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The intervention taboo(s): Strategy and normative invalidation

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Abstract

Intervention comprises one of the most contentious issues in International Relations. This controversy results from the way normative understanding is structured around two key, but mutually exclusive, taboos: the moral expectation to respond in cases of humanitarian need and the protection of state sovereignty. In examining this dilemma, this article asks: what happens to the construction of rhetorical strategy, where that strategy seeks to justify intervention (or not), within a binary normative environment? It is argued that actors can only successfully construct a rhetorical case by engaging in, what is termed here, normative invalidation. In a binary situation, actors cannot adhere to both taboos. These taboos are so compelling, however, that actors must necessarily invalidate or neutralise any taboo not adhered to. This is discussed in relation to the Strategic Narratives paradigm and comparative case studies on the presidential rhetoric of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Keywords

Normative Theory; Strategic Narratives; Intervention; US Foreign Policy

'To intervene, or not to intervene', Hans Morgenthau once asked.[1] That is the question. Specifically, this comprises one of the most controversial, contentious, and contested questions within International Relations (IR). While IR is replete with difficult decisions, few attract more passion and criticism than that of intervention, especially humanitarian intervention. No other issue has the capacity to turn foreign policymakers into gallant knights in shining armour, or murderous devils with blood on their hands. The reason for this controversy is that the intervention debate is characterised by two key, but mutually exclusive, taboos: a moral expectation to respond in cases of humanitarian need; and the protection of state sovereignty, which precludes external intercession within another state's territory. The inherent conflict between these two positions has created a normative dilemma. In terms of understanding how this dilemma is to be resolved, analysis has focused on unpacking how actors deal with two equally persistent normative demands: how does an actor decide between multiple ideational standpoints when they are similarly compelling in respect of normative expectation? How does decision-making function within a binary normative environment? Yet this approach overlooks a core aspect of normative behaviour in respect to coping with dilemma: the rhetorical construction of decision. Regardless of the motivation behind a decision concerning intervention – whether this is the product of a complex normative trade-off or a more simplistic assertion of realist self-interest – what occurs when that decision

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[1] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'To intervene or not to intervene', *Foreign Affairs*, 45:3 (1967), p. 425.

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is communicated? This will necessarily involve the construction of a rhetorical strategy[2] that justifies and promotes the decision to intervene or not; but what does that process entail within a binary conceptual condition?

It is argued that actors are forced to engage in a process of, what is termed here, *normative invalidation*. Within this binary normative framework, an actor can obviously not adhere to two oppositional taboos in terms of the construction of a rhetorical strategy; nor indeed, are they required to adhere to either, should they wish to pursue an alternative narrative. Yet, while an actor can adopt either taboo as the basis of their policy narrative, this does not automatically 'get rid' of the taboo(s) not adopted. In this case, the other taboo still exerts normative influence, and – if not dealt with – will threaten the success of the rhetorical strategy in question, not least where it provides an ideal conceptual foundation on which critics can mount an opposition to a given decision. The actor, therefore, must develop a rhetorical strategy that actively invalidates and neutralises the relevance and/or meaning of the 'rejected' taboo, where this constitutes a *necessary* aspect of their rhetoric. This is discussed in relation to the Strategic Narratives paradigm, specifically as an original model of norms and norm usage within IR based on actor agency.

In demonstrating this, the article examines three case studies in US foreign policy rhetoric. Where the US is typically the focus of interventionist behaviour, given its position as the hegemon, this is why it has been chosen. Two presidents – President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama – are analysed. This is designed to counter two potential arguments against the claims put forward. First, it demonstrates that the strategic trends identified are not exclusive to one actor, but apply at the normative-systemic level. Normative invalidation is not merely an individual strategy, adopted on the basis of one actor's own personal brand of rhetorical construction. Second, this is not simply an expression of an actor's normative preference, but a strategic process. By analysing two case studies in relation to one president (Clinton), so this proves that different scenarios can produce different outcomes of rhetorical construction, even by the same actor. The supporting data, comprising an assessment of presidential speeches, was collected primarily through searches of two key US government archives: the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* and the *Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

Intervention as taboo

Taboos are what you are not supposed to do. They exist as socially constructed expectations that actors should not engage in, permit, and in some cases even acknowledge, certain behaviours deemed prohibitively unacceptable. To quote Hutton Webster, taboos are 'prohibitions observed as customs'; 'an imperative thou-shalt-not in the presence of the danger apprehended'.[3] They are the intrinsic 'don'ts' of society, where these are attached to the hypothetical or actual violation of some moral, ethical, and/or social measure – a measure that obliges to be respected and upheld.[4]

[2] 'Rhetorical strategy' is defined here as the narrative(s) employed by an actor to create a specific view of the decision for (non-)intervention. It is the rhetorical presentation of a policy to be audience in order to convince them to support the case put forward.

[3] Hutton Webster, *Taboo: A Sociological Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), pp. 13, 17.

[4] Walter Gantz, 'The Movement of Taboos: A Message-Orientated Approach', Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, Seattle, Washington, 13–16 August 1978; Kate Allan and Keith Burridge, *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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Consequently, the socially integrated nature and 'taken-for-grantedness' of this conceptualisation has seen taboos classified as a type of norm.[5] To add in yet another definition: 'Norms are regarded as standards of behaviour, defined in terms of rights and obligations. In this sense norms are general prescriptions of behaviour that regulate intentions and effects.'[6] Such behaviour can be comprehended within the terms of Peter Katzenstein's well-used conception of 'the proper behaviour of actors within a given identity'.[7] Yet in the case of the taboo, action is not simply governed by normative expectation, but also a belief that identifies specific acts as intolerable, whereby these constitute 'a particularly forceful kind of normative prohibition' based on 'prescriptions or proscriptions for behaviour'.[8] Indeed, proscription is elemental to the concept of the taboo. Any violation is intrinsically connected to its own preclusion and/or sanction. Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl take this so far as to insist that the punishment of violation is inseparable to the construction and exercise of taboos.[9] That is, expectations of non-transgression cannot exist irrespective of their coercive enforcement.

