2005). This discrepancy suggests the necessity for further research regarding the influence of ideology. Furthermore, both Kavanagh et al. (2019) and Lounsbury et al. (2011) noted the ideological motivations of intervening actors as significant but also acknowledged that it was more important during the Cold War. Furthermore, they state that interventions are conducted to counter specific ideologies within a host nation (e.g., communism, jihadism).

Finally, the role of regional geopolitics cannot be underestimated when investigating the circumstantial factors shaping the success of interventions. The study of Dobbins et al. (2005) concluded that it is impossible to intervene and build up a nation when the neighboring countries are resisting. Therefore, the likelihood of success increases when the intervener has approval from the neighboring countries. Furthermore, the work of Kavanagh (2019) argued that interventions are also shaped by alliances and partnerships as they significantly shape the reasons for a state to intervene, but also the degree of effort.



Therefore, regional dynamics can escalate the intensity of a conflict when additional actors, each with their resources and interests, become involved. Furthermore, Wolff & Dursun-Özanca, (2012) also emphasize the importance of effective external cooperation to end the conflict. However, a recent literature review by Clare and Danilovic (2020) points out that the geopolitics of broader regional conflicts remains underexplored.

## **2.4 Gap and Justification**

The most prominent gap identified in the literature review is the absence of a comprehensive framework for evaluating the outcome of military intervention. Some definitions or frameworks are provided, but they are narrow in focus and contradicting. For instance, these definitions suffer from disagreements among scholars on what makes an intervention successful (achievement of political objectives, ending of violence, etc.). This is mainly the result of the fact that the existing frameworks for evaluating military interventions were developed for quantitative research. Such definitions are suitable when one wants to make generalizations for certain phenomena with high frequencies. However, this thesis argues that the evaluation of military interventions is way too complex to assess with such a narrow scope and thus requires a more detailed examination. Furthermore, it seems that interventions are evaluated by our morality rather than by the standards of the intervener and thus the studied objective is not the same as the actual objectives (Mattoon, 2017; Kavenagh, 2019). This has also resulted in the concept of military and humanitarian interventions being used interchangeably (Postmus & Rrustemi, 2022).

The next significant problem around military interventions is that the nuancing factors that are influencing the eventual outcome are often neglected. This issue often stems from an overly narrow focus on the methods of execution rather than the broader context in which these interventions occur. Research that examines these factors is narrow in scope and focuses on singular factors rather than embracing a comprehensive approach that considers multiple variables. This is underscored by Kavanagh et al. (2019) who note that "there is even less emphasis on identifying those factors that affect the likelihood that specific types of objectives are successfully achieved" (p. 23). He further expands on his argument by highlighting that existing literature addressing this issue lacks generalizability. Furthermore, the book of Mattoon (2017) confirms this by highlighting the role that factors such as existing interstate relationships play (colonialism, and geopolitics) are often overlooked in the assessment of interventions.

Based on these findings, this thesis aims to address these two issues by developing a qualitative framework that includes all essential elements that should be associated with a successful intervention. In its attempt, it aims to contribute to creating a universally accepted framework for evaluating military intervention, one that includes a broader array of criteria in its assessment. Even though such a framework demands more time to evaluate, it also offers a more detailed explanation of why certain interventions were successful. Consequently, by conducting a broad-based evaluation of each intervention, the research intends to provide in-depth insights into the ways circumstantial factors have shaped intervention outcomes. Such an extensive assessment of military interventions enables a thorough post-analysis of the factors affecting specific aspects of the studied interventions, moving beyond a simplistic exploration of the direct relationships between single factors and the overall outcome. Overall, by combining the established qualitative framework with the examination of the influencing factors, this thesis aims to address two issues at once. On the one hand, it aims to lay down the foundational elements for a universal qualitative framework that can evaluate military interventions. On the other hand, it wants to explore which factors have contributed to this outcome, thereby facilitating further academic discourse in this field.

The significance of this approach is underscored by Clare & Davidovic (2020) who stated, "Our brief illustrative cases additionally reveal that qualitative research with detailed comparative case studies can significantly contribute to the growth of knowledge from quantitative analyses" (p. 32). This confirms that well-conducted qualitative research regarding the success or failure of military interventions can significantly contribute to the current literature. However, it should be noted that it is still difficult to draw general conclusions based on two cases. Nevertheless, the main objective of this thesis is not to make general conclusions, but rather serve as a basis or steppingstone for further research and policy recommendations. Finally, while this thesis recognizes the importance of both the execution of strategies (the "how") and the contextual factors (the "where") in determining the success of military interventions, there is a deliberate emphasis on circumstantial factors. This is based on the fact that the identified gap in the literature mainly exists in the understanding of the contextual factors rather than how the intervention is executed.

### **3. Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework of this thesis is designed to methodically analyze military interventions. It starts by establishing a working definition of military interventions that provides the foundation for this thesis. Thereafter, the thesis outlines the theoretical underpinnings that guide the analysis. The next section demonstrates the criteria used to assess the outcomes of the interventions and explains the rationale behind the chosen indicators of success. These criteria include the achievement of political objectives, effectiveness of strategies, acceptable costs, and facilitation of long-term stability. Lastly, the framework incorporates a discussion of the examined contextual factors, including socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional influences.

#### **3.1 Definition**

Before delving into the conceptual framework, the definition of military intervention utilized in this thesis is elucidated as the literature review demonstrated there is no universally accepted definition. Based on this understanding, this thesis aims to adopt the definition that aligns most with the goals of this research. Consequently, this chapter will outline the selected definition and delineate the conceptual boundaries to determine which instances of military intervention fall within the scope of this thesis.

Building upon this premise, this thesis utilized the definition provided by Pearson (1974) as he defined military interventions as “the movement of troops or military forces by one independent country, or a group of countries in concert, across the border of another independent country (or colony of an independent country), or actions by troops already stationed in the target country” (p. 295). This definition is used for its broad applicability, making it suitable for analyzing military interventions that exhibit differences in methods, motivations, and outcomes. Although focusing specifically on one specific type of intervention has its advantages, the substantial similarities among different types of military interventions necessitate their simultaneous examination (Kavanagh et al., 2019). Hence, Pearson's (1974) definition was chosen since it allows us to include most of the types of military interventions conducted. Additionally, for the purpose of this thesis, this definition ensures that only interventions that consist of direct military engagement are incorporated into its analysis. This thesis argues that this component is necessary to thoroughly test the established framework and examine the determining factors that influence their outcome. Furthermore, based on this definition, it is important to note that the intervention doesn't have

to be employed by a single country but could also be executed multilaterally (NATO in Libya). This suitability makes this definition particularly relevant for this thesis since it aims to include both unilateral and multilateral interventions. Moreover, this conceptualization entails that the investigated military intervention should consist of the involvement of the state or intervening entity in a conflict that they were previously not involved in, and this involvement is characterized by both military and strategic means.

However, this definition also excludes certain interventions. For example, interventions that are solely executed by economic or diplomatic means are outside the scope of this thesis, since it does not involve deployment of military forces. This involvement, however, can be indirect, such as training local forces or conducting air strikes, as long as these actions involve military force and occur within the borders of the host country. In addition, the intervention should consist of the involvement of foreign actors. This excludes internal government intervention against its citizens. Finally, interventions executed covertly are excluded from this study, as they do not encompass sufficient means to be considered as military interventions within the scope of this thesis. This decision ensures that the study focuses on interventions where the military component is significant and observable.

### **3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings**

This thesis will draw upon two respected theories in International Relations. Firstly, it utilizes the State-Dependence Theory as it offers a conceptualization of how events may be related over time. According to Heckmann (1981), this theory posits that state dependence refers to the likelihood that a particular situation or event that occurs in the future is influenced by previous experiences or actions. In the context of military interventions, this theory can be translated to the fact that the outcome of the intervention is significantly influenced by preceding involvements prior to or during the same conflict before the intervention (Owsiak, 2014). This makes this theory relevant as it offers a lens through which the impact of past events on the current and future state of a nation can be understood. In other words, it argues that the present conditions within the host nation are a consequence of its historical and geopolitical experiences, including past military interventions. Furthermore, this theory underscores the notion that interventions are not isolated events but are deeply embedded in the historical context of ongoing conflicts. Therefore, this theory will help to take into consideration how history and external involvements have shaped these interventions within the discussed factors.

Secondly, it will look at the Complex Interdependence Theory that was first illustrated by Nye & Keohane (1973). This theory assumes that international affairs are influenced not only by the traditional state power dynamics but also by various non-military factors and actors. This is in contrast with the realism argument, which focuses on state sovereignty and military power. Complex Interdependence, however, highlights the influential roles of non-state actors in this process and argues that state behavior cannot be fully understood by only power and security. Hence, this theory is embedded in the belief that states are connected through various diverse, non-hierarchical channels that include economic, political, cultural, and ideological dimensions (Nye & Keohane, 1973; Walker, 2014). When this theory is applied to military interventions, it presents a more nuanced view. It argues that outcomes aren't only dictated by military strategies or capabilities but are affected by a combination of factors like economic ties, political alliances, and regional dynamics. For example, the economic interdependence between nations can significantly influence the practicality and support for military action, and political alliances can shape the international community's response. Therefore, this approach offers a comprehensive framework to understand the complex nature of military interventions in today's interconnected world, moving beyond the traditional focus on military strength to include a wider range of influential factors.

### **3.3 Success Criteria**

In this thesis, the definition of success is defined by the development of a nuanced conceptual framework that consists of the key requirements that make a military intervention successful. This thesis argues that the success of a military intervention is determined by several factors and consists of more fundamental elements than just the achievement of objectives or ending the violence. Such a narrow focus could be favorable when conducting studies with a large sample size. However, when executing in-depth qualitative research, a more comprehensive understanding of the success or failure of military intervention is needed. Therefore, this thesis developed a comprehensive qualitative framework for the evaluation of the military which consists of the following components: (1) the achievement of the political objectives, (2) effective strategies, (3) execution at acceptable costs, and (4) facilitating long-term stability. These pillars are extracted from the literature and an explanation and justification of why each variable is chosen are provided in each specific section.

### 3.3.1 Achievement of Political Objectives

The first pillar of military success is found in the achievement of stated political objectives (such as regional stability, eliminating threats, establishing a government, and civilian protection). The decision to include this criterion in the definition is quite obvious as a military intervention cannot be labeled as success when it did not achieve its initial goals. The significance of achieving political goals as a pillar for success has been underscored by many scholars in their studies (Ichani et al., 2019; Kavanagh et al., 2019; Regan; 1996; Sullivan & Koch, 2009).

In line with Sullivan & Koch (2009), this thesis focuses on the political objectives of each military intervention and excludes policymakers' personal, domestic motivations. For instance, a leader's desire to remain in office or increase personal political power is not considered a political goal. However, in contrast to Sullivan & Koch (2009), this thesis included grand strategic objectives in its assessment which could be the prevention of the spread of an ideology, maintaining credibility, ensuring human rights, or any other long-term foreign policy aims. Other possible examples of political objectives are the defense of territory, seizure of political territory, or the maintenance of political power (Ichani et al., 2019; Kavanagh et al., 2019; Regan; 1996; Sullivan & Koch, 2009). However, according to Sullivan & Koch (2009) and Kavanagh et al. (2019), there should be a distinction between military objectives and political objectives since military objectives are more of a means to achieve political objectives. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the achievement of the political objectives rather than including military objectives in this assessment as well. It is also important to note that objectives are often fluid and can change during the execution of military intervention (Kavanagh et al., 2019) but that this thesis focuses solely on the political goals before the intervention. Furthermore, it should be noted that some countries are less transparent about their intentions and that tracking down their actual objectives is complicated (Pearson, 1974; Kavanagh et al., 2019). Especially, since today's military interventions are framed as peace missions or ensuring human rights operations. Additionally, when studying the political objectives of an intervening entity, the focus must be on the actual objectives rather than on Western perspectives or moral standards (Kavanagh et al., 2019; Mattoon, 2017). Hence, to navigate through these complexities, this thesis will first conduct a thorough analysis of the actual objectives of the intervener before its evaluation.

Importantly, this thesis holds that the achievement of political objectives can be qualified as success when an intervening entity succeeds in the realization of its core objectives with a maximum of three. The reason to focus on multiple objectives rather than one is that according to Kavanagh et al. (2019), a military intervention is rarely undertaken for a single objective. Additionally, they discovered that the mean of main political objectives in their analyzed interventions was three, which justifies this benchmark. Nevertheless, it should be noted that intervention could also exist for fewer objectives.

To identify the stated objectives, this thesis will examine whether the intervening entity had explicitly stated goals before the military interventions but also look beyond governmental statements to include a broader range of possible objectives. After the illustration of the stated objectives, the outcome will be examined. An important note is that no further operationalization for this criterion could be provided beforehand as the political objectives of each intervening entity are diverse. This means that for each case the political objectives will be outlined and thereafter evaluated for their success. However, this thesis acknowledges that the full achievement of a political objective may not be possible. For instance, ending complete violence is often not feasible in a country that has been exposed to war for decades, and eliminating the threat of an adversary that has been operating for ages is impossible as fractions are likely to be maintained. Therefore, it will examine whether the interventions at least accomplished their goal to an acceptable extent.

### **3.3.2 Effective Strategies**

The second pillar is based on the reports published by Kavanagh et al. (2019) and Frederick et al. (2021), who noted that the success of military intervention largely depends on the strategies conducted. Therefore, this thesis considered effective strategies not merely as a contributing factor to success but as a central element of a successful intervention.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this criterion is connected to the achievement of political objectives as it would be extremely difficult to achieve objectives without proper strategies (Frederick et al., 2021; Meiser et al., 2021). Still, a separate examination of the strategies is required to illustrate how these political goals were achieved to get an objective and comprehensive assessment of the intervention. For instance, limited achievement of policy objectives could be accepted if the intervention employed strategies that maximized resource efficiency and utilized tactical advantages.

Firstly, it is important to consider what is meant by military effectiveness and military strategy. Research often defines military effectiveness as the capacity to create military power and tells how well a state can translate resources into actual power in war (Brathwaite, 2018). Furthermore, according to Brooks (2007), effectiveness is “the difference between what a state’s raw resources suggest it could potentially do, and what it is capable of doing in battle” (p.3). Based on this premise, Meiser et al. (2021) stated that “military effectiveness is considered as the ability to create power, measured as relative combat efficiency” (p. 38). Related, they refer to military strategy as “a theory of how to create military power (or relative combat efficiency) and use that power to achieve political goals” (p. 39). Building on the cruciality of examining the relationship between military effectiveness and military strategy, Meiser et al, (2021) developed a framework for evaluating military strategies regarding their battlefield performance. Here, they argue that an effective military strategy should consist of creating relative power advantages. This thesis utilizes this framework to measure effective military strategies since it offers a detailed methodology for examining the relationship between the strategy employed and its impact on battlefield outcomes. Hence, it facilitates a thorough assessment of whether the employed strategies during the intervention could be labeled as successful.

According to Meiser et al. (2021), a relative power advantage and thus military effectiveness can be achieved in four ways. Firstly, creating a relative power advantage can be achieved by exploiting the weakness of your adversary. Here, Meiser et al. (2021) utilize the story of David and Goliath where David is aware of his weaknesses and Goliath’s strengths. Therefore, he invented a source of power that utilized his capabilities (slingshot skills) and effectively exploited Goliath's weakness (lack of head protection). This example underscores the necessity for a combatant to continuously seek and create relative power by identifying and exploiting the weaknesses of its opponent. According to Meiser et al. (2021), a fighting entity should always be focused on creating relative power compared to the adversary. In this case that is done by exploiting the weakness of the other side. More specifically, this means “If this mechanism of relative power creation is present, an analyst would expect to see one side identifying the strategy of its adversary, finding weaknesses, and then implementing an appropriate counter-strategy to exploit these weaknesses” (idem, p. 40). Therefore, this thesis will look at the implemented strategies and whether they were executed to gain relative power and consequently exploit the adversary side's weaknesses.

The second criterion is that relative military power is produced through deception, speed, concentrated violence, and psychological manipulation and/or destruction (Meiser et



al., 2021). Here, the goal is to attack the enemy's system and produce incapacitation with speed and surprise. Meiser et al. (2021) built this requirement upon the work of Hart (1991, p. 326) who argued that dislocation tactics include changing the direction of attack, putting supply lines in harm, and dividing adversary forces. Such strategies aim to psychologically unbalance and deceive the enemy. Therefore, the analysis will look for evidence of strategies designed to cause psychological dislocation and deception, executed through operations that surprise and destabilize the adversary.

The third criterion for achieving an effective military strategy depends on the intervener's ability to determine how, where, and when engagement is fought to impose a favorable pattern of war that exerts some level of control (Meiser et al., 2021). This means that the intervener should employ strategies that manipulate the characteristics of the conflict to create a favorable environment. For instance, relative military power is created by controlling when and where the battles are fought and forcing your adversary to fight on a battlefield dictated by the protagonist. Therefore, an analyst should expect to find evidence of a strategy that seeks to exert control by shifting the terms of combat to a time and place that is disadvantageous to the adversary.

Lastly, the employed strategies should be in line with the stated objectives of the intervention. As Meiser et al. (2021) noted: "A tight linkage of military strategy, operational practice, and tactics is therefore necessary to maximize military effectiveness" (p. 40). Therefore, when studying the effectiveness of the strategies employed, one should find evidence of a clear alignment between policy, strategy operation, and tactics.