The concept of the taboo has been employed widely within IR, for example in relation to the: killing of civilians;[10] creation of security regimes;[11] use of torture;[12] and prohibitions on the possession and/or use of certain types of weapon.[13] This also relates to intervention, especially where this is enacted (or not) on humanitarian grounds. Understanding the intervention question as taboo – as opposed to within a more generalised normative frame – is critical in that this recognises the emotive and often moral expectations characterising this issue. Intervention is highly controversial. It is a debate that plays into deep-felt disputes concerning proper conduct within the international system and of 'doing the right thing'. Existing normative frameworks cannot necessarily capture this tension, whereas the concept of the taboo opens up understanding of the difficult relationship of ideas within the intervention debate by establishing the oppositional but simultaneous nature of different viewpoints. Analysis can more fully identify the dilemmas created by these viewpoints and the intensity of the ideas currently typifying them. The taboo as a theoretical model allows this examination to explain why certain ideas are so prevalent, to the extent that they must be acknowledged at all times and cannot be contextually ignored or sidelined (where this will comprise a fundamental argument

[5] Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 11. See also George Quester, 'If the nuclear taboo gets broken', *Naval War College Review*, 58:2 (2005), p. 74; Richard Price, 'International norms and the mines taboo: Pulls towards compliance', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 5:3 (1998), p. 115.

[6] Annika Bjorkdahl, 'Norms in International Relations: Some conceptual and methodological reflections', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 15:1 (2002), p. 13.

[7] Peter Katzenstein, 'Introduction: Alternative perspectives on national security', in Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 5. The concept of 'proper' behaviour is also employed by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), p. 891.

[8] Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, p. 10.

[9] Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, 'Towards a theory of international norms: Some conceptual and measurement issues', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 36:4 (2012), pp. 634–64.

[10] Jeffrey Sluka, 'Terrorism and taboo: an anthropological perspective on political violence against citizens', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1:2 (2008), pp. 167–83.

[11] Janice Gross Stein, 'Taboos and regional security regimes', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26:3 (2010), pp. 6–81.

[12] Gunter Frankenberg, 'Torture and taboo: an essay comparing paradigms of comparative law', *American Journal of Comparative Law*, 56:2 (2008), pp. 403–22.

[13] Richard Price, 'A genealogy of the chemical weapons taboo', *International Organization*, 49:1 (1995), pp. 73–103.

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of this article). Furthermore, the concept of the taboo encapsulates the sheer hostility and vitriol that 'doing the wrong thing' with regards intervention can inspire – of which the 2003 Iraq invasion comprises an ideal example. While punishment for such actions may not be explicit, there are clear negative repercussions for behaviour deemed inappropriate by other international actors, and where this is intrinsic to the decision to pursue intervention or not. In understanding why intervention has come to be associated with the taboo, this can be divided into two key – and, critically, conflicting – arguments:

'Humanitarian impulse'

Non-intervention is taboo in cases of genuine humanitarian need, both normatively and, some would say, legally.[14] While intervention on non-humanitarian grounds remains controversial, the protection of human rights – including in a country other than one's own – is held up as the moral option: 'Military intervention has … gained a degree of moral legitimacy, as it is now often launched for humanitarian ends rather than simply to further the intervener's strategic or material interests.'[15] This moral commitment links back to the humanitarian interventionism of the 1990s – especially Kosovo – whereby military action against human rights abuse became incorporated into international political doctrine.[16] This emergent desire to promote a globally recognised politics of intervention has been termed the 'humanitarian impulse':[17] a desire to do the 'right' thing when others suffer illegitimately.[18] It now comprises an expectation to action on all states. As Kofi Annan said of the UN:

> Why was the United Nations established, if not to act as a benign policeman or doctor? Our job *is* to intervene: to prevent conflict where we can, to put a stop to it when it has broken out, or – when neither of these things is possible – at least to contain it and prevent it from spreading. That is what the world expects of us.[19]

This is not to say the taboo has proved absolute, as humanitarian crises such as Rwanda will attest. Some attribute this to normative weakness. R2P in particular has been criticised for its inherent frailty and as being 'devoid of real content',[20] which hardly suggests the presence of a strong taboo. Daniel Fiott exemplifies this analytic standpoint where he questions 'whether humanitarian intervention will ever become a fully accepted norm in international law and IR'.[21] Moreover, the pressure for intervention has frequently been seen to clash with state self-interest, where normative

[14] Eric A. Heinze, 'Humanitarian intervention: Morality and international law on intolerable violations of human rights', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 8:4 (2004), p. 471.

[15] Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, 'The international military intervention debate: an updated resource for conflict scholars', *Journal of Peace Research*, 46:4 (2009), p. 589.

[16] Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alex. J. Bellamy, 'Kosovo and the advent of sovereignty as responsibility', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 3:2 (2009), pp. 163–84; Kledja Mulaj, 'Dilemmas of reacting to mass atrocities: Humanitarian intervention to end violent conflict in the western Balkans', *Democracy and Security*, 7:2 (2011), p. 141.

[17] Amir Pasic and Thomas G. Weiss, 'The politics of rescue: Yugoslavia's wars and the humanitarian impulse', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 11:1 (1997), pp. 105–31.

[18] To the extent that any suffering can be considered legitimate.

[19] Kofi Annan, 'Intervention', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 15:2 (1999), p. 116.

[20] Aidan Hehir, 'The responsibility to protect in international political discourse: Encouraging statement of intent or illusory platitudes?', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 15:8 (2011), p. 1332.

[21] Daniel Fiott, 'Realist thought and humanitarian intervention', *The International History Review*, 35:4 (2013), p. 767.

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compliance occurs only when taboos and interests match.[22] This is especially the case in that humanitarian intervention 'also strains our blood and coffers'.[23] The desire to protect expensive troops, and also the security of non-combatants (where intervention often involves civilian deaths within the intervened state), threaten the taboo's normative strength. Consequently, intervention has been inconsistent, not least where this maps on to the selective interests of Western powers, particularly the US.[24] Furthermore, the 2003 Iraq invasion has done little to improve the reputation of humanitarian intervention. Indeed, Iraq is seen to mark a decisive downturn in interest in, and commitment to, humanitarian action.[25] As well as enflaming arguments that intervention is nothing more than the imperialistic and highly discriminatory imposition of Western values,[26] Thomas Weiss says that – while '[t]he notion that human beings matter more than sovereignty radiated brightly, albeit briefly, across the international political horizon of the 1990s' – Iraq has now destabilised the principle.[27]

As such, Rajan Menon states: '[T]he claim that there is an international community, unified by a conception of the common good and with the means to prevent egregious violations of its core principles, is an instance of the wish fathering the thought.'[28] Where Alex Bellamy says that intention is critical in legitimising intervention, this would seem especially damning.[29] To this extent, Luke Glanville argues this is now a prescriptive, as opposed to prohibitive, norm.[30] This approach, however, comprises an overreaction to the limitations of the taboo and its normative weight more generally. It is acknowledged that taboos vary widely in terms of strength, that is, the extent to which that expectation is accepted and internalised within actor behaviour. Richard Price says: 'Some of these norms are very robust, while others are relatively weak and routinely violated.'[31] Yet, while application of a taboo may be conditional, this does not necessarily undermine its prohibitive nature. Price goes on to argue violation can actually strengthen a taboo because the adverse reaction serves to reinforce its ideals.[32] As already highlighted, the massive outcry over Iraq demonstrates there still exist strong normative expectations surrounding the humanitarian taboo, as do more recent criticisms against Obama concerning his lack of action in Syria. Normative understanding must, therefore, encapsulate the way a taboo can exist as a (often moral) demand, even when it is not consistently respected as such.

[22] Major Mark Adams, 'A duty to intervene?', *The RUSI Journal*, 145:6 (2000), pp. 32–6.
[23] Thomas G. Weiss, 'The sunset of humanitarian intervention? The responsibility to protect in a unipolar era', *Security Dialogue*, 35:2 (2004), p. 141.
[24] Noam Chomsky, 'The current bombings: Behind the rhetoric', *Z-Net* (2009), available at: {https://chomsky.info/199903__/}; Stanlake J. T. M. Samkange, 'African perspectives on intervention and state sovereignty', *African Security Review*, 11:1 (2002), pp. 73–4.
[25] S. Neil MacFarlane, Carolin J. Thielking, and Thomas G. Weiss, 'The responsibility to protect? Is anyone interested in humanitarian intervention?', *Third World Quarterly*, 25:5 (2004), p. 977; James Kurth, 'Humanitarian intervention after Iraq: Legal ideals vs. military realities', *Orbis*, 50:1 (2006), pp. 87–101; Andrew Cottey, 'Beyond humanitarian intervention: the new politics of peacekeeping and intervention', *Contemporary Politics*, 14:4 (2008), p. 429.
[26] Adekeye Adebajo, 'The revolt against the West: Intervention and sovereignty', *Third World Quarterly*, 37:7 (2016), pp. 1187–202.
[27] Weiss, 'The responsibility to protect?', p. 135.
[28] Rajan Menon, 'Pious words, puny deeds: the "international community" and mass atrocities', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 23:3 (2009), p. 237.
[29] Alex J. Bellamy, 'Motives, outcomes, intent and the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention', *Journal of Military Ethics*, 3:3 (2004), pp. 216–32.
[30] Luke Glanville, 'Norms, interests and humanitarian intervention', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 18:3 (2006), p. 155.
[31] Price, 'International norms and the mines taboo', p. 105.
[32] Ibid., pp. 116–17.

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Sovereignty

Intervention is also taboo where this challenges state sovereignty.[33] Sovereignty is recognised as a fluid,[34] varied,[35] and contested[36] concept. Conventionally, however, it is seen to comprise a legal and normative protection of a state's territorial integrity and the capacity to make decisions independent of external influence. This is enshrined in the much-cited Article 2(4) of the UN Charter: 'All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.'[37] This comprises one of the 'core tenets of the post-Second World War order'.[38] States have also drawn on the UN Charter Article 51 principle of self-defence to justify the protection of sovereignty,[39] as President George W. Bush did in relation to Iraq.[40] To violate this principle through the act of external intervention, it is argued, undermines the very basis of the international system and the rights to which all states should be able to lay claim to as a stabilising factor of that system. As such, sovereignty is a primary barrier to intervention: 'State sovereignty has played a starring role in the demise of many attempts to legitimise intervention.'[41]

Again, this is far from perfect with respect to compliance. Repeated violation is argued to have undermined the taboo, as do UN provisions to the contrary, for example, to take action against any 'threat to peace and stability'[42] – although others state this is an oversimplification of wider

[33] Among others: Kelly Kate Pease and David P. Forsythe, 'Human Rights, humanitarian intervention, and world politics', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 15:2 (1996), pp. 290–314; John Charvet, 'The idea of state sovereignty and the right of humanitarian intervention', *International Political Science Review*, 18:1 (1997), pp. 39–48; M. Ayoob, 'Humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 6:1 (2002), pp. 81–102; Andreas Anderson, 'Democracy and susceptibility to UN intervention', *International Peacekeeping*, 13:2 (2006), pp. 185–6; A. O. Enabulele, 'Humanitarian intervention and territorial sovereignty: the dilemma of two strange bedfellows', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 14:3 (2010), pp. 407–24; Alexis Heraclides, 'Humanitarian intervention in the 19th century: the heyday of a controversial concept', *Global Society*, 26:2 (2012), p. 216; Michael Steinberg, 'Reforming the notion of national sovereignty by external intervention', *Defense & Security Analysis*, 29:1 (2013), pp. 68–75.

[34] Georg Sorensen, 'Sovereignty: Change and continuity in a fundamental institution', *Political Studies*, 47:3 (1999), pp. 590–604.

[35] Robert Jackson, 'Sovereignty in world politics: a glance at the conceptual and historical landscape', *Political Studies*, 47:3 (1999), pp. 431–56; Etain Tannam, 'International intervention in ethnic conflict: Competing approaches', *Ethnopolitics*, 11:4 (2012), p. 342; Sarah Brockmeier, Gerrit Kurtz, and Julian Junk, 'Emerging norm and rhetorical tools: Europe and a responsibility to protect', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 14:4 (2014), pp. 429–60.

[36] Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Eric K. Leonard, 'Seeking sovereignty: Gaining understanding through critical analysis', *New Political Science*, 23:3 (2001), pp. 407–28; Ersun Kurtulus, 'Theories of sovereignty: an interdisciplinary approach', *Global Society*, 18:4 (2004), pp. 347–71.

[37] United Nations, Charter of the United Nations (1945), available at: {www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/}.

[38] Mateja Peter, 'The politics of self-defence: Beyond a legal understanding of international norms', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 24:2 (2011), p. 245.

[39] UN, Charter of the United Nations.

[40] Robert Knox, 'Civilizing interventions? Race, war and international law', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), p. 114.

[41] Stevie Martin, 'Sovereignty and the responsibility to protect', *Griffith Law Review*, 20:1 (2011), p. 153.

[42] UN, Charter of the United Nations; Ian Hurd, 'Is humanitarian intervention legal? The rule of law in an incoherent world', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 25:3 (2011), p. 303; Diana Panke and Ulrich Petersohn, 'Why international norms disappear sometimes', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18:4 (2012), p. 733.