According to Meiser et al. (2021), this framework is based on cause and effect. They focus on using force in a way that increases the ability to inflict relative damage to the adversary. The first criteria are focused on decreasing the adversaries' combat efficiency, while the last one focuses on increasing your efficiency. However, they note that these pillars are not separate entities but are interconnected. In its assessment, this thesis will examine how the employed strategies rank on these criteria and consequently form an evaluation of to what extent the strategies employed during the military intervention could be considered a success.

### **3.3.3 Acceptable Costs**

The third pillar of a successful intervention entails that the costs should be in line with the results and that the collateral damage should be minimized. This is based on the fact that

interventions can impose a significant cost on the intervening actor(s) and can be a burden on their resources (Frederick et al., 2021). In addition, what could have started as a ‘simple’ military intervention could easily evolve into a larger perpetuating conflict and increased costs which also has been referred to as mission creep (Watts et al., 2017). Hence, this thesis argues that for an intervention to be deemed successful, the costs must be considered acceptable.

The evaluation of the costs will start with an extensive outline of the monetary costs associated with the intervention. It will further look at the indirect costs associated with the intervention. These costs will be measured based on the work of Sullivan & Koch (2009) and Frederick et al. (2021). Sullivan & Koch (2009) here argue that these costs are determined by casualties on both sides, the number of troops committed, the type of force employed, and intervention duration. Accordingly, these metrics will be illustrated in each case. Furthermore, it will also examine the strategic and reputational costs as illustrated by Frederick et al. (2021). Strategic cost refers to the increased costs due to the intervention's consequences within the international system as it could intricate global diplomatic relationships. For instance, the decision to intervene could affect diplomatic relationships when adversaries or allies disapprove or feel threatened by the intervention. In addition, reputational costs are costs that are associated with the loss of reputation or credibility consequently to the intervention. For example, the reluctance of the US to intervene in a conflict can impose reputational costs as they are considered the gatekeepers for international security issues. Finally, the collateral damage of each intervener should be taken into consideration when evaluating the costs of military intervention. Important here is that this collateral damage should also be examined from the intervener's perspective rather than our moral standards (Mattoon, 2017). This means that it is likely that NATO would assign higher costs of civilian casualties as collateral damage than Russia.

A crucial concept in this evaluation is cost tolerance, defined as “the extent to which an actor is willing (or politically able) to absorb the human and material costs imposed by an adversary and to bear the human, material, and opportunity costs of using force against that adversary to achieve it” (Sullivan, 2008, p. 52). This study aims to examine the perceptions of costs related to the intervention and assess their alignment with acceptable thresholds. To further give the cost tolerance meaning, the costs will be compared to the benefits of the interventions, acknowledging the latter as necessary for a comprehensive evaluation (Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2012). Here, the benefits are qualified as the achievement of the political objectives. Given the challenges in quantifying the costs and benefits of military conflict, this

thesis opts for a qualitative assessment, acknowledging the inherent subjectivity. The consideration was made due to the lack of an economic background, and it was not considered feasible to conduct a quantitative costs-benefit assessment within the time frame. Finally, it is crucial to recognize that governmental efforts to obscure actual intervention costs might pose significant challenges to this evaluation (Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2012).

### **3.3.4 Facilitating Long-Term Stability**

The final pillar for success is that the intervention should facilitate conditions for achieving long-term stability. This is important as stability significantly decreases the likelihood of conflict recurrence (Collier et al., 2008; Frederick et al., 2021; Goldstone et al., 2010; Kavanagh et al., 2019). Furthermore, as Lounsbury et al. (2011) note, interventions today are also being judged on their abilities to establish conditions for conflict resilience and stability. Therefore, this thesis argues that when a state interferes in another state it is most likely that it wants to leave behind a certain degree of stability. However, it should be noted that counter-arguments could be made about whether stability should be incorporated in the definition of a successful intervention since interventions could also be executed to destabilize. While this thesis acknowledges this dichotomy, it argues that it is essential to emphasize that genuine long-term success from such interventions is still partly characterized by the achievement of stability. This argument is based on the fact that interventions targeted at destabilization are typically strategic considerations, aiming to overthrow an existing order to establish a new one that better serves the interveners' strategic interests (Frederick et al., 2021; Sullivan & Koch, 2009). However, these actions, while initially disruptive, are not ends in themselves. For the outcomes of such interventions to be truly successful over the long term, stability must eventually be established. This stability is critical to sustain the benefits generated by the intervention and to prevent the resurgence of conflict, which could otherwise significantly jeopardize the intervention's achievements and goals. Therefore, this thesis argues that even interventions initially aimed at destabilization need to achieve a certain level of stability to fulfill and sustain their objectives effectively.

For its assessment, this framework builds on the work of Pickering & Kisangani (2009) and Lounsbury et al. (2011) in which they incorporate various dimensions in their conceptualization of stability. Pickering & Kisangani (2009) suggest that stability should consist of long-term viability and avoidance of major violent political upheaval, and the following three components should facilitate this: political regime, economic growth, and

physical quality of life over subsequent periods. This is further elaborated by Lounsbury et al. (2011), who similarly adopted this conceptualization but took into consideration that reform and thus stability take time. This is in contrast to Pickering & Kisangani (2009) who expected immediate effects.

Building on this understanding, this thesis will assess to what extent the military interventions have contributed to providing conditions in the host nation that could facilitate stability. This thesis argues that stability is characterized by three pillars: the presence of a credible governmental body, a decrease in violence, and the improvement of economic conditions to guarantee a certain quality of life. The understanding of stability in this study differs from Lounsbury et al. (2011) and Pickering & Kisangani (2009) in several aspects. Firstly, in contrast to these studies, this thesis focused on a legitimate governmental institution rather than the achievement of democracy, since democracy is not always the goal of the intervener. Secondly, it views the absence of violence as a critical element of stability rather than equating stability solely with the absence of violence. Finally, in contrast to Lounsbury et al. (2011) and Pickering & Kisangani (2009), this thesis will look at these variables from a qualitative perspective to provide a rich and detailed understanding.

Based on this, the assessment of a credible governmental body includes examining the intervention's impact on political structures, legal reforms, and the credibility of the resulting government to enhance state stability. In addition, it will look at the state of violence after the intervention and assess whether the intervention succeeded in decreasing the level of violence. Finally, it will evaluate how the economy developed after the intervention and examine the interveners' role in shaping conditions for economic growth. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that one cannot expect a country that has been suffering from violence, fragmented governments, and ideological segregation to directly transfer into a stable institutional country. However, during the evaluation, it should be evident that the intervention has resulted in conditions to facilitate stability and thus conflict resilience.

### **3.3.5 Concluding Remarks**

This research has identified four pillars or criteria that need to be met for a successful intervention and these are summarized in the following table:

**Table 2: Overview Conceptual framework**

<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Conceptualization</b>
<b>Achievement of Political Objectives</b>	Measures the success of the intervention in realizing its core political objectives with a maximum of three.
<b>Effective Strategies</b>	Strategies should be both effective and in line with political objectives. Effectiveness is assessed by determining whether the intervener successfully exploited the adversary's weaknesses, employed speed and deception, established a favorable battlefield environment, and aligned with objectives.
<b>Acceptable costs</b>	Cost should be in line with intervention results. These costs are measured across various metrics, including monetary, indirect, strategic, and reputational factors.
<b>Facilitating Long-Term Stability</b>	Intervention should facilitate long-term stability. Stability is measured by the presence of a credible government, decreased levels of violence, and the improvement of economic conditions.

This thesis will assess every pillar separately before synthesizing it towards a conclusion on whether one of the military interventions can be labeled as a success. It should be noted that these pillars are connected rather than separate entities and that together they should form an objective assessment of each intervention. Nevertheless, by first assessing each pillar individually, this thesis aims to examine them in more detail before reaching a conclusion. Finally, any limitations of this framework will be discussed in the conclusion.

### **3.4 Contextual factors**

The latter part of the Conceptual Framework will provide a theoretical foundation that examines the different factors that determine the success or failure of these interventions. The detailed justification for this incorporation has been provided in the literature review and is grounded in the fact that the current work fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influencing factors that dictate the success or failure of interventions. Therefore, this thesis aims to conceptualize a diverse set of factors to understand how they influence the outcome of military interventions. In short, this means that it will look at four different factors that are expected to influence the outcome of the interventions: socioeconomic, political, ideological, and regional factors. These factors are chosen based on their significance from the studied literature, while they also represent different angles for studying

the nuances of success or failure in military interventions. Their significance and how they contribute to this thesis will be explained individually in the next section.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this thesis is primarily concerned with the contextual factors of the host nation. During the literature review, this thesis concluded that there is more research available on factors related to the intervener (e.g. the timing, duration of the intervention, and resources). Conversely, factors on the internal dynamics of the host nation have received comparatively less attention. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the latter, while also considering factors related to the intervener when such insights are considered essential.

Moreover, in contrast to the previous part, this section is more explorative. Hence, this part of the conceptualization is going to deploy different concepts deriving from this theoretical framework concerning the nuancing factors determining the success of military intervention. The empirical part of the analysis will then attach these variables to the concrete cases to answer the research question(s). Nevertheless, due to the chosen inductive methodology of this part, further conceptualization is not yet possible. This means that this thesis does not develop a strict conceptualization of how each factor is measured. However, indicators for each factor will be delineated based on theoretical discussions, preparing the ground for an analysis of how these factors have collectively influenced the outcomes of the interventions.

### **3.4.1 Socioeconomic Factors**

The inclusion of socioeconomic factors in this thesis is predicated on a significant body of literature underscoring the correlation between socioeconomic factors and intervention outcomes. For instance, Kavanagh et al. (2019) highlight how stable economic conditions contribute to enhancing societal resilience, thereby potentially mitigating the adverse effects of military engagements. In addition, countries with an abundance of raw materials often have the opportunity to keep financing the conflict by rooting these sources. Furthermore, both Collier et al. (2008) and Doyle & Sambanis (2000) argue that the recurrence of the conflict is less likely when there is substantial economic development. These findings indicate a critical link between socioeconomic development and the outcome of interventions and thus present a necessity for examining how they influenced the outcome of military interventions.

This research will investigate the socio-economic environment in the host nation - both before and during the intervention - to assess how it shaped the outcome of the intervention. Its analysis includes - but is not limited to - indicators such as resource distribution, equality, employment, and overall poverty. These indicators will both serve to provide a means to the country's wealth and shine a light on the social well-being and potential for conflict resilience. Thereafter, it will elaborate on how these socioeconomic factors have influenced the intervention's effectiveness. For instance, it will dive deeper into how the available resources have affected the capacity of the intervener to deploy effective strategies or how the socio-economic conditions of a country may have impacted the intervention's internal support.

### **3.4.2 Political Factors**

This thesis also opts for an examination of how political factors have influenced the outcome of the intervention. This is based on the work of Kavanagh et al. (2019), who stated that an intervention is less violent in a country with a strong political structure. In addition, they also state the available literature lacks an examination of this relationship in-depth, justifying the inclusion of political factors in this thesis. Furthermore, it seems that there is an agreement in the literature that political factors shape military interventions (Frederick et al., 2021, Goldstone et al., 2010; Vreeland, 2008). However, these studies lack an understanding of the degree this relationship exists.

Hence, this thesis will examine different political factors that could have determined the intervention's performance. For instance, the government structures and institutional strength before and during the intervention will be assessed. This includes how the present form of government (democratic, authoritarian, or hybrid) has affected the success of military interventions. Echoing Kavanagh et al. (2019), it is posited that pre-existing political frameworks can facilitate a more positive intervention outcome, offering a foundation upon which intervention efforts can build. Moreover, the internal power struggles and leadership of the country will be examined as it is expected that an internally divided government and oppressive government positively increase the chances of success of a civilian-supported intervention (Edelstein, 2004). Finally, it will be illustrated how these variables played a role in shaping the outcome of the intervention. By providing a detailed analysis of these political factors, this thesis aims to elucidate their role in shaping the outcomes of military

interventions thereby offering new insights into the complex interplay between political environments and intervention efficacy.

### **3.4.3 Ideological Factors**

This thesis also considers the role of ideological factors crucial in shaping military interventions. Both Kavanagh et al. (2019) and Pearson (1974) note that ideology may affect the outcome of military success but highlight that there is no understanding of the degree to which it does. This lack of understanding underscores the necessity of incorporating an analysis of ideological factors into this framework. Consequently, this thesis aims to examine several ideological factors that dictated the outcome of the intervention. For instance, it will examine the religious or ethnic differences, sectarian tensions, and ideological motivations within the host nation. It particularly focuses on how sectarian divides and ethnic tensions have shaped military interventions since ideological clashes often result in the exacerbation of conflict and complicate intervention efforts (Regan, 1996). Moreover, this thesis explores how the prevailing ideologies within a host nation influence the formation of alliances or lead to the splintering of groups. By examining these dimensions, this thesis aims to provide a better understanding of how ideological factors have dictated the course of military interventions.

### **3.4.4 Regional Factors**

Finally, this thesis will dive into regional factors that are expected to influence the outcome of military interventions. This factor is considered essential given that intervention efforts are doomed to fail when regional forces disapprove (Kavanagh. 2019; Dobbins et al., 2005). In addition, Clare & Danilovic (2020) highlight the pivotal yet underexplored link between regional politics and military interventions, justifying its detailed examination in this study. Therefore, this thesis examines how the involvement of surrounding countries, geopolitical interests, and regional alliances shaped the outcome of the intervention. More specifically, it intends to shine a light on the complex interplay between the strategic interests of neighboring countries and its effect on military interventions. Additionally, it will incorporate an examination of the actual involvement of regional countries and assess whether this exacerbated the conflict. Finally, it illustrates the relationship between these factors and the outcome of the intervention.



## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

To develop an answer to the research question, this thesis utilizes a qualitative methodological framework, while adopting a dual case study design. According to Yin (2014), a case study should be utilized for finding patterns in real-life contexts and is particularly suited for diving into the how and why of phenomena. This approach aligns with the intention of this thesis to explore the complex dynamics of military interventions and the factors shaping them. Furthermore, according to Bryman (2016) and Stake (2005), one will be better at understanding social phenomena when these are compared in multiple contrasting cases, which is why this thesis chose a dual case study design to test the developed framework and explore the determining factors. Especially since according to Yin (2014), case studies are “often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (p. 57). Additionally, unlike multiple case studies, a dual case study design allows for in-depth exploration within a manageable scope, maintaining clarity and in-depth analysis. Furthermore, it is important to note that a dual case study design is not merely a collection of individual findings but should serve as a tool that facilitates a comparative analysis which enhances the robustness and generalizability of the findings (Bryman, 2016; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). Such a comparative stance is important for gaining an understanding of the broader trends and dynamics that dictate the success or failure of military interventions. In the context of this thesis, two different military interventions were selected to fulfill this requirement.

The adoption of a dual case study approach is highly favored in this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, this method allows the testing of the established conceptual framework within different environments that enhance the transferability of this thesis while it also assists in uncovering the nuancing factors of each intervention outcome. Consequently, it opens space for gathering cross-findings in the cases. In addition, a dual case study was the most appropriate since military interventions are conducted in different contexts, and examining one intervention would not provide a sufficient amount of data. However, examining more than two was considered not feasible since it would have prevented this research from going into detail. Therefore, two cases were chosen to provide the amount of data without having to sacrifice the depth that case studies require. Moreover, this design allows for a significant explanation of its causal mechanisms. This entails that the case study

method grants a thorough examination of a possible relationship between the outcome of the intervention and the socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional factors. Finally, the dual case study design offers a certain level of flexibility which is useful for comprehending the complexities of studying convoluted phenomena such as military intervention.

## **4.2 Case Selection**

A crucial component of a credible case study is the selection of the chosen cases. Military interventions are conducted worldwide. However, attempting to cover them on a global scale would limit the depth of this study due to the complexities involved in achieving a comprehensive understanding of each unique environmental context. Therefore, this thesis decided to narrow its geographical scope to the Middle East. Even though this thesis is aware that a global scope would have increased the transferability of the findings, a regional focus is considered more effective, since it allows the gathering of an in-depth understanding of the environmental situation which ultimately strengthens the findings.

The decision to focus on the Middle East was based on several arguments. Firstly, the Middle East has a historical context of military interventions that can be traced back from the Cold War until the Arab Spring. This historical significance provides a rich context of the factors that dictate its success. Secondly, the region consists of strong geopolitical significance and acts as a nexus for trading routes, raw materials, and political alliances. This has often made the region vulnerable to international military interventions and therefore provides a sufficient amount of data for studying. Thirdly, military interventions in the Middle East present a wide array of dynamics, including unilateral, multilateral, and coalition-based approaches, each with distinct motivations, strategies, and outcomes. This provides a sufficient amount of data for a comprehensive analysis of these military interventions. Finally, the implications of military interventions in this region have global consequences, making it crucial to understand the dynamics under which they fail or succeed and the factors contributing to this outcome.