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normative and legal commitments to the interventionist principle.[43] Furthermore, the sovereignty concept is contested due to attempts to redefine it in sympathy with the humanitarian impulse. At the very least, it is suggested, this should be seen as a nuanced issue that is more complex than an either/or situation.[44] In this vein, conceptual redefinition is considered a potential solution to intervention's catch-22; that by tweaking the principles involved there may be a way through this normative quagmire.[45] For example, there are efforts to reconceptualise intervention as a moment of exception – a special concession to the sovereignty argument[46] (although this has routinely failed to make a serious dent in the sovereignty narrative).[47] Similarly, sovereignty has been reconceptualised within the context of responsibility, that is, that states can only lay claim to the rights of sovereignty if they ensure the human rights of their people.[48] While this does not dispute the general comprehension of sovereignty outlined above (as political and territorial integrity), this adds a layer of contingency in that states can violate this right where they have permitted humanitarian abuses within their borders. This was the basis of the now-famous 2001 *International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* report, which underpinned the development of R2P – and where this constituted a key point of redefinition as to how sovereignty should apply within the international system.[49] Yet, ultimately, these efforts have proved limited thanks to the predominance of Westphalian conceptualisations of sovereignty, especially where these have proved so beneficial in reducing the imperative to intervention on states that would prefer to avoid it. It also protects leaders seeking internal control: 'Sovereignty has often been used to protect leaders at the expense of citizens.'[50] As such, the sovereignty taboo remains a core aspect of the intervention dilemma.

Resolving normative dilemma

The resolution of normative dilemma has been relegated to a secondary position in the wider debate on norms. Analysts primarily focus on the comparative relevance of individual norms in influencing decision-making, specifically as a measure of normative strength. As Jeffrey Legro famously asks: 'Which norms matter?'[51] Yet this is still constructed as a measure of normative influence in terms of competing forces such as state self-interest; Legro does not ask which norms matter compared to

[43] Dawn L. Rothe and Christopher W. Mullins, 'The death of state sovereignty? An empirical exploration', *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 34:1 (2010), pp. 79–96; Jarvis Matiya, 'Can there be a human rights approach to international intervention?', *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, 39:1 (2013), p. 107.

[44] Sarah Brockmeier, Oliver Stuenkel, and Marcos Tourinho, 'The impact of the Libya intervention debates on norms of protection', *Global Society*, 30:1 (2016), pp. 113–33.

[45] P. A. Hayman and John Williams, 'Westphalian sovereignty: Rights, intervention, meaning and context', *Global Society*, 20:4 (2006), pp. 521–41.

[46] Selver B. Shain, 'How exception became the norm: Normalizing intervention as an exercise in risk management in Kosovo', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 15:1 (2013), pp. 17–36.

[47] Jennifer Szende, 'Selective humanitarian intervention: Moral reason and collective agents', *Journal of Global Ethics*, 8:1 (2012), pp. 64–5.

[48] Bellamy, 'Kosovo and the advent of sovereignty as responsibility'; Ramesh Thakur, 'Intervention, sovereignty and the responsibility to protect: Experiences from ICSS', *Security Dialogue*, 33:3 (2002), pp. 323–40; Amitai Etzioni, 'Sovereignty as responsibility', *Orbis*, 50:1 (2006), pp. 71–85; Luke Glanville, 'The antecedents of "sovereignty as responsibility"', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:2 (2010), pp. 233–55.

[49] Joelle Tanguy, 'Redefining sovereignty and intervention', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 17:1 (2003), pp. 141–8; David Chandler, 'Reconceptualizing international intervention: Statebuilding, "organic processes" and the limits of casual knowledge', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 9:1 (2015), p. 74.

[50] Jakkie Cilliers and Kathryn Sturman, 'The right intervention', *African Security Review*, 11:3 (2002), p. 28.

[51] Jeffrey W. Legro, 'Which norms matter? Revisiting the "failure" of internationalism', *International Organization*, 51:1 (1997), pp. 31–63.

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others, where these too could lay claim to affect. Norms are frequently analysed as singular constructs, not ideas that can clash with similar units of influence. Despite this, however, the question is far from ignored. Opinions vary, yet the resolution of normative dilemma – the ability to cope with directly competing norms, not least where these are subject to the stringent expectations of a taboo – has typically been reduced to either: (a) relative normative weakness; or (b) the prioritisation of self-interest. In terms of the former, this is effectively a question of hierarchy. Whether we accept normative strength as a linear and ongoing process[52] and/or the product of highly contextualised context,[53] it is assumed that, within a specific dilemma, there will be a stronger of the two norms and that this will trump the weaker.[54] One norm will emerge as the more compelling option. Alternatively, this is a decision based on self-interest. While norms still influence (the extent to which depending where on the realist-constructivist spectrum you lie), this is ultimately subordinate to state desire. To the degree a state ostensibly adheres to a certain ideological viewpoint in preference to another, this occurs only as far as this facilitates their self-interested ambition – even to the point of hypocrisy.[55] This is especially relevant in cases where this involves the national interest (as intervention typically does) and moral decision-making (where again, this connects to the humanitarian impulse). Even those who reject the extremes of Machiavelli often see a need to balance moral norms against self-interest, where the latter reigns supreme – at least in the realist mind-set.[56]

Given ongoing tension between realist-constructivist viewpoints on the relevance of norms, this will no doubt continue to be a source of debate; but it is not the issue that concerns this article. While understanding the process of decision-making within a complex normative environment is important, this article states that the very presence of that decision (when made; however it is made) within that same environment is also a major point of analysis. Specifically that, regardless of the motivation behind the decision – even if this is interpreted as a perfect realist action, devoid of normative pressure – then that decision is still introduced into a binary normative environment on which it will be judged. This situation is the same whether those norms are genuinely felt by the audience or employed manipulatively to support or undermine the decision in question. As such, this article asks what happens to the presentation of a decision when it becomes subject to a binary conceptual environment based on opposing taboos? What does an actor have to do in order to ensure their strategic position survives given the conflicting nature of the relevant norms? Given that any decision will inevitability 'disappoint' one or both sides of the debate, how can an actor control that normative situation in order that their decision wins through and does not disintegrate under criticism from the elements they conflict with? This is understood as a condition of rhetoric and rhetorical presentation. How does an actor present their decision in a way acceptable to all sides of the debate?

[52] Robert Axelrod, 'An evolutionary approach to norms', *American Political Science Review*, 80:4 (1986), pp. 1095–111.

[53] Michelle Bentley, *Syria and the Chemical Weapons Taboo: Exploiting the Forbidden* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

[54] Myron Weiner, 'The clash of norms: Dilemmas in refugee policies', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11:4 (1998), pp. 433–53; Vaughn P. Shannon, 'Norms are what states make of them: the political psychology of norm violation', *International Studies Quarterly*, 44:2 (2000), pp. 293–316.

[55] Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[56] Marshall Cohen, 'Moral skepticism and international relations', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 13:4 (1984), pp. 299–346; Paul Dixon, '"There is nothing politically right that is morally wrong"? Beyond realism and idealism in the Northern Ireland peace process', *Irish Political Studies*, 29:2 (2004), pp. 236–57; Jannika Brostrom, 'Morality and the national interest: Towards a "moral realist" research agenda', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2015), available at: {www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2015.1015488}.

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Normative invalidation

The current significance of these taboos[57] means that adherence (genuine or purely strategic) to either one, as part of a rhetorical strategy in presenting a case for or against intervention, is likely to be successful. Critically, this does not guarantee success. It is, however, a fairly safe bet that this would comprise a sufficient basis on which to push through a decision on (non-)intervention with a degree of credibility (although this also depends on the rhetorical skill of the constructing actor). Yet this leaves open the question as to what happens to the other taboo, or both taboos if an alternative rhetorical strategy is pursued. In a conceptual environment so strongly built around a binary normative structure, a taboo does not disappear just because it does not fit a certain decision. Simply picking one is not enough to discount the other, especially where failing to address that other would give potential critics an ideal foundation for attacking the decision (and where that criticism would hold substantial weight in that this itself plays into such a strong normative framework). The pressure and influence of the taboo not selected will still be relevant, and the actor is still subject to the expectations it creates. In simple terms, you cannot adopt one side of the argument and forget about the other. If that other taboo is not removed as part of the overall rhetorical strategy it will undermine it, and – subsequently – the ability to enact the desired decision. The relationship between these taboos, as well as their own individual meaning, must be respected if a particular rhetoric is to succeed.

Within this context, engaging with the intervention debate requires a rhetorical process of *normative invalidation*. Actors must provide a 'reason' why the taboo(s) not employed within their rhetorical strategy do not apply in a given case – one that effectively removes this from debate. For example, if an actor employs a pro-interventionist humanitarian stance, they will still have to answer to claims concerning the sovereignty of the country in question, unless a rationale is constructed as to why this is not the case. The latter is so taboo that it must be conceptually written off in some way in order for an opposing strategy to succeed. Invoking the humanitarian argument is not sufficient. Of course, that humanitarian framework can be utilised to provide such a rationale, for example, that moral need outweighs sovereignty. Critically, however, the key point is that this argument needs to be made. Even more specifically, that this is not merely a case of using one taboo against another, but the construction of a clear explanation for invalidation. Rhetoric must provide a justification as to why this should not be held up as a barrier to intervention. The sovereignty debate does not simply disappear on an assumption that, if the humanitarian approach is adopted, then this is no longer a relevant or legitimate consideration. It must be shown that the sovereignty case is *invalid*, and the normative expectation of it removed. The same of course applies to cases wherein both taboos are rejected. Here, justification will have to be given for the invalidation of both sides of the debate, even where the main thrust of the rhetorical argument has nothing to do with either. What is taboo and not adhered to must be explained away, regardless of any other rationalisation.

Invalidation does not necessitate the end of the taboo. This is not to suggest that, in denying the relevance of the taboo in relation to a specific instance of (non-)intervention (where this allows the

[57] In discussing this normative situation, this is not to suggest that it will always remain so. Norms come and go, as to their relationships with other norms; nor are they essentialist in my interpretation. The identified dilemma, therefore, is limited to its history and present use. It may be that one, or both, taboos will disappear and actors will be either free or subject to other/new considerations in terms of their construction of rhetorical strategy. Yet the conclusions surrounding how actors deal with normative dilemma in respect to rhetorical strategy still hold. And unless either taboo is effectively removed from current understanding (for whatever reason), both will continue to exert a major influence over how an actor communicates a decision of intervention and will shape the nature of the rhetorical strategy employed in doing so.

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actor to construct a rhetorical strategy best served to realise their policy desires), this requires the taboo's elimination. In short, invalidation does not mean getting rid of the taboo. This requires only that invalidation take place within a limited context of rhetorical usage. Moreover, it does not require that the constructing actor renounce any genuine belief in that taboo. The actor can continue to accept the taboo, not least where the wider influence of normative expectation would indicate that this would remain the case to some extent. Denying the relevance of a taboo in a given act of (non-) intervention does not necessitate that the actor disbelieve it, even if they choose to rhetorically negate this as part of a particular strategy of policy communication. It also does not preclude their employment of the rejected taboo as the basis of future rhetorical strategies (as the examples relating to Clinton below will demonstrate, in that the president embraces the humanitarian argument in respect to Kosovo after actively refuting it in relation to Rwanda). Invalidation is, therefore, a *rhetorical* concept, one limited to context. It is about constructing a taboo in ways that neutralise its prohibitive influence within a given scenario, and that remove this influence in relation to a rhetoric that it would otherwise destroy. The audience must be made to feel that this should not concern them in their judgement of a decision for or against intervention, rather that they should adhere to the reasoning put forward by the constructing actor. This can be achieved in a myriad of ways (as again, the case studies discussed below will reveal), including the suggestion that the taboo does not apply to a certain situation, that the specifics of that situation mean it would be inapt to factor it into decision-making, or simply a case of playing up one taboo over the other through rhetorical skill; anything, in fact, to ensure that the persistent normative influence associated with the taboo does not upset or hinder the realisation of self-interested ambition.

Strategic taboos

On the one hand, normative invalidation would seem to imply that taboos comprise a major restraint on what actors can accomplish in constructing rhetorical strategy. In effectively demanding they address all relevant taboos within a given normative environment, even when these so obviously conflict, this demonstrates just how far actors are normatively bound. They cannot construct rhetorical strategy irrespective of pre-existing normative dimensions. This fits in with existing understanding of how norms, language, and concepts work in relation to IR. Constructivists view language as a restraint on actors.[58] Language is not something that actors construct, but a pre-existing framework that must be adhered to – if only because, should actors attempt to use new interpretations of language, they would simply be incomprehensible.[59] This is reflected in the norms debate, where these too are viewed as fundamentally 'set', if not essentialist; or at least beyond the contextual reinterpretation of individual international actors.[60]

On the other hand, this article demonstrates that actors still construct a rhetorical strategy within this frame of understanding, one that is: (a) capable of invalidating a taboo (even to the extent that this

[58] Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Jennifer Milliken, 'The study of discourse in International Relations: a critique of research and methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), pp. 225–54; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006); Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Charlotte Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes' wake: the rational actor, the self, or the speaking subject?', *International Organization*, 67:2 (2013), pp. 287–316; Ron R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[59] Ron R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Twisting tongues and twisting arms: the power of political rhetoric', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 35–66.