With the rationale for choosing the Middle East as a region defined, it is crucial to illustrate what this thesis considers the Middle East. Academically, there are different definitions provided and no accepted universal understanding exists with regard to which countries to include (Batanouny, 2001). This thesis adopted the definition provided by the UNC Centre for Middle East & Islamic Studies (n.d.). They include the following countries in their definition of the Middle East: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus (northern), Egypt,

Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza (Palestine) and Yemen. This definition is chosen for its broad inclusivity of the region, countering the narrow scope of this thesis to focus on one region. Furthermore, this broad definition allows one to choose from interventions that were conducted after the Arab Spring which ensures that the study's findings remain relevant and significant to the contemporary context.

Consequently, the provided definition of the Middle East enables this thesis to establish the criteria for the cases eligible for this study. Yin (2014) underscores the cruciality of precisely defining these criteria by carefully specifying what, who, where, and when. However, it should be noted that complete representative cases are difficult to identify, especially in complex and broad concepts such as military intervention (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Based on these understandings this thesis established four different criteria:

1. **Geographical and temporal scope.** The intervention must have occurred within the defined region of the Middle East and the time frame of the start of the intervention is set between the Arab Spring (2011) and 2018. This is required so that the findings are recent enough to be relevant for current policymakers and research implications. Furthermore, the time limit has been set for 2018 so that the long-term consequences of the intervention are included in the study.
2. **Nature of the intervention.** The intervention should mainly consist of military means as the main strategy. In the current intervention paramedic, it is impossible to pick interventions that only consist of military means. However, for this research, only interventions with a predominant focus on military means are selected.
3. **Diversity of actors.** This thesis aims to examine interventions conducted by various state or state-like entities to ensure that the findings are relevant and more generalizable.
4. **Inclusion of government.** At least one of the involved parties in the conflict must be a governmental entity. This inclusion ensures that the study covers interventions with significant political and sovereign implications,

Based on these requirements the following cases were considered for this thesis: Egypt (2013), Libya (2011), Syria (2015), Yemen (2015), and Bahrain (2011). Unfortunately, examining all of them was not considered feasible for this project. Therefore, this thesis used the extreme case technique as described by Seawright & Gerring (2008) to select the

preferred cases. Firstly, the NATO intervention in Libya has been selected for this study due to its significant scale and profound influence on the conflict's resolution. In addition, the overthrowing of Gaddafi also made it interesting to study the aftermath consequences. Hence, Libya provides a unique opportunity to test the established framework by exploring the ramifications of such an external intervention, while it also provides the necessary context for what factors influenced this outcome. Secondly, Syria represents an extreme case due to its magnitude and the international consequences it has generated. This country has experienced a complex web of different military involvements which include Russia, Iran, the US, and Turkey among others. This thesis focuses specifically on the Russian intervention to include a non-Western intervening actor and an intervention that is government-supportive to test the developed framework. The intricate interplay of various international and regional actors, the repressing regime, and economic conditions also make Syria an essential case for understanding the influencing factors.

Overall, these two cases provide the richest amount of data for studying military interventions, which increases the generalizability of the findings. Yet they also consist of some fundamental differences that enhance the credibility of this thesis. The main differences are found in the fact that NATO's intervention in Libya is multilateral, rebellion-supportive, and Western, while Russia's intervention in Syria is unilateral, government-supportive, and non-Western. This balanced examination of military interventions (within the dual case study design) not only enriches the comparative analysis but also facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of international military interventions.

### **4.3 Data Collection**

The data collection strategy is developed to gather a sufficient amount of information to study military interventions. As Bryman (2016) notes, data collection forms the core of one's research and thus underscores the necessity of a detailed explanation of the selected data collection methods. For the empirical analysis, this thesis will utilize both empirical and non-numerical data gathered from primary and secondary sources. However, due to the focus of the research question, it will limit itself to already existing data. The data collected for this thesis will be gathered from:

- Official reports from governments and non-governmental organizations: These documents will provide information about the strategies, objectives, and outcomes of

the intervening entity. They serve as a primary source of information, providing a detailed insight into the objectives of the intervening party.

- Media reports: Media reports will help to offer a less biased perspective since they provide a different angle. In addition, these views contribute to capturing the international dynamics and real-time development during these interventions.
- Academic articles: these sources will be used to understand the existing theories and historical context around military interventions and form the basis for the conceptual framework.
- Case studies: Existing case studies on the interventions allow this thesis to gain a holistic understanding of specific instances of the intervention, including tactical evaluation and strategic outcomes. These studies provide the necessary and comprehensive insights into each case, which facilitates a deep examination of military interventions.

Furthermore, the collected data will meet essential research needs, which include -but are not limited to - the following requirements:

1. Provide a background on one of the military interventions.
2. Assist in evaluating the success or failure of military interventions, measured by the clearly stated criteria in the conceptual framework.
3. Explain the factors contributing to the success or failure of the different interventions. These can vary from the economic conditions in a country to the strength of the opposing forces.

The data will be collected through various methods. The Google engine will assist in the search for official reports from government, NGOs, and media articles. Furthermore, the access to academic articles is extracted from reputable academic publishers through which access was granted by the electronic library of Charles University or Google Scholar. To ensure a certain degree of robustness and data collection methodology, this thesis has implemented several guidelines during the data collection process. Firstly, an extensive literature review was executed to ensure a high level of expertise in the studied topic. Secondly, it applied the principle of triangulation during the collection of data. This principle means that one uses multiple sources and data types to compare and contrast different sources to search for common themes and check the truthfulness of the findings (Bryman, 2016). Thirdly, the thesis aimed to adhere to ethical guidelines when gathering data from sensitive

topics to maintain its research integrity. However, it should be noted that complete neutrality is impossible in conducting research.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

According to Yin (2014), within the process of conducting a multiple or dual case study, each case must be treated separately before the findings are synthesized. Therefore, the data analysis consists of two parts. Firstly, a Historical Analysis coupled with Process Tracing is conducted on each case separately. Thereafter, the findings are synthesized in the cross-sectional analysis. Within the first step, the conceptual framework will be applied to each case after extracting and analyzing the necessary data. Furthermore, based on the outcome of this assessment, an examination is conducted on the determining factors contributing to its success or failure. During this process, a Historical Case Analysis is conducted due to its excellence in explaining and understanding past events (Thies, 2002). A Historical Analysis aims to reconstruct past events and interactions between parties to explain these events with the information present today, rather than at the time of the events (Thies, 2002; Widdersheim, 2018). Within this method, the researcher aims to find causality between past events, tests a theory, and investigates why these events occur to gain insights into the broader phenomena of trends. The primary aim here is to use contemporary data to retrospectively analyze events and provide insights into the causality and dynamics that shaped these interventions. The Historical Analysis will be conducted on data such as governmental records, historical documents, and reports related to the chosen cases to gain a comprehensive narrative of these events. Consequently, this method not only assists in the construction of the Conceptual Framework that captures the essence of successful military interventions but also aids in developing a comprehension of each case that facilitates the testing of this framework. Additionally, a Historical Analysis enables us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the possible socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional factors that have influenced the outcome of each intervention.

Moreover, the Historical Analysis will be complemented by the method of Process Tracing. With Process Tracing this thesis intends to get a better understanding of the causal link between military interventions and their influencing factors. This method allows it to dive deeper than just correlation as it investigates phenomena by using a cause-and-effects approach (Collier, 2011). Meaning that this thesis aims to investigate the causal links between the specific outcomes of the intervention and the significant factors dictating this

outcome. This method is essential due to its ability to elaborately illustrate the mechanisms through which the outcome of military interventions is influenced. More specifically, it will help in identifying how it is influenced by socio-economic, political, ideological, and regional factors. However, it should be noted that by studying cases within an open environment it is impossible to exclude the influence of other actors and factors. Therefore, the main focus here is to illustrate association within this relationship rather than causation.

The outcome of the Historical Analysis and Process Tracing process will be analyzed using a Cross-Case Analysis that compares the selected cases' similarities and differences. According to Bryman (2016), a Cross-Case Analysis is necessary when a researcher is interested in variation and wants to examine relationships within variables. This aligns with the goals of this thesis to serve as a steppingstone for further research based on examining the level of application of the established conceptual framework. Additionally, this method allows for the exploration of possible generalizations across the two cases and consequently results in a broader understanding of the factors that have contributed to the outcome of the studied interventions. This approach not only aids in achieving a deeper insight into the dynamics of military interventions but also establishes a foundation for subsequent research, enhancing our understanding of what factors significantly impact the success or failure of such interventions.

## **5. Analysis**

The analysis consists of several parts. Firstly, each case will be evaluated based on the established framework and thereafter follows an illustration of the contextual factors that dictated the assessed outcome. This will be followed by a discussion section where the Cross-Case Analysis will be conducted. However, each case starts with a small contextual background to provide some understanding of the conflict. Still, it should be noted that this doesn't dive too much into the specifics since these will be covered in the analysis itself.

### **5.1 Libya**

#### **5.1.1 Historical Background**

Libya became an independent country in 1951 after the rise of King Muhammed Idris. King Idris was known for his pragmatic and minimalistic government style. His reign experienced the discovery of the first oil sources, opening tremendous opportunities for the economically

struggling Libya (Winer, 2019). However, the year 1969 witnessed a dramatic shift in Libya's political landscape when Gaddafi came to power after he and the Free Officers Movement succeeded in a military coup to overthrow King Idris. Gaddafi implemented significant changes that transformed Libya into a social and rentier state. These changes could be detected by the establishment of certain privileges for the prominent families of Libya including Gaddafi's tribal group, the Qadhadhfa, as well as other local tribal leaders (Pedde, 2017; Winer, 2019). Simultaneously, this also led to marginalization policies for other groups such as civilians in Cyrenaica, east of Benghazi (oil producers), the Saharan interior, and Islamists (Winer, 2019). Such divisive policies not only exacerbated the wealth disparity among different societal groups but also formed the foundation of discontent that would later evolve in the 2011 uprising.

Gaddafi's rule could be characterized by a system that was called *Jamahiriyah* (state of masses). Theoretically, this system should provide high production, equality, social justice, and less exploitation for the working class. However, in practice, this meant a dictatorship where Gaddafi ruled authoritarian through repression (Keenan, 2018; Pedde, 2017; Serafimov, 2012; Winer, 2019). Examples of his repressive rule could be seen when he expelled other political parties in 1972 and his role in the Abu Salim prison massacre. Furthermore, his foreign policies resulted in the country's isolation from other Arab countries.

Under Gaddafi, Libya was plagued by widespread human rights violations, a lack of political representation, and limited economic opportunities, which formed the basis for the 2011 Libyan revolution. The revolution started in Libya's second city Benghazi after human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil was arrested. These resulted in protests around Libya, whose roots could be traced back to the Arab Spring. The revolution was driven by a bonded desire to oust Gaddafi but lacked ideological or political unity (Serafimov, 2012; Winer, 2019). The revolution rapidly transformed into a violent conflict after Gaddafi responded by ordering his forces to kill and shoot protesters. At first, the rebellion forces succeeded in gaining ground, and within a week they established the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the first independent Libya government. However, Gaddafi regained ground with a brutal response which prompted the NATO intervention in March 2011 (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012). This operation was justified on humanitarian grounds and consisted of three different tasks: protecting civilians, policing the arms embargo, and maintaining the no-fly zone. With NATO assistance, the rebellion succeeded in taking ground on Gaddafi's forces until he was eventually killed in October 2011.



### 5.1.2 Achievement of Political Objectives

The first pillar to examine whether the intervention of NATO in Libya could be labeled as a success depends on whether they achieved their political objectives. This thesis identified two main political goals that motivated NATO to execute the intervention in Libya.

Firstly, NATO claimed that its goal was to protect civilians from human rights violations enforced by Gaddafi (Igwe et al., 2017; Kuperman, 2013; NATO, 2015; Subramanian, 2022; Terry; 2015). The presence of this objective was straightforward since NATO explicitly stated that their main political goal was to improve the human rights situation and protect civilians from Gaddafi's violence. They adopted Security Council Resolution 1973 to improve the human rights condition which allowed member states to take all the necessary measures to fulfill these objectives. According to NATO, their motivation was solely based on humanitarian reasons and had no other political reasons. However, some scholars argue that NATO was also driven by regime change rather than serving solely humanitarian interests. Several arguments could be found to back up this statement. Firstly, it could be argued that the employed tactics aligned more with overthrowing Gaddafi rather than protecting civilians (Kuperman, 2013; Subramanian, 2022; Terry; 2015). A notable example is the bombing of Gaddafi's forces in his hometown of Sirte, where the threat to civilians was arguably minimal as the population largely supported the regime (Kuperman, 2013; Subramanian, 2022; Terry, 2015). Secondly, the continuation of aiding the rebels also strengthens this argument as they preferred the preservation of violence rather than achieving a peaceful ceasefire (Kuperman, 2013; Terry, 2015). Even when the government initiated negotiations towards a constitutional government change and ceasefire, the rebels favored war and neglected this opportunity. Moreover, the decision to end NATO's involvement shortly after the elimination of Gaddafi suggests that his removal may have been a pivotal objective and raised questions about the long-term commitment to Libya's humanitarian needs and political stabilization (Clark et al., 2021). Finally, even during the war, several NATO members stated that Gaddafi could not remain in power, which also justified the assumption that ousting Gaddafi was a political goal for NATO. Therefore, this thesis argues that NATO had two main political goals for its intervention in Libya: (1) the protection of the human rights of civilians and (2) the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. Still, it should be noted that NATO also had subgoals which could be regional stability, economic motivations, and democratic ambitions. However, these were not considered as the main political objectives.

The assessment of NATO's objective to enhance human rights in Libya unfolded a debate within the academic community that revealed a disagreement about the intervention's effectiveness. On one hand, scholars argue that NATO's intervention had a negative influence on the death toll, the duration of the conflict, and thus the human rights situation. For instance, Kuperman (2013) stated that NATO's interference has prolonged the conflict and increased the number of casualties. Furthermore, Teimouri & Subedi (2018) argue that the intervention exacerbated the existing refugee crisis and increased the violence. Critics have also raised concerns about NATO's selective protection of human rights, accusing the alliance of focusing only on civilians opposed to the Gaddafi regime, rather than universally applying human rights protections (Igwe, 2017; Terry, 2015). On the other hand, several authors (Chivvis, 2012; Daalder & Stavrides, 2012; Mueller, 2015; Gartenstein-Ross, 2014) argued that the intervention resulted in the saving of many lives and fulfilled its humanitarian mandate. This perspective suggests that - in certain respects- NATO's intervention achieved its humanitarian objectives in the short term by shielding civilians from immediate harm.

However, the long-term consequences of the intervention paint a less nuanced outcome and challenge the achievement of this objective. In the aftermath of the intervention, a series of events unfolded that cast a shadow over the humanitarian achievements initially credited to NATO. For instance, the rebels conducted reprisal killings combined with torturing and beating former Gaddafi supporters (Igwe, 2017; Kuperman, 2013; Teimouri & Subedi 2018). Furthermore, they looted and robbed homes in different cities that were loyal to the regime. Human Rights Watch (2012) categorized these actions as severe crimes against humanity, suggesting a deteriorating human rights landscape post-intervention.

Additionally, according to Human Rights Watch (2024), Libya today still suffers from ongoing human rights abuses, with militias, armed groups, and security forces engaging in widespread arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances, and forced confessions. Based on this, one could significantly question whether NATO succeeded in improving the human rights condition in Libya. While it certainly could be argued that there might have been fleeting NATO successes in improving human rights conditions initially, the enduring legacy of the intervention is one of continued human rights violations and unrest. It is important to note that one could not expect NATO to free a country from human rights violations that has been subjected to it for ages. Yet, when looking at the current situation it seems that the NATO intervention did not even succeed in building some foundations that could facilitate the improvement of human rights in the long term. Therefore, this thesis argues that the current state of affairs indicates a failure to achieve this objective.

Secondly, this thesis will evaluate the second objective of overthrowing Gaddafi. Upon examining the concrete outcomes of the intervention, it becomes evident that NATO's actions directly facilitated the downfall of Gaddafi's regime (Mueller, 2015; Daalder & Stavrides, 2012; Chivvis, 2015; Kuperman, 2013; Ross, 2014). While the hypothetical scenarios regarding the civil war's potential outcome without NATO's involvement remain speculative, it is widely acknowledged that Gaddafi's forces were gaining momentum before NATO's intervention and the intervention significantly countered this process. However, despite the success in ousting Gaddafi, the post-intervention environment has been characterized by political instability and fragmentation. These developments pose significant considerations about the nature of this success. However, creating a democratic and stable institution was not considered as a political goal in this thesis and therefore excluded in this part of the evaluation. Following Kavanagh's (2019) approach, the evaluation of an objective must adhere to a specific criterion—here, the removal of Gaddafi from power. Within this understanding, the achievement of this objective could be labeled as a success.

### **5.1.3 Effective Strategies**

The evaluation of the operation's military success is multifaceted, focusing on several key strategies implemented during the intervention. These strategies include: enforcing an arms embargo in the Mediterranean Sea, enforcing a no-fly zone to prevent air bombings, conducting air and naval strikes against government forces, and aiding the rebels in ground combat (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012; Igwe, 2017; NATO, 2015; Pashakhanlou, 2017; Terry, 2015; Wehrey, 2015).

Firstly, it is important to define to what extent these strategies succeeded in exploiting Gaddafi's weaknesses. According to Petersson (2023a), the air campaign generated both short and long-term impacts. In the short term, he stated that the Gaddafi forces lost territory to the rebellions, while he also found evidence that the Gaddafi forces were impeded by the airstrikes from recapturing territory. This is also underscored by Mueller (2015) who stated that the air campaign resulted in significant difficulties for the Gaddafi forces to effectively fight the rebel coalition. The effectiveness of airstrikes could be explained by the reliance of the Gaddafi forces on conventional military means (Mueller, 2015; Peterson, 2023a; Peterson; 2023b). This is in line with the criteria defined by Meiser et al. (2021), of exploiting the weakness of your adversary. In this context, NATO adeptly identified and targeted the Libyan government's reliance on conventional warfare, thereby magnifying its

strategic advantage through air operations. Additionally, the aiding of the rebels ensured that there was a strong ground force that would be able to attack Gaddafi which ensured that NATO's weakness regarding the lack of ground forces was countered. Furthermore, cutting off the weapons supply by sea was another strategic component that capitalized on a critical vulnerability of Gaddafi's regime: his reliance on maritime routes for the importation of weapons and supplies (Chivvis, 2012; Smith-Windsor, 2013). The employment of the naval blockade and arms embargo ensured that NATO exploited the weakness of Gaddafi to be heavily dependent on the sea for its supplies. Overall, within the scope of military strategy and tactical execution, NATO's operations can be regarded as successful in exploiting the weakness of Gaddafi's forces,

Secondly, this thesis evaluates to what extent the requirement of using deception and psychological manipulation could be detected. NATO's swift and unexpected deployment of military assets significantly impacted Gaddafi's forces, with Mueller (2015) highlighting the incredible speed of military planning and execution. Furthermore, the deployment of naval assets was within hours after the operation initiation and caught the Gaddafi forces off guard (Kuperman, 2013; Smith-Windsor, 2013). Consequently, within two weeks of the NATO support, the rebels made notable progress through the successful defense of Benghazi and the recapturing of Brega and Ras Lanuf. This aligns with Meiser et al. (2021) criterion of using speed and concentrated violence to gain relative power and utilize momentum.

Furthermore, the combination of aerial bombings with the cutting of the arms supply aligns with Meiser et al. (2021) and Hart's (1991) understanding of the concept of dislocation. Here, they argue that dislocation can be exemplified by putting supply lines in harm and dividing the adversary forces. In addition, the overwhelming airpower deployed by NATO not only tactically disadvantaged Gaddafi's forces but also served to demoralize them, contributing to the psychological destruction of government troops. This psychological destruction is a crucial component of Meiser et al. (2021) understanding of military effectiveness and thus boosted NATO's strategy efficiency. However, it should also be noted that NATO was limited in mission operations by legal or moral boundaries (Smith-Windsor, 2013). This imposed a degree of predictability in their operations which the Gaddafi forces could exploit. For instance, the regime troops exploited moments when NATO's operational capabilities were limited or when they were legally or morally restricted from engaging. This negatively affected the effectiveness of deception and psychological manipulation tactics. Still, NATO's overall strategic application concerning this requirement largely succeeded in gaining relative power.

Thirdly, this thesis delves into the effectiveness of NATO's operations in Libya in controlling the battlefield environment. Foremost, the strategic deployment of air strikes played a significant role in dictating the terms of combat. For instance, Petersson (2023b) stated that the air attacks were calculated moves to transform the battlefield into terrains that favored the rebels or to counteract government offensives. This added non-conventional means to the battlefield that significantly altered the way the war was conducted. This corresponds with the requirement of Meiser et al., (2021) to dictate how engagements are fought that are disadvantageous to the adversary. Furthermore, the imposition of a no-fly zone and maritime restrictions around Libya played a crucial role in ensuring Gaddafi could only rely on ground forces. This favored the rebels who did not have the capabilities to counter the possible air capacities of the government. This effectively neutralized possible air threats for the rebels thereby forcing the conflict into a domain where NATO and the rebels could exert the most influence. Moreover, Chivvis (2012) noted that due to the air support, the government forces were unable to operate freely on the battleground. This control over the environment played a crucial role in undermining the strategic positions and capabilities of Gaddafi's forces, contributing significantly to the rebels' advances. However, the reliance on aerial tactics without corresponding ground forces presents a notable limitation in achieving total control over the conflict's dynamics. In addition, the previously mentioned difficulty of NATO being bound by legal and moral issues also resulted in complexities in dictating the battlefield environment. These limitations occasionally allowed Gaddafi's loyalists to exploit moments when NATO's presence was minimal or when distinguishing between civilians and combatants was challenging. This limited NATO's opportunity to dictate how the way war was conducted.

Fourthly, the examination of the alignment between NATO's operational strategies in Libya and its stated policy objectives reveals a complex interplay, particularly in the context of human rights promotion. Some airstrikes were targeted at government forces that formed no immediate threat to the civilians, which questions the alignment between military strategy and improving human rights (Igwe et al., 2012; Kuperman, 2013; Terry; 2015). Furthermore, the question of whether air power is the most efficient way to achieve the objective of human rights has been asked frequently (Clark et al., 2021). This strategy, while instrumental in facilitating the goal of regime change, inadvertently contradicts civilian safety, indicating a potential contradiction between the objectives of ousting Gaddafi and ensuring the protection of human rights. Further evidence for this statement could be detected with the maintenance of aid to the rebels. This continuation of aid had negatively impacted the human rights

situation as it prolonged the war and the rebels themselves formed a threat to civilians loyal to the regime (Kuperman, 2013; Terry, 2015). Again, this strategy was instrumental in NATO's endeavor to facilitate regime change but contradicted its desire to improve human rights conditions. Additionally, while the arms embargo was supposed to improve the human rights situation, its application suffered arbitrarily as it was only enforced on the government but not on the rebels (Kuperman, 2013). Finally, it seems that the blockade of the sea supplies is one of the few measures that aligned with both objectives since it reduced the number of weapons in Libya and therefore decreased the likelihood of human rights violations. Overall, it becomes evident that NATO's strategies in Libya were predominantly geared towards deposing Gaddafi, with less consideration for their humanitarian implications.

To conclude, it seems that NATO's military strategies could be considered reasonable and effective. They mostly succeeded in creating relative power by exploiting the weaknesses of their adversary, using deception, and dictating the battle environment. However, despite these military successes, the intervention's alignment with humanitarian objectives - specifically the protection of human rights - presents a more complex evaluation. Nevertheless, overall NATO strategies could be labeled as reasonably successful due to their relative tactical efficiency.

#### **5.1.4 Acceptable Cost**

It should be noted that the monetary evaluation of multilateral interventions comes with complexities as they may unfold in two ways. With regards to the military intervention in Libya, this means that some costs are directly spent by NATO while others stem from contributions by individual states. Hence it should be made clear that this thesis primarily focuses on those costs that can be directly linked to NATO, given that the focus of this evaluation is on examining the intervention from NATO's perspective.

According to NATO (2015) the intervention mobilized 8.000 troops, 260 air assets (aircraft, helicopters, and aerial vehicles), and 21 naval assets. Furthermore, NATO disclosed that its direct operational costs, primarily for the AWACS surveillance planes and personnel, amounted to approximately €6.2 million monthly. Beyond these direct costs, individual member states incurred additional expenses in deploying their military capabilities, contributing to the overall financial outlay of the intervention. Overall, the collective financial burden was deemed relatively cost-efficient compared to other military interventions. For instance, Daalder & Stavridis (2012) stated that the overall costs consisted

of several billions, which is considered economically acceptable compared to other interventions such as Kosovo. This perception is also underscored by Mueller et al. (2015) and Chivvis (2012).

An impressive statistic of this intervention was the absence of any allied casualties (Mueller, 2015). Nevertheless, the conflict witnessed substantial losses among the rebels, civilians, and governmental forces with numbers deviating from 8.000 to 11.500 (Kuperman, 2013). The academic community remains divided on whether the intervention saved lives or if it exaggerated the death toll. For instance, Kuperman (2013) believes that NATO interference increased the death toll by exceeding the duration of the conflict, while Daalder & Stavridis (2012) and Wilson (2013) argue that it saved thousands of lives. Kuperman's (2013) argument is based on a hypothetical analysis that investigates the war without NATO intervention and concludes NATO intervention significantly prolonged the conflict. In contrast, Daalder & Stavridis (2012) stated that rapid action prevented the lives of 10.000 people from destruction. Such disparities highlight the inherent difficulty in conclusively determining the intervention's impact on the conflict's duration and death toll. However, NATO's behavior concerning the continuation of support to the rebels, the neglect of ceasefire talks, and its persistence in ousting Gaddafi certainly complicates the argument that the intervention mainly saved lives.

Furthermore, the intervention's impact on civilian infrastructure and the human costs also presents a contentious debate. There are some claims that NATO contributed to the significant collateral damage post-intervention as many civilian facilities were destroyed (Fernandes, 2022; Teimouri & Subedi 2018). Furthermore, while NATO aimed to minimize civilian casualties through precision airstrikes, the effectiveness and ethical implications of these efforts remain disputed (Marcuzzi, 2022; Kuperman: 2013). However, Chivvis (2012) concluded that the civilian death rate was relatively low with no existing report exceeding the rate of a hundred victims. This is underscored by other scholars who pleaded for NATO's success in minimizing the collateral bombings through precision airstrikes (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012; Mueller, 2015; Pashakhanlou, 2017). Again, this results in a lack of consensus on whether NATO involvement succeeded in minimizing collateral damage or, conversely, intensified it. Regardless, attributing all post-war collateral damage solely to NATO would be both difficult and unethical, as it is plausible that, even without intervention, the country would have also suffered damages due to the conflict.

Furthermore, the intervention's strategic and reputational costs demand a close examination. The intervention heightened tensions within the international system,

challenging the existing norms and thresholds for international interventions under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine (Kuperman, 2013; Terry, 2015). This has complicated the legitimacy of future interventions and indicates that the intervention resulted in significant strategic costs. In addition, the regional instability following Gaddafi's downfall posed significant spillover effects and strategic costs associated with the power vacuum left by the intervention. For instance, Mali has been subjected to a civil war which some scholars trace back to the instability after the Gaddafi downfall (Gartenstein-Ross, 2014; Terry, 2015). This not only exacerbated the strategic cost of the intervention but also posed new security challenges within the region. This regional instability was further reinforced by the seized opportunity of non-state violent actors to establish a foothold in the region, which further negatively affected the strategic costs.

Reputationally, the intervention caused a lot of damage with different actors arguing that NATO overstepped its authority. The argument here was that NATO was driven by political ambitions rather than protecting human rights (Fernandes, 2022; Kuperman, 2013; Terry 2012). This affected the credibility of NATO as an organization and complicated the prospects for future interventions. Russia and China, in particular, are less willing to grant permission for further interventions, as evidenced by their stance in Syria (Miller, 2022; Kuperman, 2013; Gobush, 2017). Despite some counter arguments - such as those posed by Chivvis (2012) who suggested that the relationship decline had a limited impact on key issues - the broader consensus is that the intervention has indeed made possible future interventions more challenging.

Overall, NATO performed well over this criterium when looking at the monetary costs. However, when taking a broader stance and considering also the strategic and reputational costs, it seems that they were less successful. Furthermore, the argument that the intervention mainly saved lives remains disputed. Additionally, despite incurring significant indirect costs, the intervention fell short of achieving all its intended political goals. Therefore, this analysis concludes that the intervention's strategic and reputational drawbacks and NATO's role in conflict prolongation outweigh its financial efficiency and limited allied casualties.

### **5.1.5 Facilitating Long-Term Stability**

The last requirement for a successful military intervention is that the aftermath of the intervention should consist of conditions that should facilitate stability. This entails that the post-intervention situation should be characterized by a credible governmental body,



decreased presence of violence, and increased economic conditions that ensure a certain quality of life.

Firstly, conditions for the establishment of a credible government will be evaluated. After the revolution succeeded and Gaddafi was ousted, a new government was installed based on the National Transitional Council (NTC) (Terry, 2015; Fukutomi, 2017; Gartenstein-Ross, 2014). This resulted in a remarkable moment with Libya's first democratic elections in decades. Initially, this development suggested the formation of foundational elements necessary for a stable governance structure. However, the established government rapidly suffered from fragmentation due to its different ideologies and the existing power vacuum after Gaddafi's removal (Kuperman, 2013; Teimouri & Subedi 2018). What followed were new violent eruptions between rivaling groups with each controlling significant territories and undermining the prospects for a unified national governance. Domestic politics in Libya became further divided after the dissolution of the General National Congress (GNC) in 2014, leading to the emergence of two rival governmental administrations: the Libya Dawn, based in Tripoli, and the internationally recognized government in Tobruk (Fukutomi, 2017; Vilmer, 2016; Winer, 2019). This bifurcation, rooted in an array of armed forces driven by local and tribal loyalties, intensified the enduring political instability that gripped the country. The precarious state of Libya's democratic institutions is further highlighted by the fact that the last elections were in 2014 and Libya still only has an interim constitution (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Teimouri & Subedi, 2018). Finally, as Teimouri & Subedi (2018) noted: "it is safe to claim that the imposed regime change by NATO states and their allies played a part in the creation of the failing state status of Libya, thereby endangering Libyans" (p. 12). Therefore, it can be concluded that NATO's intervention suffered from significant shortcomings in creating political foundations that should support stability with no sovereign unilateral government existing today.

Furthermore, the intervention encountered challenges in decreasing the amount of violence which can be attributed to several post-conflict factors that NATO left unaddressed. Firstly, the power vacuum after Gaddafi's downfall enabled militias to take over government functions. These groups, often driven by disparate ideologies, engaged in widespread conflict across the country, undermining efforts to establish a unified and peaceful governance structure that could control the levels of violence. In addition, there was an increasing threat from radical Islamists which further fueled violence (Kuperman, 2013; Gartenstein-Ross, 2014). These radical groups were initially suppressed by Gaddafi's strict rule but re-emerged after his downfall. The fragmentation of security forces -with many units remaining loyal to

their pre-revolution commanders rather than the interim government - further exacerbated the security vacuum, hindering efforts to stabilize the level of violence and restore order (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Centre for Preventive Action, 2023). In addition, the weak functioning of public services to provide security forces civilians to arm themselves for protection. The second civil war in 2014 further demonstrates NATO's shortcomings in decreasing the violence. Lastly, contemporary Libya still suffers from violent clashes between rival governments leading to civilian deaths, human rights issues, and severe violence (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Centre for Preventive Action, 2023). In light of these factors, it becomes evident that the NATO intervention, despite its intentions, did not achieve a long-term reduction in violence.

Finally, the examination of the facilitation of economic conditions that should contribute to stability reveals that this has not been realized. Libya, endowed with significant natural resources and a relatively high level of education, theoretically possesses all the necessary attributes for robust post-war reconstruction and development (Gargoum, 2022). However, it seems the available resources resulted in a paradox that NATO could not solve. On the one hand, they provide the wealth to generate economic growth and development. On the other hand, they exacerbated the existing tensions through power competition that fueled the ongoing unrest (Gargoum, 2022; Nasef, 2019). Furthermore, the Libyan economy's heavy reliance on oil exports has introduced a level of vulnerability to external market fluctuations and internal disruptions in production. The intervention could have formed the basis for a structured approach to equally divide the resources and address the issue of oil dependency. Nevertheless, this opportunity was neglected by NATO as they directly pulled out after Gaddafi's death leaving a fractionalized country behind. In addition, the intervention and conflict contributed to a shrink in the economy that has not been resolved today (Gargoum, 2022). Furthermore, since the intervention, Libya never succeeded in restarting its productive sectors at full capacity which further increased the economic malaise. Furthermore, the control of oil-rich territories by militias, combined with diminished oil production—now only a fraction of its pre-conflict capacity—underscores the severe disruptions to Libya's economic foundation post-intervention (Fukutomi, 2017). Finally, the arms embargo, frozen assets, destruction, and horrible currency flow further complicated economic recovery (Subramanian, 2022). While the current economic situation in Libya cannot be solely attributed to NATO intervention, it is evident that NATO's efforts have not yielded significant economic steppingstones to foster long-term stability in the region.

To conclude, it is quite evident that NATO did not succeed in creating stability according to the criteria stated in this thesis. Today, the country lacks a credible and central government, suffers from high levels of violence, and is without any economic prosperities.

#### **5.1.6 Overall Assessment**

The NATO intervention in Libya produced mixed outcomes. They succeeded in overthrowing Gaddafi with limited means. Nevertheless, despite its humanitarian intention, the post-intervention outcome is characterized by human rights abuses, violence, and political uncertainty. Although NATO's tactics, particularly the use of air power, were effective in altering the power balance, the strategic execution of the intervention faced criticism for prioritizing regime change over humanitarian concerns. Additionally, the intervention had severe implications for NATO concerning the strategic and reputational costs. For instance, it harmed international relations and has been used as a precedent that complicated future interventions under the flag of R2P. Finally, the post-intervention situation in Libya reveals the lack of a credible government, ongoing violence, and severe economic challenges. Hence, the analysis stated that the intervention did not succeed in providing conditions that should facilitate long-term stability. Therefore, this thesis argues that, besides some aspects of success, the intervention could not be labeled as a success.