[60] See, for example, Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', pp. 887–917.

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can be viewed as a necessary and highly contextual requirement); and (b) manipulated to favour the actor's own self-interest. The fact that an actor can pick and choose which taboos to apply – even if that choice is limited by normative expectation – indicates a much higher level of rhetorical agency than some interpretations of norms would allow for. The two identified taboos clearly limit, nay dictate, how an actor justifies a policy decision on intervention. Yet there is still considerable scope to shape that strategy and use the identified taboos for the actor's own strategic ends. As well as being controlled by a normative environment, they can also exert their own control back over it to a significant degree. Indeed, within the normative debate, there are moves to conceptualise how language can be used strategically, to the point at which actors manipulate and exploit norms. While some would say the idea that actors use language strategically to get what they want is self-evident, this remains under-analysed, especially within the IR discipline;[61] hence the development of the Strategic Narratives (SN) paradigm, which seeks to resolve this gap. SN aims to theorise how strategic linguistic construction takes place, not least where this relates to issues of agency and normative restraint. In explaining the nature of SN, these are defined as:

> [A] means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives provide a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate … . The point of strategic narratives is to influence the behaviour of others.[62]

Narratives are the words, speech, and actions that allow actors to present politics in specific ways. Explicitly, that they are the 'compelling storylines' by which actors strategically utilise rhetoric to craft and enact perceptions of a political situation or issue, in order to shape opinion in line with their own ambitions.[63] Actors use narratives to create a description of the world – an understanding of what politics looks like and entails – whereby they 'force' their audience into adopting certain interpretations and pathways of logic that complement the aims of the constructing actor(s). More than mere spin or framing, this is the control of political comprehension, where actors use language in order to influence how politics is carried out, and where such narratives hold together the necessary networks of communication and information required to make this popular.[64] Unsurprisingly then, parallels have frequently been drawn with Joseph Nye's soft power,[65] and also the concept of speech acts,[66] where these also appeal to the idea that language can be taken

[61] Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu, and Jens Ringsmose, 'Shaping societies for war: Strategic narratives and public opinion', in Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu and Jens Ringsmose (eds), *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion, and War* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 3–14; Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*.

[62] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

[63] Lawrence Freedman, 'The transformation of strategic affairs', *The Adelphi Papers*, 45:379 (2006), p. 22. See also Maarten Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Theorizing practical geopolitical reasoning: the case of the United States: Response to the war in Bosnia', *Political Geography*, 21:5 (2002), pp. 601–28; George R. Dimitriu, 'Winning the story war: Strategic communication and the conflict in Afghanistan', *Public Relations Review*, 38:2 (2011), pp. 195–207.

[64] John Arquilla and David Rondfelt, 'What next for networks and netwars', in John Arquilla and David Rondfelt (eds), *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), p. 328.

[65] Miskimmon et al., *Strategic Narratives*, p. 3.

[66] Per M. Norheim-Martinsen, 'EU strategic culture: When the means becomes the end', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 32:3 (2011), p. 521.

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advantage of for such means. Critically, this is understood as intrinsically deliberate behaviour. The narrative is a conscious product, which is operationalised to secure a specified political purpose or benefit. While this is not to state that every act of linguistic employment is deliberate (actors do not premeditatedly consider/construct every word or concept they employ), the opportunity exists for the planned and persuasive expression of language, specifically via narrative structures.

The SN approach does not necessarily conflict with the existing interpretations of normative and linguistic theory already identified. Alister Miskimmon et al.'s work explicitly draws on this literature as the basis of their research. Elsewhere, however, this deliberate nature of narrative construction has underpinned the expansion of the SN paradigm towards a more agency-centric view based on the work of political theorist Quentin Skinner.[67] Here it is claimed actors exert considerable agency not only over the construction of rhetoric, but its meaning. Actors can modify and manipulate both ideational and linguistic definition in order to achieve their strategic intention. Skinner says that the actor who does so is more likely to get what they desire, as opposed to those who slavishly adhere to given discursive production.[68] This does not preclude the idea that norms express pre-existing meanings that influence the actor. Skinner accepts the idea of convention and that words/concepts articulate meanings that restrain actor innovation to an extent.[69] What this article does assert, however, is that there is greater flexibility surrounding norm usage than existing normative assumptions suggest. While actors cannot ignore norms, they still possess significant control over how norms are applied, specifically where that deliberate application is designed to realise their own political aims. Even where their normative environment binds actors, they can still manipulate norms for their own ends. Moreover, when actors do adhere to established norms, it may be largely because that norm provides the best way of achieving their aims as opposed to normative adherence in the conventional sense.[70]

Within the context of this analysis, therefore, this is the claim that actors engage strategically with the intervention taboos that also bind them. While taboos by their very nature prohibit behaviour, these are also rhetorical tools to be exploited. In fact, they provide the very conceptual and linguistic resources necessary to develop a calculated rhetorical strategy. The ideas that underpin these norms provide strategic function, not only in the sense that they can be invalidated (thereby paving the way for a successful strategy), but also that these can be applied and manipulated to bolster a certain type of presentation. Invalidation must take place for this to be possible, but actors still exert significant agency over the ideas they both use and reject. It is recognised here that this approach constitutes a potentially controversial deviation from existing understandings of normative theory. The idea that actors possess even the limited agency suggested here is contentious, although it should be noted that this article does not suggest that actors possess total control over norms. The approach proposed here still respects the basic ideals of normative theory; it only seeks to demonstrate that there is some level of agency within this that existing theory does not address. As such, it makes an original

[67] Michelle Bentley, *Weapons of Mass Destruction and US Foreign Policy: The Strategic Use of a Concept* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[68] Quentin Skinner, 'Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action', *Political Theory*, 2:3 (1974), p. 293.

[69] Quentin Skinner: 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', *History and Theory*, 8:1 (1969), p. 49; 'Conventions and the understanding of speech acts', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 20:79 (1970), pp. 118–38; 'Hermeneutics and the role of history', *New Literary History*, 7:1 (1975), p. 216; 'Introduction: Seeing things their way', in Quentin Skinner (ed.), *Visions of Politics: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 7.

[70] Bentley, *Syria and the Chemical Weapons Taboo*.

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contribution on these grounds. This is an important contribution as it highlights that an element of actor agency exists that has previously been ignored. But, as the following case studies will demonstrate, this new aspect of normative explanation that must be recognised if analysis is to have a full understanding of how norms apply – especially on such a major issue as intervention.

Case study 1: Clinton and Rwanda

The US's controversial decision not to intervene in the 1994 Rwandan genocide is long seared into IR memory. In a self-interested move (not least one that recognised French support of the Hutu government[71]), and in the shadow of Somalia,[72] Clinton chose to reject intervention – not only by the US, but also by the UN, where the US was primarily responsible for ensuring the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers. While Clinton's previous policy had demonstrated a strong adherence to the humanitarian taboo as a basis for foreign policy, therefore, he was now much more amenable to the idea of staying out of potentially messy and controversial interventions. As US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, says in her seminal discussion of genocide:

> Remembering Somalia and hearing no American demands for intervention, President Clinton and his advisors knew that the military and political risks of involving the United States in a bloody conflict in central Africa were great, yet there were no costs to avoiding Rwanda altogether.[73]

The decision to reject intervention, therefore, was neither a direct consequence of the humanitarian impulse nor a commitment to sovereignty. Critically, it was not the case that Clinton (and other members of the international community) was unaware of the humanitarian gravity of the situation at the time. Investigative journalist Linda Melvern has repeatedly shown that policymakers were well aware of the horror being played out in Rwanda, even if they were not prepared to admit that publicly.[74] As such, this was a strategic – not an ill informed – move. This is not to dispute the relevance of norms; indeed, analysis cannot in this case ignore, for example, the work of Lyn Graybill, who identifies Rwanda as a consequence of 'humanitarian fatigue'.[75] That is, despite the increasing prominence of humanitarian intervention throughout the 1990s, this became strained at times under the intense pressure of expectation. In this sense, while the norm still applied

[71] Daniela Kroslak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2007); Andrew Wallis, *Silent Accomplice: The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2014).

[72] Clinton engrained his post-Somalia aversion to peacekeeping in May 1994, signing into force 'Presidential Decision Directive 25: The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations' (although this only limited, and did not explicitly rule out, US engagement in peacekeeping). For discussion, see: Holly L. Burkhalter, 'The question of genocide: the Clinton administration and Rwanda', *World Policy Journal*, 11:4 (1994/1995), pp. 48–9; Glenn T. Ware, 'The emerging norm of humanitarian intervention and Presidential Decision Directive 25', *Naval Law Review*, 44 (1997), pp. 1–58; Peter J. Schraeder, 'Trends and transformations in the Clinton administration's foreign policy toward Africa (1993–1999)', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 26:2 (1998), pp. 2–3; Richard Lock-Pullan, 'Learning the limits of virtue: Clinton, the army and the criteria for the use of military force', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 24:2 (2003), pp. 144–6.

[73] Samantha Power, *The Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003), p. 335.

[74] Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2004). See also Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004).

[75] Lyn Graybill, '"Responsible … by Omission": The United States and genocide in Rwanda', *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomatic and International Relations*, winter/spring (2002), pp. 88–9.

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(indeed, that it would form the basis of major criticism against Clinton for refusing to intervene), policymakers at this time experienced a distinct lack of willingness to comply that was connected to, and also *facilitated*, the expression of self-interest against intervention. Even within this normative context, however, this was still a decision that ultimately upheld self-interest over normative restriction, and as such cannot be explained by either of the taboos identified above.

Yet self-interest was not the rhetoric employed in expressing this strategic doctrine. This is hardly surprising, given that sympathy for any justification based on explicit selfish desire was/is unlikely. Saving American lives and American interest may resonate with aspects of the US public, but beyond this – including at the international level and within the context of those Tutsi lives being lost – that approach would have little sway, not least given the normative pressures of the humanitarian taboo to 'do something' in the face of human rights abuse. This approach would also be unsuccessful in that it would fail to address the core taboos dominating normative understanding of intervention, for reasons already discussed. As such, Clinton's rhetoric deliberately adhered to the sovereignty taboo, specifically as a vehicle for invalidating the humanitarian argument. There are two key ways in which this was achieved. First, Clinton's refusal to label the crisis 'genocide' undermined the humanitarian taboo. The Clinton administration actively avoided the term on the basis they believed this would require them to intervene (a consequence of the 1948 Genocide Convention)[76]. As Adam Jones says: '*Genocide* is one of the most powerful words in the English language: observe how international actors turn cartwheels to avoid having it applied to their own actions.'[77] Instead, the killing was expressed via euphemism; including the now infamous reference to 'genocidal acts'. Critically, however, this should not be viewed merely as a legislative get-out, but the construction of a rhetorical strategy to normatively invalidate the humanitarian taboo. By effectively nullifying the concepts on which a humanitarian argument could be based, this invalidated the taboo by establishing it was not applicable in this case, thereby rejecting US responsibility for the violence and denying potential humanitarian supporters both a platform and the rhetoric to express their position. It not only removed the pressure for intervention by annulling the relevance of the taboo, it also precluded others' access to the associated narratives of humanitarian impulse by which they could construct a case for intervention. As well as the taboo, this approach neutralised its very discourse and discursive resources – a direct consequence of the rhetorical framework put in place by Clinton's disavowal of this dialogue.

Second, the sovereignty doctrine was exploited to further realise this strategy of normative invalidation. Specifically, Clinton presented the killing as the consequence of civil war and, therefore, not a humanitarian concern. If the violence was the product of civil unrest then this both: (a) did not come under the banner of intervention, given that there had been no humanitarian violation; and (b) invoked the sovereignty argument in that civil war was an internal affair that actively should not be interfered in by another member of the international community. As Power succinctly puts it: '"War" was "tragic" but created no moral imperative.'[78] While sovereignty had never been cited as a reason for US policymaking on Rwanda, it still provided Clinton with a valuable discursive resource to construct a solid and seemingly legitimate case against intervention – and more specifically as a way of invalidating normative expectation surrounding the humanitarian impulse. If this was civil

[76] Douglas Jehl, 'Officials told to avoid calling Rwanda killings "genocide"', *New York Times* (10 June 1994), available at: {www.nytimes.com/1994/06/10/world/officials-told-to-avoid-calling-rwanda-killings-genocide.html}; Burkhalter, 'The question of genocide', p. 45; Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 132.
[77] Adam Jones, *Crimes Against Humanity* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2008), p. 26.
[78] Power, *The Problem From Hell*, p. 384.