#### **5.1.7 Contextual Factors**

#### **5.1.8 Socioeconomic Factors**

Socioeconomic factors significantly influenced the outcome of NATO's intervention in Libya as the revolution was deeply rooted in the country's unequal wealth distribution. While Gaddafi provided most of the basic needs for the Libyans, real wealth was only available for those loyal to the regime (El-Sseid et al, 2021; Winer, 2019). Gaddafi perpetrated this have-and-have-nots structure through a divide-and-rule system that favored certain tribes and groups. This system ensured the regime's survival, as it cultivated a system of mutual benefit with tribal leaders who - in exchange for their support - were granted economic advantages and were ranked in prominent positions. Over time, however, this arrangement laid the groundwork for significant grievances among the ones excluded from this wealth circle and ultimately contributed to the eruption of the revolt.

Additionally, this inequality was further exacerbated by the skimmed distribution of the oil revenues that similarly contributed to Libya's relative lack of development compared

to other Arab states. Consequently, economic grievances among the civilians unfolded in the sense that they felt that their quality of life should be similar to other Gulf states, but instead, they suffered from unemployment, poor housing, and inferior wages (Macheke & Jeffrey, 2019; Serafimov, 2012; Gargoum, 2022). These socioeconomic disparities not only sparked the initial uprising but also sustained the resistance against Gaddafi during NATO's intervention. This sustained commitment among the rebels remained even in the face of setbacks which ensured that NATO could keep calculating on the rebels for ground combat. Consequently, NATO could mainly rely on air- and naval strategies that were effective in ousting Gaddafi and relatively cheap, without having to complement these efforts with ground forces. This significantly bolstered NATO's intervention concerning their monetary costs and effective strategies. However, these strong economic grievances also led to the preservation of violence and human rights violations that contributed to post-conflict instability (Kuperman, 2013; Macheke & Jeffrey, 2019; Terry, 2015). The rebels refrained from participating in peace talks and were so focused on ousting Gaddafi that they did not consider any diplomatic solution. This strong commitment to oust Gaddafi was driven by economic grievances and ensured the prolongation of the conflict that came with more cost, less effective strategies, and difficulties in creating post-conflict stability.

Moreover, Libya's opportunity for economic wealth due to its oil resources has both negatively and positively influenced the outcome of the intervention (Fukutomi, 2017; Gargoum, 2022). On the one hand, it provides a potential for economic recovery. On the other hand, it resulted in violence, political fragmentation, and struggles for control over oil wealth. These developments complicated the improvement of human rights and hindered the opportunities for achieving stability. These findings are in line with Collier et al. (2008) and Doyle & Sambanis (2000) who argued that conflict and violence are likely to recur when a country suffers from a lack of economic development and possesses natural resources. Especially, since Winer (2019) concluded that the lack of economic foundation resulted in the unrest that eventually led to the Second Civil War

The availability of natural resources also provided enough assets for Gaddafi to finance his war and pay for his army (Gargoum, 2022). Therefore, it is fair to argue that without the availability of natural resources, NATO would have suffered fewer difficulties in achieving its goals since the government would eventually run out of financial resources as Gaddafi also lacked external support. Notably, NATO's efforts to freeze Gaddafi's assets did inhibit his access to some resources, yet the ongoing oil revenue allowed the conflict to

persist longer than it might have otherwise. This extension of the conflict significantly impacted NATO's intervention outcome since it limited the chance for a swift, low-causality intervention that could have bolstered post-conflict stability. Instead, the continuation of the conflict resulted in more damage to the critical infrastructure, which decreased the possibility of conflict resilience.

### **5.1.9 Political Factors**

Gaddafi's regime exemplified a classic authoritarian rule where political power was heavily centralized around himself, effectively stifling political dissent and eliminating potential rivals (Terry, 2015; Winer, 2019). The weak political foundation and centralized control had a dual role in NATO's intervention. On the one hand, it prevented the emergence of credible successors and resulted in a failure to institutionalize, generating in a power vacuum that exacerbated violence and human rights violations after the intervention (El-Sseid et al., 2021; Winer, 2019). On the other hand, this weak institutionalization boosted NATO's effectiveness as it faced a weaker and less organized opponent.

However, it should also be noted that politically, Gaddafi did develop some critical situations such as the national bank that functioned reasonably well despite its corruption (El-Sseid et al., 2021; Winer, 2019). This in combination with his often-generous social policies resulted in the fact that he ensured the loyalty of the people he favored both before and during the conflict (El-Sseid et al., 2021). This guaranteed that he maintained sufficient support to continue his battle and complicated NATO intervention efforts. Nevertheless, it also formed the basis for the grievances of the excluded.

Furthermore, Gaddafi's authoritarian rule provided the root grievances for the start of the revolution and also assured support during the revolution. The ages of corruption and dictatorship formed the basis for the revolution and also ensured the commitment to the revolution once it started (Winer, 2019; Macheke & Jeffrey, 2019). These political grievances were significantly present and ensured a high amount of devotion from the rebels. Similar to the economic grievances, it assured that NATO could count on the ground forces of the rebels which led to relatively effective and cheap strategies while achieving regime change. However, parallel to the economic grievances, this contributed to continued violence and instability afterward.

Finally, the international political recognition of the National Transitional Council (NTC) played a pivotal role during the intervention by legitimizing the rebel effort and

facilitating international cooperation (Serafimov, 2012; Winer, 2019). The recognition ensured that the intervention was not only a military uprising but also consisted of a legitimate representative body that represented regime change. This legitimacy was crucial for NATO since it legitimized the intervention, contributed to international cooperation, and ensured a recognized political entity that could eventually replace the Gaddafi regime. However, despite its initial positive contributions, the NTC faced significant challenges in consolidating authority and transitioning Libya to a stable state as it suffered from internal divisions and a lack of legitimacy among the Libyan population (Kuperman, 2013; Serafimov, 2012). Consequently, it complicated NATO's intervention outcome as they did not succeed in transforming the country into a stable state with a credible government.

#### **5.1.10 Ideological Factors**

The ideological landscape of Libya, marked by historical divisions, tribal affiliations, and the emergence of various political and religious ideologies, influenced the trajectory and aftermath of NATO's intervention. Firstly, the groups adhering to Gaddafi such as the historically prominent families- the Qadhafis- and other local tribal groups enjoyed the benefits of the Qadhafi's system (Winer, 2019). These ideological underpinnings contributed to the resilience of Gaddafi's support base during NATO's intervention. However, the groups that were excluded by Gaddafi's ideology ensured that they provided a significant resistance that NATO could utilize. Mainly because his regime was considered "a corrupt kleptocracy that benefitted Gaddafi, his family, and his minions first" (Winer, 2019, p. 6).

The rebellion against Gaddafi was less about a unified ideological vision for Libya's future and more about a collective desire to overthrow a repressive regime (Serafimov, 2012). This lack of unification led to fragmentation among the rebels when their overarching goal of ousting Gaddafi faded. This fragmentation was significantly shaped by ethnicity and ideology, with different groups battling for different rights based on their ideology and interests (Fukutomi, 2017; Winer, 2019). This lack of ideological unity posed significant challenges for NATO, particularly in terms of advancing human rights conditions and establishing long-term stability (Gargoum, 2022; Serafimov, 2012; Winer, 2019). For instance, it was complex to create a secure environment as former fighters remained loyal to their commander, tribes, or cities rather than adhering to a central government (El-Sseid et al., 2021; Macheke & Jeffrey, 2019). This hindered efforts to create a new credible government that ensured stability since no agreement on how to achieve such a government

could be reached. Moreover, the strong ideological segregation and polarization resulted in the eruption of violence afterward which targeted both Gaddafi loyalists and other ideologies that shared different beliefs. This resulted in the recurrence of violence and also complicated efforts to create a sovereign government.

Furthermore, during his rule, Gaddafi utilized the tribal and ideological competition inside Libya by fostering this rivalry as a means to increase his control over these tribes (El-Sseid et al., 2021). This fostering ensured that they would never unify power against him and pulled attention away from abuses within the regime. However, it seemed that Gaddafi's control over these tribes eventually turned against him as these tribes saw an opportunity to get released from his rule and withdrew support once the revolution started. This defection was not just a symbolic blow to the regime but also a practical loss of manpower, resources, and territorial control. Finally, the Islamic ideology also possessed challenges to achieve some stability afterward since the power vacuum left by Gaddafi resulted in the emergence of violent non-state actors such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Kuperman, 2013; Gartenstein-Ross, 2014). This further complicated the security landscape and undermined NATO's possibility of stability.

### **5.1.11 Regional Factors**

A confluence of factors significantly shaped the regional landscape surrounding NATO's intervention in Libya. First and foremost, the conflict in Libya cannot be fully understood without examining the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring's wave of revolutions within the Arab region set the stage for NATO's intervention in Libya. This widespread movement consisted of a call for political reform and helped NATO to legitimize its intervention internationally. Furthermore, a key factor enhancing the prospects for a successful NATO operation was Gaddafi's damaged relations with other Arab states, leading to substantial support for the intervention from the Arab League despite prevalent anti-Western sentiments in the region (Wilson, 2011; Winer, 2019; Pashakhanlou, 2017). The involvement of Arab states, especially the UAE and Qatar, in leadership roles within the intervention forces highlighted a unique coalition that blended Western and regional efforts against a common adversary. This lack of regional opposition combined with direct regional support enabled NATO to proceed with a significant power advantage and thus boosted their outcome. However, this regional support also brought up challenges as the ideological and geographic interests of supporting states led to a fragmented rebel support system where different factions received backing

based on their alignments. This resulted in different rebel groups not only being dependent on NATO support but also receiving additional aid. Consequently, credibility issues emerged as these factions were less concerned with NATO principles in combat since they were assured a certain level of support by other states. This ultimately complicated the post-conflict stability and caused human rights violations. The diverse support of Arab states for different factions can be explained by geopolitical motives, as they backed groups that aligned with their ideologies (Winer, 2019). For instance, Qatar maintained support for Islamists, while Turkey provided aid to Ottoman-friendly groups. This regional interference helped NATO during the intervention in tackling the Gaddafi regime. However, the continuation of this external support after NATO's intervention inadvertently fueled fragmentation and post-conflict power struggles. This prevented the formation of a stable and unified Libyan government, worsening instability and aiding the rise of violent extremist groups.

What further facilitated NATO efforts was the fact that Russia and China had no concern in protecting the Gaddafi regime (Chivvis, 2012). In contrast to Syria, they had no interest in the maintenance of the Gaddafi regime which allowed the resolution to pass and resulted in a favorable battlefield without other third-party interference. This ensured that they could implement more drastic and effective measures that were less likely to result in significant strategic costs. Furthermore, it resulted in the fact that Gaddafi did not receive any support from another world power and thereby resulted in a power imbalance that facilitated the goal of regime change, effective strategies, and low monetary costs.

Finally, it seems that NATO's approach to the Libyan intervention was heavily influenced by the lessons learned from previous engagements in the Middle East, such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Chivvis, 2012; Mueller; 2015). The previous interventions resulted in prolonged conflicts and significant costs and casualties. Therefore, NATO relied on naval and air power that was military effective and relatively cheap. However, it also resulted in the lack of ground troops and state-building efforts which contributed to a post-conflict power vacuum that generated instability and violence.

## **5.2 Syria**

### **5.2.1 Historical Background**

The Syrian Civil War broke out in the aftermath of the Arab Spring after the government repressed nationwide protests that first emerged in Dera in March 2011. These



demonstrations erupted to initiate political reforms and demanded the release of political prisoners. Bashar Al-Assad, the president of Syria, answered these demonstrations with severe violence. Consequently, the protesters' demands changed from political reforms to regime change and the tensions further intensified. This reached an ultimatum in the City of Homs which eventually led to the killings of more than one hundred protesters. Russia started its limited intervention efforts almost directly after the revolution erupted and supplied the Assad regime with military and economic resources (Charap et al., 2019; Kainikara, 2019). This aid started small but eventually consisted of significant weapons such as helicopters and radars. However, they refrained from direct intervention so far.

In response to the continuation of suppression by the regime, the opposition formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in September. The clashes continued through the end of the year and the success from both parties varied. The opposition managed to defend key areas such as Damascus and Homs while the regime succeeded in limiting the protests' expansion. In November 2012 the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) was formed to create a political umbrella organization of different fragmented opposing groups and this organization was recognized by different countries. Nevertheless, the high levels of violence continued in 2013 and were characterized by multiple offensives of both sizes (Kainikara, 2018).

The developments in Syria quickly got international attention as the EU, the US, and the UN disapproved of the violence used by the regime. However, attempts within the UN Security Council to pass resolutions were blocked by Russia and China (Kainikara, 2018). The conflict also led to the emergence of extremist groups - notably ISIS - which sought to establish an Islamic state in opposition to both the Syrian government and the SNC. The rapid expansion of ISIS led to several US-led intentions to address their influence. However, Russia and Assad blocked all possible sanctions against ISIS that were not in cooperation with the Syrian regime which made concrete interference complicated. Russia started its first airstrike attacks in Syria on 30 September 2015 (Maher & Pieper, 2021). They framed their intervention as a fight against terrorism but in reality, a lot of bombings were also targeting oppositional forces (Charap et al., 2019). Looking at the situation today, it can be stated that Russia's interference in the Syrian Civil War has been a defining element of the conflict, significantly influencing its dynamics and outcomes.

### 5.2.2 Achievement of Political Objectives

Through extensive research on the available literature, three main reasons for Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war have been detected. Firstly, Russia justified this intervention globally by framing it as a fight against terrorism (Charap et al, 2019; Kofman, 2020; Lewis, 2022). Russia assumed that there was a rationale between extremist expansion in Syria and a domestic security threat from terrorism. Therefore, Russian interference was needed to counter such a threat. However, the operational focus of Russian forces - which reportedly targeted opposition groups more than ISIS - sparked debates regarding the authenticity of Russia's counterterrorism claims (Charap et al., 2019). Russia defended these accusations by stating that there is no such thing as moderate opposition and blamed the opposition for having close links with several extremist Islamic groups. Besides Russia's possible mixed motivations, the perceptive threat of terrorism was considered significant within Russian politics as Russia consists of the largest indigenous Muslim population in Europe and has faced several Islamic rebellions in Chechnya (Charap et al., 2019; Lewis, 2022). Furthermore, they experienced several terrorist attacks that have links with the Middle East, while also a credible number of Russian civilians joined Islamic extremist groups. Therefore, this thesis considers Russia's motivation to address terrorism as a valid objective.

Russia's second motivation was grounded in preventing regime collapse. The battlefield outcomes were directed toward regime defeat as ISIS and oppositional forces were gaining power (Charap et al., 2019; Kainikara, 2018). Russia was convinced that without its interference the regime would have collapsed, leading to security complications caused by an increased threat of international terrorism and the potential establishment of a Western-orientated regime (Charap et al, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2020). It should be noted that this objective is related to countering the terrorism threat. Putin feared that a regime collapse in Syria would lead to chaos in the Middle East, potentially escalating Islamic extremism in the former Soviet states. Consequently, regime maintenance was a way of mitigating this terrorism threat. However, this thesis still evaluates these two separately since one could still be achieved without the other.

Finally, according to the literature, one of Russia's main objectives for its intervention can be traced back to its desire to expand and reconfirm its geopolitical influence (Jones, 2020; Freire & Heller, 2016; Lewis, 2022). Russia was still under the assumption that it was a great power in the global order. However, their international status had declined over the last decades and Moscow was convinced that the proceeding of this conflict without Russia's

interference would further decrease their significance in the Middle East and globally. Especially, given that Russia has historically strong relations with Syria, and they were one of the last partners in the Middle East (Charap et al., 2019). Hence, this thesis considered Russia's geopolitical goals as the third political objective of Russia during its intervention.

To evaluate, it can be stated that Russia significantly succeeded in decreasing the power of extremist groups, especially ISIS. Through the conduction of military operations, Russia contributed to the decline of ISIS territories in Syria (Charap et al., 2019; Hirsch, 2021). However, it should be noted that Russia was not the only contributor to ISIS's decline as it was a worldwide effort. For instance, the SDF, the EU, and the US also significantly deployed military efforts in addressing such extremist groups and questions about Russian influence on its results have been asked (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Hirsch, 2021; Jones, 2020; Rezvani, 2020). Furthermore, fully destroying these terrorist organizations is difficult as their roots and grievances are almost impossible to eradicate. Despite these discussions, it is undeniable that Russian involvement played a role in mitigating the terrorist threat in Syria as ISIS and other extremist groups significantly lost their power within Syria (Hirsch, 2021; Kainikara, 2018). Therefore, this thesis concludes that Russia succeeded in decreasing the threat of terrorism.

Secondly, it is evident that with Assad currently still in power, Russia succeeded in preventing regime change. Before Russian interference, Assad only controlled 10% of the country. By 2020, the regime succeeded in taking back control and successfully reclaimed control over the majority of the country—a turnaround that would have been unattainable without Russia's strategic involvement (Jones, 2020). As Hirsch (2021) noted: "Russia's intervention gave him the necessary capabilities and security to ramp up the degradation of insurgent groups and coercion of civilian populations living under rebel control" (p. 22). Even though the civil war is still occurring, Assad is now relatively strongly in control and the opposition is suffering from fragmentation. Russia's military efforts resulted in significant battlefield changes that resulted in regime preservation. This was crucial in changing the outcome of the war and therefore this thesis concluded that Russia succeeded in preventing regime change.

Thirdly, it seems that Russia successfully reinforced its status as a key geopolitical actor and challenged Western dominance (Alagha, 2024; Borshchevskaya, 2022; Kainikara, 2018; Kofman, 2020; Kofman & Rojankasy, 2018). This has positively impacted Russia's status within the domain of international relations and demonstrated its capabilities for future international disputes. Additionally, Russia succeeded in improving its relationship with

multiple regional powers which enhanced its recognition as a global power broker (Kofman & Rojanksky 2018; Rezvani; 2020). The strategic outcomes of this conflict not only proved Russia's significance over regional affairs but also showed that they could handle such disputes without Western involvement. Finally, Russia managed to prevent a Western-oriented state in Syria and also succeeded in the expansion of military bases in the Middle East. Therefore, it can be concluded that Russia was also successful in expanding its geopolitical influence and thus achieved its geopolitical goals.

### **5.2.3 Effective Strategies**

Firstly, it is important to shine some light on Russia's military strategy during the intervention. Russia's strategy relied heavily on air power, naval efforts, and a small number of troops on the ground (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Hirsch, 2021; Jones, 2020). Overall Russian strategy could be described as a Lightfoot strategy that consisted of a mix of Russian airpower, limited ground troops, and the reliance on proxies for combat engagements (Kofman, 2020). This strategy aimed more at punitive measures than winning hearts and minds, intending to increase the societal costs of rebellion through severe violence (Hirsch, 2021; Jones, 2022). However, a side note is that in this case defining the adversary is more complicated since Russia was fighting a two-front battle with both extremism groups and the opposition.

When looking at the requirements provided by Meiser et al. (2021), it should first be observable that Russia employed strategies that exploited the adversary's weaknesses. The deployment and significant reliance on air weaponry was a way in which Russia exploited the weaknesses of the oppositional forces and ISIS as they could not match Russian air power and were heavily reliant on conventional means (Jones, 2020; Kofman 2020). Russia had the technology to further utilize this vulnerability through its advanced surveillance assets and forces on the ground which increased their regional knowledge and allowed for more precise targeting (Hamilton et al., 2020; Göransson, 2023).

Moreover, one of the Syrian opposition's key weaknesses was its fragmentation and lack of unified command (Charap et al., 2019; Tan & Perudin, 2019). Russia capitalized on this by targeting mainly moderate rebel groups, thereby indirectly strengthening extremists. However, these extremist factions were more difficult for Western countries to support and thus complicated the international response to Russia's intervention. Still, it should also be noted that this increased power of extremist groups may have resulted in the prolongation of

the conflict (Charap et al., 2019; Hirsch, 2021). This significantly compromises Russia's effectiveness and reflects the intricate challenge of addressing multifaceted insurgencies.

Secondly, Russia's strategy also encompassed elements of deception and psychological manipulation. For instance, the airstrikes launched in early 2016 severely damaged the opposition's communication lines between Aleppo and the Turkish border which significantly hindered their operational capabilities (Jones, 2020). In addition, Russia managed to change the direction of attacks when rebels in Hama and Latakia threatened to isolate Damascus from the coast. Furthermore, they successfully targeted the oil infrastructure of ISIS and other extremist groups which had a meaningful impact on their revenues (Hamilton et al., 2020). They also succeeded in cutting off the rebel supply routes from Turkey and fragmenting the oppositional forces that complicated their cooperation efforts (Wójtowicz, 2018). All these examples align with Meiser et al.'s (2021) understanding of dislocation and deception. Finally, although controversial from a humanitarian perspective, their hard stance and punishment strategy caused significant psychological destruction by the adversaries. The violent response of both Russia and the regime resulted in the demotivation of civilians to join the rebellion, aligning with Meiser et al.'s (2021) principle of psychological manipulation.

Thirdly, there should be evidence that Russia had control over where and how battles were fought to create a favorable war environment. Russia changed the characteristics of the war with its air and naval force since the rebellion lacked this air and naval capacity. The rebels had severe difficulties in adapting to the changing battlefield environment that included this air and naval force. Furthermore, Russia succeeded in changing the battleground by advising and improving the Syrian forces which led to a significant power increase (Göransson, 2023; Hamilton et al, 2020; Kainikara, 2018). This was even further reinforced by their significant use of PMCs. Finally, their technological support towards Assad resulted in a technological upper hand compared to the opposition and terrorist organizations, changing the battleground in a way that favored the regime. However, a critical note that could be made to the Russian interference is that some scholars argue that they intervened too late as the Syrian forces were already exhausted and degraded (Kofman, 2020). This complicates the principle of Meiser et al. (2021) to execute at the right timing.

Lastly, Russia's military actions in Syria have always been closely linked to its broader policy goals and ensured that each military operation served the purpose of weakening the opposition and extremist organizations while solidifying the Assad regime and Russian influence in the region. Despite a stronger focus on countering the opposition, most

of the employed strategies align with one of the stated political goals. For instance, their airstrikes executed in Aleppo between October 2015 and March 2016 targeted both oppositional forces and IS forces resulting in significant victories for the Assad regime (Hirsch, 2021). This eventually resulted in the “liberation” of Aleppo by Assad at the end of 2016. Other evidence can be found in the Northern Aleppo Offensive which resulted in the recapturing of the towns of Nubul and Al-Zahra. Finally, the deployment of ground forces was highly crucial in achieving their goals as it allowed them to execute critical missions, orchestrate a variety of allied forces, and enhance the capabilities of these forces.

However, their reliance on hard punishment strategies endangered their possibilities to achieve their geopolitical interests as a lot of countries disapproved of this. Their strong punishment resulted in many civilian deaths and severe human rights violations leading to international complications. Nevertheless, it seemed that the actual international consequences of these actions were very limited (Borshchevskaya, 2022). Furthermore, when looking at Russia's objective(s) it seems that they preferred a short-term strategy above a long-term strategy. Their actions were in line with maintaining the regime and eliminating the terrorism threat in the short term. However, without further addressing the root causes of the conflict, the future will prevail for how long these achievements will be present.

Overall, Russia's strategy was considered a success despite some minor issues. Through a combination of air superiority, tactical ground operations, and psychological warfare, Russia managed to alter the conflict's trajectory in its favor. However, questions could be asked to what extent the outcomes are sustainable in the long term. Nevertheless, this thesis considers Russia's military strategy as highly effective.

#### **5.2.4 Acceptable Costs**

Before diving deeper into the question of whether the costs of this operation should be considered acceptable, it is important to note that Russia is not very transparent in providing data regarding the costs of the operation. The Russian government stated that the costs did not exceed the ministry's budget and after approximately half a year of the intervention, Putin stated that thus far the operation cost approximately 464 million dollars (TASS, 2016). Additional estimates suggested daily expenditures ranging from \$4 million initially and escalated to \$8 million as the conflict extended (Freire & Heller, 2016; Shaikh & Rosenbaum 2015).

The monetary costs of the intervention had some significant impacts on the Russian economy, including a notable GDP decline and inflation rise which put pressure on the *ruble* (Freire & Heller, 2016). This caused difficulties for Russia to justify the intervention domestically, but the regime countered this domestic criticism by emphasizing the importance of fighting terrorism and the intervention's international diplomatic benefits. Overall, it seemed that Russia was aware of the monetary costs and considered them acceptable (Charap et al., 2019). Another remark is that Russia also faced several imposed sanctions as a result of its actions in Syria. However, questions are asked to what extent these sanctions have hurt Russia's economy as they already faced a significant number of sanctions after they annexed Crimea in Ukraine.

When looking at the number of used troops, it seemed that it did not exceed the inappropriate level, as only several thousand Russians were deployed on the ground (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Jones 2020). This strategic calculation also resulted in relatively minimal losses with only 73 personnel fatalities reported (Lavrov, 2020). Furthermore, in the first five years of the intervention, Russia lost eight aircraft, eight helicopters, and one airplane (Lavrov, 2020). Moreover, only one known high-casualty incident occurred when hundreds of Russian contractors were killed after a violation of the deconfliction agreement (Borshchevskaya, 2022). However, these victims mainly consisted of Wagner mercenaries who were paid to go to war and questions could be asked whether Russia attached much value to these losses.

Moreover, considering the strategic costs, Russia continued to further damage the relationship with the West with its authoritarian and violent approach. However, questions could be asked to what extent Russia attaches value to this Russia-western relationship. The recent developments in Ukraine and their hard punishment strategies reveal that they are not reluctant to achieve their geopolitical interests at the expense of the Russia-Western relationship. In addition, the strategic costs also included fluctuating diplomatic relations, notably with Turkey following the downing of a Russian jet, though this relationship was swiftly mended given Turkey's significance to Russia (Freire & Heller, 2016). Additionally, the intervention generated a stronger Russian-Syrian relationship, while it also intensified the connection with other anti-Western countries, improving Russia's overall relations in the Middle East. Notably, the strengthening of ties with other regional actors was achieved without incurring substantial strategic costs, despite operating in a landscape with multiple involved actors striving for various interests. Overall, the incurred strategic costs were part of

a broader strategic outlook that prioritized the expansion of Russian influence and the assertion of its power on the global stage.

When looking at the reputational costs, it appears that Russia never paid a significant price for its violations of human rights and civilian casualties. In contrast, it seemed that their reputational status only increased as they succeeded in gaining respect for handling international disputes (Baev, 2019; Borshchevskaya, 2022; Jones 2020). Furthermore, it should be noted that when looking at the collateral damage, it is likely that Russia did not attach much value to factors such as civilian costs or infrastructure destruction. Russia has historically demonstrated a willingness to use violence in responding to rebellions and uprisings, underscoring a pattern of behavior that prioritizes the achievement of goals regardless of their collateral damage (Hirsch, 2021). Consequently, within the context of this analysis, the humanitarian and infrastructural costs resulting from Russia's operations in Syria are not deemed significant factors affecting the overall evaluation of its military intervention.

To conclude, it seems that the costs of the Russian intervention were significant but not unbearable considering that they managed to achieve all their objectives. The monetary costs influenced the Russian economy but still were considered acceptable as it generated enough benefits. Moreover, the strategic and reputational gains from the operation were evaluated to outweigh the expenses. Hence, as Lavrov (2019) concluded “The financial and material price (as well as the price in life) of this experience for Russia was bearable, and the experience gained has been substantial. The benefits of the operation outweighed the cost” (p. 109). Therefore, this thesis concludes that Russia succeeded in conducting the intervention at acceptable costs.

### **5.2.5 Facilitating Long-Term Stability**

The last requirement for a successful military intervention is that the aftermath of the intervention should consist of increased stability of a country. This entails that it should be characterized by a credible governmental body, decreased presence of violence and increased economic conditions that ensure a certain quality of life.

Although Russia's primary aim in supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime was to maintain its ally in power, achieving a truly stable post-intervention environment demands a credible government that should facilitate stability. However, contemporary Syria is ruled by an authoritarian political system that is characterized by political prisoners, favoritism, and a lack of genuine electoral processes, raising serious doubts about the government's credibility



and effectiveness (Hinnebusch, 2020; Jones, 2019; Serwer & van Wijk, 2022). Furthermore, public institutions lack the funding to function properly and are operating outside the government apparatus, leading to tangible dysfunction. This is further complicated by the international sanctions directed at the Assad regime as they are hindering the accumulation of the resources needed for conflict resilience (The Day After, 2022). In addition, Syria remains fragmented, with various areas still outside government control (Hamilton et al., 2020). This lack of government control in these areas illustrates the ongoing challenges in achieving national political unification and legitimacy. Finally, the Assad regime is still in power, but without addressing the institutional problems that fueled the initial uprising it is difficult to estimate the extent to which this government is viable in the long term. Especially since the regime suffers from a lack of legitimacy and functionality. Therefore, it can be concluded that besides Russian success in maintaining the regime, it did not succeed in facilitating political conditions that should have enhanced political stability.

Secondly, it is crucial to examine whether Russian interference resulted in a decreased level of violence. When Russia interfered in 2015 the amount of violence was at its peak. Since then, a significant reduction in violence can be detected, following Russia's assistance to the Syrian government in consolidating power and regaining control over large portions of the country. However, despite Russia's significant involvement in Syria, the fundamental causes of the uprising remain unaddressed, leaving the door open for ongoing violence. Continuous assaults by fragmented oppositional forces persist and the Syrian government remains reliant on oppressive tactics that contribute substantially to the prevailing violence (Hirsch, 2021; Lewis, 2022). Furthermore, the level of security and violence is not yet at the level where a lot of Syrians want to return to their home (Asseburg & Said, 2022; The Day After, 2022). Daily life in Syria is still characterized by a severe level of violence varying from kidnapping to extortion, with reports suggesting higher rates of such incidents in government-controlled territories (The Day After, 2022). Moreover, Russia's military operations, including airstrikes, have often been directed at rebel-held territories, resulting in high civilian casualties and worsening the humanitarian crisis. This approach has contributed to continued resistance and violence, undermining the prospects for state stability. Finally, the presence of ISIS and similar groups continues to pose a threat, maintaining a level of violence and insecurity across the country. (Jones, 2020). Overall, it should be noted that when looking at the level of violence before the intervention, Russia succeeded in a decrease in violence. However, further process is still necessary considering the situation today.

Lastly, this section dives into whether Russia facilitated conditions for post-conflict economic growth. Unfortunately, the post-conflict economic situation in Syria is bleak and characterized by high inflation, reliance on foreign aid, and other characteristics of a severe economic crisis (Asseburg & Said, 2022; Serwer & van Wijk, 2022; The Day After, 2022). Many Syrians today still live in poverty without the possibility of having access to basic services, partially the result of the government's inequality distribution of resources and unfair taxes (Asseburg & Said, 2022; Hirsch, 2021; Kainikara, 2018; Lewis, 2022; The Day After, 2022). Additionally, the infrastructure critical for economic development has suffered extensive damage due to Russian airstrikes as they prioritized short-term military objectives over long-term stability. There have been instances of structural aid from Russia to Syria, though these efforts are often interpreted as attempts to secure loyalty rather than genuine contributions toward meaningful reconstruction (Lewis, 2022). Furthermore, the displaced civilians altered the demographic composition of the country and complicated the possibility of post-conflict economic resilience (The Day After, 2022). While Russian intervention has economically stabilized certain areas under Assad's control, the overall economic outlook remains underdeveloped. Therefore, there is no doubt that enormous challenges still lie ahead for this country's future economic prospects: these include rebuilding infrastructure, relighting productive sectors, and enhancing the quality of life for the citizens. Although the current economic situation cannot be fully subscribed to Russian intervention, the conclusion here is that Russia did not succeed in providing some economic steppingstones that could help Syria achieve some long-term stability.

Overall, it seems that Russia - besides a notable decrease in the level of violence - did not succeed in providing the required conditions for creating stability. Syria still consists of weak economic and political structures that could eventually form the foundation for a new civil war. However, only time will tell how the situation evolves and whether Russia's inability to tackle these underlying issues will prove to be a critical oversight.

### **5.2.6 Overall Assessment**

In conclusion, it seemed that Russia succeeded in achieving its primary objectives. Their efforts significantly contributed to the regime's maintenance and reducing the terrorism threat. Furthermore, by taking an active role in the Syrian conflict, Russia reconfirmed its status as a key power broker in the Middle East and showcased its capability to influence global geopolitics. In addition, based on the framework provided by Meiser et al. (2021) it

can be argued that Russia's strategies mostly align with what is considered an effective strategy as they succeeded in exploiting the adversary's weaknesses and dictated the battlefield environment. Furthermore, Russia's costs were significant in monetary terms, but these were considered acceptable. Additionally, they did not experience any significant strategic or reputational costs post-intervention. However, the intervention's impact on Syria's long-term stability is less clear and reveals some shortcomings. The regime's continued authoritarian rule, the persistent violence, and the dire economic conditions suggest that significant challenges regarding stability remain. Furthermore, the intervention did not address the underlying grievances that fueled the civil war, leaving open the possibility of future conflict. Consequently, while this analysis deems Russia's intervention as primarily successful, its impact on Syria's long-term peace and stability remains uncertain.

### **5.2.7 Contextual Factors**

### **5.2.8 Socioeconomic Factors**

The Syrian conflict was deeply rooted in socioeconomic factors as the existing economic grievances formed the basis for the revolution to erupt and also for the prolongation of the conflict (Kainikara, 2018; The Day After, 2022). These grievances were propelled by the civilians' frustrations concerning their deteriorating economic conditions compared to the opportunities and the government favoritism policies that enhanced inequality. The economic situation not only ignited the opposition with sufficient support in both manpower and resources to form a meaningful opposition but also fueled its strong dedication that prolonged the conflict. The resilience and determination of these groups to their cause made it harder for Russia to employ strategies that rely on psychological manipulation or discouragement to weaken the enemy's resolve. Consequently, such deeply ingrained devotion often necessitates more resource-intensive measures. Additionally, the dire economic state of Syria also affected the power of the regime forces as they were under-equipped and limited Assad's capacity to sustain military operations (Kainikara, 2018; Tan & Perudin, 2019; The Day After, 2022). This comprised Assad and Russia's opportunities to utilize the momentums when the rebels were most vulnerable. The applied economic sanctions of the West further complicated the regime's efforts to conduct decisive military campaigns, as they lacked the financial capability to do so (Tan & Perudin, 2019). Russia aimed to mitigate this issue by improving these forces through training and advising. However, with more economic resources, it could be expected that it would have been easier to achieve success.

The civil war also resulted in massive economic fragmentation in Syria and made a well-functioning economy impossible (Asseburg & Said, 2020; Hinnebusch, 2020). This led to the fact that civilians were depending on the salaries of armed groups dominated by local warlords, which prolonged the conflict and increased the level of violence. Additionally, it still contributes to the violence occurring today, impacting the evaluation of Russia's intervention regarding stability.

Furthermore, the terrible state of the Syrian economy made them highly dependent on Russia's assets (Pritchett, 2021; Wojtowicz et al., 2018). This boosted Russia's performance as they could conduct their intervention with Syrian approval which justified their intervention globally and limited their strategic and reputational costs. Furthermore, the openness and reliance of the regime towards Russian support resulted in a coordinated collaboration that enhanced Russia's performance. An example of these collaboration efforts is when the Russian forces provided training to the Syrian military that significantly increased their battlefield performance (Hamilton et al., 2020; Göransson, 2023). Moreover, Russia's permission to use Syrian airspace offered a cost-effective and impactful air strategy that was effective against an enemy that was reliant on conventional means. Additionally, Russia also utilized Assad's dependency as an opportunity for Russia to achieve its geopolitical goals (Charap et al., 2019).

Finally, control over natural resources, particularly oil fields, emerged as a shaping factor in the conflict. Before the intervention, different parties were in control over the oil fields and Russia was aware that a key factor for Assad to remain in power was to regain control over these areas. Especially, since whoever was in charge of the oil fields assured that they were able to make enormous profits out of them and therefore had sufficient means to finance the war (Kainikara, 2018). Consequently, Russia implemented strategies focused on dislodging the oppositional or extremist forces from oil-rich territories. Russia succeeded in this which resulted in the weakening of the financial capacity of their adversaries to sustain military operations, shifting the balance of power in favor of the Assad regime and bolstering Russia's effectiveness.

### **5.2.9 Political Factors**

Assad's rule has been historically characterized by a significant amount of oppression and violence that has influenced the outcome of the Russian intervention. Initially, the years of corruption formed the foundation for the revolution. Additionally, the continuation of the

repression during the revolution resulted in a change in demand from the opposition for regime change rather than political reforms (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Tan & Perudin, 2019). This shift complicated Russian efforts to conduct a swift intervention or reach a diplomatic settlement as the regime considered stepping down as a suicide while the opposition considered regime removal as the only viable option (Tan & Perudin, 2019). This significantly contributed to the intensity and prolongation of the conflict. Furthermore, it impeded the possibility of creating a stable state afterward as the regime and the opposition would always prefer fighting even when they were close to defeat.

Moreover, political alignment between Russia and the Assad regime played a significant role in the conflict (Hirsch, 2021). The synchronization of strategies and ideas played a crucial role in facilitating strategic, operational, and tactical cooperation which ultimately resulted in positive short-term outcomes for the Assad regime. For instance, it allowed the Russian ground forces to effectively operate among the Syrian forces resulting in an increased efficiency that benefited the achievement of political goals at low costs with effective strategies. This was also the case for the air and naval deployments. Furthermore, the shared belief in quelling dissent through force and violence played a pivotal role in the execution of Russia's intervention strategy (Hirsch, 2021; Kainikara, 2018; Lewis, 2022). This allowed them to demoralize the oppositional forces significantly as it created psychological destruction among the opposition. This bolstered Russian effectiveness in the short term as they deterred people from joining the rebel or extremist cause. Furthermore, the applied force without distinction also made the operation less costly as less intelligence was needed to conduct airstrikes. However, it also compromised their ability to achieve some long-term stability as only the violence of the opposition was addressed and the underlying grievances were neglected and critical infrastructure for conflict resilience was destroyed (Hirsch, 2021; Lewis, 2022). Furthermore, the reliance on violence hindered diplomatic efforts, extending the conflict's duration by foreclosing paths to a negotiated settlement (Tan & Perudin, 2019).

A remarkable feature is that the Assad regime maintained its level of political cohesion during the intervention which contributed to Russian success. The governmental structure was marked by a strong executive power that provided a relatively stable framework for the Russians to support (Mirza, 2021). This boosted Russia's performance as they had a unified body to support which increased their strategies and lowered their costs. Especially, since the opposition suffered from largely splintered fractions with semi-different goals and objectives (Jones, 2019; Tan & Peruvian, 2019). This complicated opposition efforts to

effectively form a unified front against Assad and made Russian intervention tactics easier to deploy. Nevertheless, this oppositional fragmentation also resulted in difficulties in reaching a political agreement between the regime and the opposition due to the divergent interests among the rebels.

Finally, the lack of a strong political alternative to Assad also bolstered Russia's effectiveness (Tan & Peruvian, 2019). Firstly, it disrupted the opposition's opportunities to receive (Western) support since they did not have a legitimate body but consisted of a loosely allied faction. Secondly, it led to the Western reluctance to remove Assad as it was unsure who his successor might be. As a result, Russia found its intervention strategies to be more effective as the lack of a strong, organized political opposition meant that there were fewer obstacles in reinforcing Assad's position.

#### **5.2.10 Ideological Factors**

The ideological factors significantly influenced the Syrian conflict. Notably, Russia remained free from adopting any ideology during the intervention, a strategic choice essential for operating in a complex array of diverging interests and ideologies (Freire & Heller, 2016; Kainikara, 2018). This pushed them towards a flexible strategy that allowed them to operate in the area without alienating regional partners, significantly contributing to the achievement of their geopolitical ambitions. Furthermore, this perceived neutrality enhances Russia to position itself as a key player in the international negotiations that further facilitated the achievement of its geopolitical objectives.

Furthermore, ideological affinities in and around Syria determined the alignment of various domestic and international actors. Syria's political sectarian situation, characterized by a ruling Shia minority regime governing a Sunni majority, set the stage for intense sectarian conflict (Hirsch, 2021; Kainikara, 2018; Rezvani, 2020; Tan & Perudin, 2019). Assad's government received backing from Shia-dominated nations and groups, including Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah from Lebanon's Shia community. Conversely, Sunni-majority countries in the region, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Qatar were supporting the opposition. This Sunni-Shiite rivalry was already apparent in the Arab Spring and these clashes flowed down to the Syria conflict. This development transformed the civil conflict into a global/regional proxy war influenced by the Sunni-Shia rivalry (Hinnebusch, 2020; Rezvani 2020). The use of proxies by other nations (especially Iran and Saudi Arabia) ensured that the opposition and extremist groups could continue their battle as they could rely

on foreign support. The external support for opposition forces complicated Russian efforts as it strengthened both parties, thereby hindering cost-effective strategies and complicating post-war stability. Moreover, this ideological rivalry resulted in further polarization among the Syrian population upsetting the possibilities for post-conflict stability.

Moreover, the Sunni back rebellion suffered from significant ideological differences that compromised their ability to form a united front (Tan & Perudin, 2019; Jones, 2019). This was mainly the result of the contrasting views against the Muslim brotherhood by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This caused a lack of coordination and centralization that Russia was eager to utilize which resulted in a performance boost for the Russians to conduct a successful intervention. However, this fragmentation also started to encourage extremism as they felt that the more radical, the more support they would receive from the sponsors (Baylouny & Mullins, 2017). This increased extremism resulted in an increased level of violence and harmed possibilities for conflict resilience.

Finally, the Islamic extremist ideology played an important role in the conflict in multiple ways. Firstly, the threat posed by extremist groups like ISIS was a key factor motivating Russia's involvement and provided a globally recognized justification for its military actions (Charap et al., 2019; Kainikara, 2018). This allowed Russia to operate with limited international repercussions and thus reduced the strategic and reputational costs. In addition, it also resulted in the fact that the West was less offensive against Assad as they acknowledged the threat these groups posed as greater than that of the regime itself. However, it also complicated things for Russia as they needed to conduct a three-sided battle. This damaged their effectiveness as often the weakening of one side led to the strengthening of the other. Finally, the fight against such groups not only escalated Russia's military expenditures but also posed challenges to achieving a stable post-conflict environment. The presence and actions of these groups intensified violence, deepened societal fractures, and obstructed efforts aimed at peace and stability.

### **5.2.11 Regional Factors**

Similar to Libya, the regional dynamics after the Arab Spring played a crucial role in the outcome of the Russian intervention. The Arab Spring not only formed the basis for the revolution but also resulted in an international discussion on how to handle the discrepancy between sovereignty and R2P (Ahmed & Raman, 2019; Freire & Heller, 2016; Tan & Peruvian, 2019). Furthermore, the chaotic aftermath of Libya reinforced Russia's caution

against removing the Assad regime, fearing Syria might suffer a similar fate. Therefore, Russia used its veto power to block any likewise action in Syria. Moreover, the emergence of a failed state in Libya not only motivated Russia's involvement but also contributed to Western hesitancy. Their hesitation emerged as they were afraid that by toppling the Assad regime, Syria would also become a failed state. This resulted in the fact that the Western states refrained from substantial involvement in toppling the Assad regime thereby allowing Russia to step in and intervene with less concern for intervention by other international actors. This reduced the potential for significant strategic costs for Russia and ensured they faced a weaker adversary.

Furthermore, the Syrian conflict was deeply influenced by regional and geopolitical interests, each dependent on sectarian, economic, or domestic security considerations. Additionally, Syria's strategic location and its role in potential gas pipeline routes to Europe made it an interesting factor for proxies to engage (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Wojtowicz, 2018; Maher & Peiper, 2020). This substantial involvement of regional powers was crucial in Russia's success as they successfully integrated military operations with several other regional actors (Baev, 2019; Jones, 2020; Hinnebusch, 2020). For instance, the fruitful relationship between Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah emerged from these regional dynamics and was partially the consequence of the Middle East rivalry between Sunni and Shiite factions that was discussed earlier. Iran's official statement claimed that their involvement was limited to providing advice on countering terrorist groups. However, Iran's role was also pivotal in ensuring the maintenance of the Assad regime, which they considered as crucial to their regional interests. The Russian-Iran cooperation positively impacted the outcome of the Russian intervention as shown by their collaboration during the siege and recapturing of Aleppo (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, Iran provided significant support to the regime forces that were considered vital in regime maintenance and supplied Russia with the necessary regional knowledge (Tan & Perudin, 2019). Moreover, Russia's collaboration with Hezbollah further solidified the regime's position as they also provided crucial military support to the regime. Hezbollah's involvement was intended to secure a strategic position against Israel and safeguard its supply lines (Kainikara, 2018). Overall, Iran and Hezbollah have been integral to Syria's war dynamics and Russia's intervention. By providing ground support, strategic planning, and facilitating political alliances, they have helped consolidate Assad's power and allowed Russia to achieve its objectives in the region more effectively. This alliance has profoundly influenced regional power dynamics and underlines the significant role that collaboration with regional powers can play in conducting a successful intervention.



Moreover, Russia also managed to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Sudan, and Israel (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Charap et al., 2019). This expansion of diplomatic ties - remarkable for bridging significant geopolitical divides - enhanced Russia's performance. For instance, it allowed them to use the airspace of countries such as Iraq and Iran which significantly boosted their strategy efficiency.

Furthermore, the way Russia executed its strategies was also shaped by regional actors as they needed to reconcile them with the local allies (Borshchevskaya, 2022; Charap et al., 2019). This forced them into the adoption of the lean and flexible strategy that eventually seemed to be affordable both in direct and indirect costs, while also being militarily effective. In addition, these regional actors played a significant role in supporting Russia's objectives in Syria by conducting on-the-ground combat operations. This allowed Russia to minimize its deployment and associated costs.

However, the regional dynamics also complicated Russian efforts as Iran's support for the regime resulted in counter-support for the rebels from Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Karim & Islam, 2016; The Last Day, 2022). This affected Russian chances of a quick and low-cost intervention as the rebels enjoyed support from other states resulting in the exacerbation of the conflict. In addition, the bolstering of opposition forces by external actors created a prolonged struggle, embedding the Syrian conflict within a broader network of regional power plays and competing interests, thereby complicating the pathway to a stable, post-conflict Syria.

## **6. Discussion**

For the analysis, a broad framework was developed and tested to include all the elements of a successful military intervention that are deemed necessary. Consequently, this comprehensive scope allowed this thesis to specifically examine what circumstantial factors contributed to the success or failure of certain aspects of the intervention. Firstly, this discussion section will compare both the assessments of Syria and Libya and the applicability of the conceptual framework, before it dives deeper into the circumstantial factors.

### **6.1 Framework**

The evaluation of military interventions in Libya and Syria within this thesis confirms the complexity of evaluating such actions as merely successful or unsuccessful. For instance, this thesis concluded that the Libya intervention was overall unsuccessful. However, that does not

imply that the whole intervention was a failure. For example, the reliance on air power and the arms embargo were effective strategies to establish a level of military effectiveness that utilized Gaddafi's reliance on conventional means. Furthermore, it ensured that the intervention could be conducted at a relatively low monetary cost. However, this is also where the problems of this intervention arise as the reliance on air power compromised NATO's abilities to provide some foundations for creating state stability and improving human rights conditions. Additionally, it resulted in strategies that allied more with regime removal than state-building, facilitating the subsequent instability and power vacuum. Overall, it seems that NATO wanted to execute a limited intervention, but its objectives were far too complex to achieve with such means since state-building is an effort that requires strong devotion and costs, not limited interference. The failure of NATO to address this also resulted in a significant amount of strategic and reputational costs that damaged their legitimacy for handling future interventions.

Conversely, Russia's intervention in Syria is assessed as relatively successful within the parameters of this research. They succeeded in achieving their primary objectives: (1) maintaining the Assad regime, (2) mitigating the terrorist threat, and (3) enhancement of their status in the global order. Furthermore, similar to NATO, Russia's reliance on air force power was highly effective in addressing the Rebels and Jihadists' conventional means. This aligns with Petersson's (2023a) analysis which suggests that air forces can be particularly effective against adversary's dependent on conventional warfare tactics. Nevertheless, similar to NATO's experience, Russia's intervention also lacked post-conflict stability that could evolve in severe consequences in the long term as the existing grievances remained unaddressed. However, time is the only factor that could eventually tell the severity of this issue. The shortcoming of both interventions to facilitate stability implies a critical trade-off in military interventions: the decision between a cost-effective, limited engagement strategy and a more substantial, resource-intensive effort in order to facilitate sustainable peace and state-building.

Furthermore, in contrast to Libya, Russia was not solely focused on the air force but also deployed ground forces. Although they were limited in size, they significantly boosted Russia's performance. This development underscores the critical role that ground forces can play in complementing air and naval power, offering a more nuanced and effective military strategy. Furthermore, by providing training and strategic advice, Russia enhanced the combat effectiveness of the Syrian forces. This promoted the continuation of Russia's flexible strategy without necessitating a large-scale deployment of its troops, resulting in relatively

low monetary costs compared to past interventions. Additionally, even though Russia's hard punishment strategies resulted in difficulties in achieving stability, they created psychological destruction by their enemies that positively influenced their performance.

Moreover, Russia's intervention in Syria presented an interesting case where Western predictions about Russia's non-involvement - based on potential strategic and reputational costs - were proven incorrect. Post-intervention it seems that Russia did not experience any significant strategic and reputational costs. The pre-existing strain in relations with Western nations - primarily due to the annexation of Crimea - meant that further deterioration from intervening in Syria brought no substantial additional consequences, given that sanctions and diplomatic repercussions were already in place. Moreover, the potential costs of further straining these relationships were evaluated and deemed acceptable by Russia, indicating a calculated approach to balancing its geopolitical ambitions against the backdrop of existing tensions with the West. Russia also managed to improve its relationships with other Middle Eastern nations without having to pay a significant price for their excessive violence. Therefore, the only serious Russian shortcoming in this intervention comes from the instability afterward that is caused by the existing violence, lack of economic development, and questions about the legitimacy of the Assad government.

**Table 2: Comparative Overview of Evaluation Results**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Libya (NATO)</b>	<b>Syria (Russia)</b>
<b>Achievement of Political Objectives</b>	Mixed success: Effective in removing Gaddafi but failed in improving the human rights conditions.	Successful: Achieved primary objectives including reducing terrorism threat, maintaining the Assad regime, and enhancing global status.
<b>Effective Strategies</b>	Mixed success: Tactically efficient, but lack of alignment between objectives and strategies.	Successful: High level of strategic efficiency by utilizing air power combined with ground forces; clear alignment between policy objectives and strategies
<b>Acceptable Costs</b>	Unsuccessful: High strategic and reputational costs outweigh the low casualties and low monetary costs.	Successful: Monetary costs were significant but considered acceptable; no significant strategic or

		reputational costs
<b>Facilitating Long-Term Stability</b>	Unsuccessful: No signs of conditions for long-term stability due to the lack of a credible government, ongoing violence, and economic crisis.	Unsuccessful: The prospects for long-term stability are minimal due to the absence of a credible government, the continued - albeit reduced - level of violence, and an ongoing economic crisis.
<b>Final Assessment</b>	Largely unsuccessful	Largely successful

This conceptual framework aimed to provide a comprehensive conceptualization that allowed for an encompassing evaluation of military interventions that moves beyond a binary evaluation of success or failure. The academic discourse around such interventions is fraught with disagreements, primarily due to differing views on what military success entails. By introducing four key pillars, this framework proposes a more holistic approach to evaluating interventions. It acknowledges that employing an intervention often consists of trade-offs between choices among the established criteria of success. For instance, the reliance on air capabilities resulted in military success but showed the limitation of creating state stability afterward. Nevertheless, the developed framework never aimed to simplify this complexity into a reductive assessment but wanted to offer a comprehensive conceptualization that includes a broad spectrum of intervention outcomes. This was also necessary to investigate how certain influencing factors have dictated the outcome of specific aspects of the interventions.

The evaluations showed the ability of the established framework to assess interventions from a multilateral perspective and thus demonstrated the framework's capacity to capture the complexity of military engagements. This thesis acknowledges that the framework still leaves space for improvement but argues that its foundation could serve as a steppingstone for developing a universally accepted framework. A remarkable characteristic of this framework is the limited overlaps between the four different pillars. Although some overlap is not entirely preventable, this framework succeeded in its limitation. For instance, the framework distinctly evaluates costs in its section, ensuring that financial considerations do not influence the strategic assessment.

Finally, the assessment revealed two primary findings that were particularly notable. Firstly, the reliance on air capabilities underscores a strategic dilemma faced by intervening

forces: the balancing act between achieving immediate military objectives and laying the groundwork for long-term stability. The interventions in Libya and Syria showed this relationship, where the tactical efficacy of air power did not translate into stability. This questions the long-term viability of air-centric military strategies in achieving comprehensive intervention success. Secondly, the evaluation of these interventions also highlighted the importance of considering the post-intervention landscape as the lack of a cohesive plan for conflict resilience is likely to result in vacuums of power, violence, and instability and, thus, increases the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

## **6.2 Contextual Factors**

When diving deeper into the contextual factors that contributed to the outcome of these interventions, some interesting things stood out. Socioeconomic conditions emerged as a pivotal element in both conflicts, acting as a catalyst for their inception and contributing to their prolongation. It seems that a country that suffers from a dire economic state is vulnerable to dependence on armed groups for sustenance. In addition, in both interventions the existing economic grievances resulted in a greater level of adversary between both sides, complicating diplomatic intervention efforts. No differences here were detected regarding whether the interventions were supportive of the government or the rebellion. Moreover, the poor economic state of both countries resulted in the fact that before the intervention the battling sides mostly relied on conventional means. This reliance on traditional combat techniques meant that the hybrid warfare tactics employed by both NATO and Russia were particularly effective.

Furthermore, the role of natural resources in both Libya and Syria also contributed to the complexity of the conflicts. In Libya, it ensured that Gaddafi could keep financing the war, while in Syria it allowed ISIS to gain a significant level of power. Paradoxically, the potential of these resources to lay the groundwork for economic stability became a curse, igniting power struggles for resource control that further complicated intervention efforts and hindered post-conflict recovery. This confirms the general literature which argues that countries that consist of natural resources are more vulnerable to conflicts.

Moreover, the relationship dynamics between interveners and local actors also played a significant role in shaping intervention outcomes. For instance, Assad's dependency on Russia bolstered its influence in international discussion while it also fostered a level of collaboration that optimized intervention strategies and reduced operational costs. In contrast,

the situation in Libya presents a scenario of reduced dependency on the interveners' support since also other sponsors were present. This prevented coordinated collaboration and resulted in the self-acting of proxies that compromised the NATO intervention outcome due to the human rights violations and inflicted violence. The situation with the rebels in Syria mirrored the dynamics in Libya since they demonstrated comparable behavior. However, in Russia's case, this was positive as it resulted in less support from Western states for the opposition and they could utilize this behavior to their advantage.

Secondly, political dynamics played a critical role in shaping the conflicts in both Libya and Syria. These political dynamics acted both as a driver for unrest and a barrier to peaceful resolution. The political clashes resulted in a level of hatred between both sides that compromised any possibility of achieving a peaceful settlement and undermined the possibilities for post-conflict stability. Additionally, in both cases, years of systematic mismanagement failed to establish a solid political foundation, significantly complicating efforts to achieve post-conflict stability. Furthermore, the studied interventions underscored that it is crucial to have a recognized political body that could serve as a unified front for support. Besides Assad's difficulties in receiving international legitimacy, he continued to form a somehow credible unified body capable of engaging in dialogue and receiving support. Initially, NATO found a similar figure in the NTC and this was also successful in the beginning. However, when Gaddafi was ousted, the NTC splintered into different political factions, introducing obstacles to post-war stabilization due to a lack of broad Libyan support and internal divisions. Additionally, authoritarianism in both regimes left a void in potential successors, complicating transitions further. This implies that if an intervening entity wants to execute an intervention with the objective of regime change, it should consider the presence of a replacement body to avoid post-conflict instability.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals the pivotal role of political alignment in intervention strategies. This was shown by the Russian-Assad synchronization that contributed to the effectiveness and cost-efficiency. In contrast, Libya presented difficulties for NATO once this alignment was not present. This thesis further notes the cruciality of political alignment within a fighting side. The desire for change among the rebellion factions in both countries was clear, yet disagreements over the methods to achieve this change led to severe fragmentation. This resulted in complexities for NATO to execute a successful intervention as it had an unreliable partner that hindered its ability to achieve a cohesive and successful intervention. However, this internal division among the rebels in Syria provided Russia with

the opportunity to successfully exploit these discords to its advantage and significantly boost its performance.

Thirdly, ideological dynamics played a significant role in both interventions. For instance, diverse ideological beliefs among oppositions resulted in many complexities and difficulties in forming a united front. In Libya, this problem was suppressed by the desire to oust Gaddafi. However, once Gaddafi was gone, the opposition suffered from a strong level of disunity that led to the continuation of violence, instability, and the absence of a credible government. This fragmentation deeply impacted the success of NATO's intervention and illustrates the complexities of supporting a divided opposition. However, in Syria, the fragmented opposition inadvertently strengthened Russia's position. Russia's government-supportive interference could exploit these differences while this fragmentation also resulted in a lack of Western support. This implies that before a party decides on an intervention - whether it's government-supportive or not - they should not only consider the disparities between the conflicting sides but also within the entity they choose to support. A fragmented rebellion-supportive intervention could generate significant difficulties, especially when you have state-building or human rights objectives such as NATO.

Moreover, the ideological motivations driving NATO's intervention efforts introduced additional constraints. This resulted in the fact that they needed to more carefully plan their attacks so that they aligned with their principles, thereby limiting the range of available tactical options. Russia, on the other hand, without the burden of ideological conformity, was able to explore a broader spectrum of tactical maneuvers and form alliances that aligned with its wider geopolitical objectives, enhancing its strategic position in the conflict.

Furthermore, in Syria, sectarianism significantly escalated the conflict, transforming it into an international proxy war as various global and regional powers backed different factions based on sectarian lines. This intensified the conflict and complicated Russia's ability to implement low-cost and effective strategies. Additionally, it posed challenges in achieving post-war stability and increased the likelihood of higher strategic and reputational costs. However, it also resulted in a fruitful partnership with Iran and Hezbollah and an opportunity for Russia to increase its relevance within the international order. This is remarkable as it was expected that Russia would have suffered from higher strategic and reputational costs when more actors got involved. Russia, however, succeeded in turning this into its advantage and used this international involvement to gain geopolitical recognition. Nevertheless, it seemed that sectarianism played a less significant role in Libya as it was more motivated by political, economic, and regional dynamics. Still, like Syria, the ethical differences in Libya

complicated post-stability efforts and formed the roots of the conflict due to Gaddafi's favored policy.

Finally, the role of jihadism - especially in Syria - cannot be underplayed. Jihadism in Syria enabled Russia to portray its intervention as a counterterrorism effort, garnering greater backing for its cause, minimizing indirect costs, and bolstering Assad's legitimacy. However, the emergence of jihadist groups as an adversary complicated the conflict landscape, necessitating a strategic reallocation of resources between two adversaries and complicating post-conflict recovery efforts. Furthermore, also in Libya, although less significant, jihadism played a role as it resulted in complexities in creating post-conflict stability.

Finally, regional factors played a significant role in both conflicts. In Libya, Gaddafi's regional isolation from other Arab states allowed NATO to intervene and garnered regional support that enhanced the reduction of costs and implementation of effective strategies. This is in line with Dobbins et al. (2005) and Kavanagh et al. (2019) who argue that military intervention should be approved by regional allies to increase its chances of success. However, this regional support also contributed to increased rebel fragmentation and credibility issues, complicating NATO's efforts. Similar developments could be detected in Syria where the opposition factions were also in the battle for aid that resulted in more fragmentation, violence, and holding back of Western involvement. This bolstered Russia's intervention as they could frame the rebels as extremists and exploit their disunity.

Furthermore, the NATO-led intervention in Libya benefited from the absence of opposition from other world powers, contributing to cost efficiency and increased battlefield performance. However, this does not mean that other actors were not involved in Libya as regional support still hindered the achievement of post-war stability by maintaining support to certain clients based on their ideology. Still, their role was less prevalent than in Syria which was marked by the participation of numerous international actors. This participation of international actors generated diplomatic complexity and the prolongation of the conflict. The involvement of international actors in Syria can be explained by past intervention in Libya resulting in countries such as Russia being afraid of Syria becoming another failed state. These past interventions in the region also resulted in the new trend of limited intervention. While this approach may offer strategic efficiency, it also complicates the achievement of stability and conflict resilience.

Overall, the examination of the circumstantial factors underscores this thesis' argument that military interventions are influenced by multiple factors that are intricately linked. For instance, in Syria, one can see how the ideological factors not only fueled the initial stages of



the conflict but also simultaneously influenced the regional geopolitical landscape. This development emphasizes the role that ideological factors play in shaping the internal characteristics of the conflict but also its external involvements. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the situation in Libya, where political and economic shortcomings established the foundation for conflict, which was further intensified by rivalries over valuable resources. These internal dynamics were not isolated events but were significantly influenced by each other. Therefore, these findings confirm the significance of adopting an all-encompassing research methodology for studying military interventions. Such an approach is crucial for understanding the multifaceted nature of these interventions and their wide-ranging impacts.

## **7. Conclusion**

### **7.1 Review of the Study and Key Findings**

In conclusion, this thesis was interested in developing a broad qualitative framework that evaluates all the necessary characteristics of a successful military intervention as it argues that the current academic landscape often presents a limited perspective on this matter as it frequently assesses the success of an intervention through a single criterion. Hence, this framework originated from the urge to move beyond the binary distinction between failure and success and instead takes a broader stance on the evaluation of military conflicts. Furthermore - through this expanded framework - this thesis sought to highlight the influence of circumstantial factors on specific outcomes of interventions rather than merely correlating these factors with overall success or failure. By promoting this expanded perspective, this thesis strived to deepen and refine our understanding of what truly contributes to success within the realm of military interventions.

The first phase of this thesis entailed the application of this framework to the military intervention from NATO in Libya and Russia in Syria. Based on the developed framework, this thesis concluded that the intervention in Libya was not a success. Despite the relatively low costs and effective strategies, the emergence of a failed state that suffers from violence and instability significantly impacts the overall evaluation negatively. However, the Russian intervention in Syria has been largely labeled as a success as it managed to meet all its objectives through effective strategies and at low costs. The only significant flaw within this evaluation of the Russian intervention was the afterward instability which highlights the complexities involved in conducting an entirely successful intervention.

The assessments were conducted to test the established framework for evaluating international military interventions. This evaluation demonstrated the framework's potential to evaluate interventions. While acknowledging that there is space for refinement, the foundation of this framework offers a solid basis for the development of a widely recognized assessment. The framework showed its ability to cover diverse aspects essential for assessing intervention success comprehensively, with minimal overlap among its components. Consequently, this thesis concludes that this framework could serve as a theoretical springboard for establishing a universally accepted framework.

Secondly -through its broad assessment - this thesis aimed to provide more insights into what factors contributed to the success or failure characteristics of each intervention. While existing studies have explored these factors, they often adopt a narrow focus and isolate specific factors. However, this thesis argues that the factors could not be investigated separately since they are often interconnected and impacted by external circumstances. Hence, it aimed to understand how various factors collectively influenced specific aspects of interventions rather than attempting to directly link individual factors to the success or failure of the intervention.

The analysis confirmed the need for an expanded research approach as both cases showed the comprehensive implications that result from military interventions. For instance, it showed how the socioeconomic state of a country can both exacerbate conflicts and complicate intervention efforts, presenting a paradox where interventions may both uphold and challenge existing structures economically. Furthermore, the analysis of political structures, alignments, and ideologies revealed how political or ideological fragmentation impacts post-conflict stability and strategic effectiveness. This bonding similarity does not necessarily have to be something as strong as in Libya, just the overall desire to oust Gaddafi was enough to form a consolidated front for the rebels. However, the problems arose when these overarching goals disappeared. This should be taken into consideration for all future interventions. Nevertheless, while fragmentation complicates intervention efforts, it can also provide strategic opportunities for interveners to exploit to their advantage. Moreover, examining regional factors and international involvement showed how the complex geopolitical landscape influenced military interventions. For instance, it revealed how regional isolation, sectarianism, and the strategic ambitions of external powers played critical roles in shaping both the conduct and the consequences of interventions, underscoring the interplay of local dynamics in determining their success or failure.

The findings underscored the interconnectedness of these factors and their collective impact on the trajectory of these interventions. By doing so, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, strategists, and scholars seeking to navigate through the intricate landscape of international interventions and underscores the necessity of considering the broader environment in which these interventions occur. However, it is important to note that these findings should not be viewed as a general theory but rather as a foundation for further research.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

Based on these findings, this thesis suggests several recommendations for future exploration. Firstly, despite a good foundation for evaluating a military intervention, the conceptual framework could be improved by integrating qualitative and quantitative elements to bolster its objectivity and credibility. For instance, the evaluation of costs could be improved by a quantitative cost-benefit assessment, aligning with Clare & Davidovic's (2020) understanding of the value of integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Additionally, further credibility of the framework could be achieved by incorporating and combining insights across multiple academic fields for a richer and more nuanced analysis of factors influencing military interventions.

Secondly, this thesis advocates for more research concerning the circumstantial factors that have influenced the outcome of these interventions. While this thesis offers a theoretical exploration, future research should further delve into how economic, political, ideological, and regional dynamics specifically impact various aspects of interventions. In addition - due to its explorative focus - this thesis managed to conduct two case studies within one region. However, expanding the number of case studies and extending their scope beyond the Middle East could enhance the generalizability and depth of findings. Further exploration and empirical validation are needed to deepen our understanding of how these elements interact and affect intervention outcomes. Additionally, this enhanced insight is essential for developing theories that can guide the conduct of military interventions more effectively.

Finally, policymakers should pay closer attention to the elements that determine the success of interventions, such as the effects of rebellion fragmentation. Additionally, they should be aware of the relationship between the triangle of air capacity, military effectiveness, and state stability. It seems that air forces are effective in achieving objectives

such as regime removal or regime maintenance but showed their limitations in achieving state stability. This thesis proved that policymakers should be aware of these processes before conducting an intervention as it concluded that policy objectives and strategy application do not always align, which implies a lack of awareness regarding this matter.

### **7.3 Limitations**

Finally, it is important to turn attention to the accompanying potential issues with the chosen research methods. By researching broad phenomena such as military interventions one can question the credibility. In this thesis, this means that it could be questioned whether the outcome of the military intervention was influenced by the provided contextual factors or whether it was due to other variables. While it is challenging to isolate every potential influence within the research design, this thesis made efforts to adhere to good research practices and provided transparent discussion to substantiate conclusions. These efforts aimed to mitigate these concerns and enhance the validity of its findings.

Furthermore, one of the most significant issues in small-N studies is that the findings derived from the research lack a degree of transferability. This is a valid question that should also be asked in the context of this thesis since it only consists of two cases. However, this is not preventable when one wants to provide a detailed examination of a phenomenon. In deciding the research methods, one should always have to take into consideration the intersection between generalization and exploration. This thesis chose to prioritize detailed examination and contextualization as it intended to serve as a steppingstone for further research. This is consistent with Bryman's (2016) assertion that comparative designs can facilitate theoretical insights from contrasting cases. Additionally, it aligns with the goals of this thesis to test a framework for the evaluation of success but also shines a light on the contextual factors contributing to the outcome and therefore justifies the chosen research design.

Moreover, a significant issue within qualitative research is the subjectivity of the researcher. This could especially be an issue with researching sensitive topics where a lot of data is covered. Interpretation bias - particularly in evaluating outcomes such as collateral damage and stated objectives - is difficult to fully avoid. This thesis aims to mitigate these concerns through rigorous qualitative methods but acknowledges that complete elimination is difficult to achieve. Finally, the reliance on the chosen data collection method is vulnerable to potential biases including selection, publication, and interpretation bias. This could impact

the dependability of the findings but is consequential to the chosen data collection methods. However, to counteract these, the thesis employed the triangulation principle that entails the cross-checking of data from multiple sources to ensure robust conclusions (Bryman, 2016). In addition, questionable statements and data points have been critically examined and presented with caution to further bolster the study's credibility. However, it should still be noted that these biases are not entirely preventable when using secondary data.

## 8. References

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