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war, then there existed a clear sovereignty barrier to intervention, not least where such action would have 'required' taking sides in another state's conflict (itself an inappropriate act for a foreign party). Clinton portrayed this situation as needing not a humanitarian solution, but a political one – which could only be negotiated between the warring parties:

> On behalf of all the American people, I call on the Rwandan army and the Rwandan Patriotic Front to agree to an immediate ceasefire and return to negotiations aimed at a lasting peace in their country … The pain and suffering of the Rwandan people have touched the hearts of all Americans. It is time for the leaders of Rwanda to recognize their common bond of humanity and to reject the senseless and criminal violence that continues to plague their country.[79]

This construct was assisted by the implication that both parties were complicit, in that there was no clear side to take.[80] Moreover, Clinton rhetorically played his concept of civil war into pre-existing assumptions that Africa was inevitably torn by ancient conflict; or more bluntly, that Africa was uncivilised, prone to violence, and that the killings were simply another instance of them being 'at it again':

> All over the world today, all you have to do is pick up the newspaper, any given day, and you see how we are worried about the disintegration of civic life in other countries … We read about bodies being thrown into the river in Rwanda and say, 'Good Lord why are those people doing that to each other?'[81]

Kenneth Harrow calls this the fantasy of 'ancient tribal warfare'.[82] Although Clinton never explicitly referred to the crisis as tribal, by discussing this in terms of internal politics he could exaggerate that sentiment; especially where this was the interpretation adopted by the media, who were more than keen to portray the violence as tribal.[83] Not only did this play down the seriousness of the violence (by dismissing this as an internal squabble), this also added weight to the idea that the US could not legitimately get involved in a conflict of this nature. Civil war demanded internal responsibility and this should not be violated, that is, such action would be taboo. The very situation precluded intervention.

Clinton took this so far as to state that, unless it comprises a natural disaster, then there will always be some underlying political reason for crisis. Therefore, the US should not become involved on the grounds of sovereign right:

> And it became crystallized for me in a way in our involvement in Somalia, which I will always believe was a well-motivated and good thing to do that save hundreds of thousands of lived

[79] William Clinton, 'Radio Address on the Situation in Rwanda', *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (hereafter *PPPUS*), *Book 1* (1994), p. 807.

[80] Alain Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pluto, 1994), p. 33; David Durenberger, 'The international community's failure in Rwanda', *Congressional Record – Senate* (8 June 1994), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-1994-06-08/html/CREC-1994-06-08-pt1-PgS51.htm}.

[81] William Clinton, 'Remarks on Legislation to Ban Assault Weapons', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), p. 814. See also William Clinton, 'Remarks at the Gallaudet University Commencement Ceremony', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), p. 906.

[82] Kenneth W. Harrow, '"Ancient tribal warfare": Foundational fantasies of ethnicity and history', *Research in African Literatures*, 36:2 (2005), pp. 34–45. See also Catharine Newbury and David Newbury, 'A Catholic mass in Kigali: Contested views of the genocide and ethnicity in Rwanda', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 33:2–3 (1999), p. 293; Helen Fein, 'Civil wars and genocide: Paths and circles', *Human Rights Review*, 1:3 (2000), p. 57.

[83] Tendai Chari, 'Representation or misrepresentation? *The New York Times*'s framing of the 1994 Rwandan genocide', *African Identities*, 8:4 (2010), pp. 333–49.

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> but which was presented, I think, quite honestly but wrongly to the American people as something that could be done on a purely humanitarian basis, when in fact, unless human tragedy is caused by natural disaster, there is no such thing as a purely humanitarian enterprise.[84]

It was argued that, unless a crisis was politically neutral, there would exist a sovereignty stop on intervention. Consequently, the only 'humanitarian crisis'[85] or 'humanitarian tragedy'[86] or 'humanitarian disaster'[87] of Rwanda was identified in respect of the refugee camps – once the US had caved to pressure to become involved following horrific media images of camp conditions. The way Clinton was so ready to flip-flop in employing humanitarian arguments – albeit within the context of the camps and not the genocide, and where this constituted an issue of aid provision as opposed to military intervention – demonstrates how strategically pliable his rhetoric was. This example proves that taboos are contextualised resources that can be utilised for the realisation of self-interested ambition. This utilisation was still bound by the need to 'resolve' the impulse-sovereignty dilemma. But within this, there is clear evidence of agency in terms of which narratives were employed and also their rhetorical construction. Indeed, that the very process of normative invalidation is strategic. This is not simply a case of demonstrating that one side/taboo was inaccurate or inapplicable, but doing so in a manner that complements the (non-)interventionist aims of the constructing actor.

Case study 2: Clinton and Kosovo

Clinton's commitment to intervention was more genuine in respect to Kosovo. Scarred by Rwanda, Clinton was determined to avoid another humanitarian humiliation.[88] US foreign policymaking here was seen as a shift back towards the humanitarian impulse. In particular, this embraced an acceptance of the 'sovereignty as responsibility' concept, where this created a new basis on which to develop the case for humanitarian intervention.[89] Of course, you do not have to be a realist to question the full sincerity of this normative gesture. While this is not to dispute Clinton's emotional authenticity, this can also be interpreted as an act to save face following the scandal of Rwanda and/or remove the controversial and bellicose Milosevic from power. While it would be excessive to accuse Clinton of failing to adhere to the humanitarian norm as a genuine commitment, not least where this norm had grown in strength more widely, it also cannot be dismissed that this provided an extremely convenient narrative supporting more realist foreign policy desires for the region. Indeed, the increased weight of the norm actually served to increase its potential as a narrative resource. Within such context, it is unsurprising that Clinton was extremely keen to construct intervention around the warning that Bosnia and Rwanda should not be allowed to happen again;[90] thereby playing into the increased sentiment that intervention should be used against crimes against humanity.

[84] William Clinton, 'Remarks to the White House Conference on Africa', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), p. 1150; William Clinton, 'Interview with the French Media in Paris', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), pp. 1056–7.
[85] William Clinton, 'Remarks Announcing Assistance to Rwandan Refugees and an Exchange with Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), pp. 1298, 1299.
[86] William Clinton, 'Exchange with Reporters in Hot Springs', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1994), p. 1305.
[87] William Clinton, 'Proclamation 6747 – United Nations Day, 1994', *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (hereafter *CPD*) (1994), p. 2095.
[88] Tim Dunne and Daniela Kroslak, 'Genocide: Knowing what it is that we want to remember, or forget, or forgive', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 4:3–4 (2000), pp. 37–8.
[89] Bellamy, 'Kosovo and the advent of sovereignty as responsibility'.
[90] Clinton, 'Remarks to the Arab American Institute Conference', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1998), pp. 718–19; Clinton, 'Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Aspen, Colorado', *PPPUS, Book 2* (1998), p. 1329.

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(This was despite the obvious irony that the president had deliberately *not* classified these previous crises as humanitarian in order to avoid involvement.)

At one level, this was an emotive rhetoric designed to pull at the humanitarian heartstrings and the existing taboo. Clinton talks about the violence caused in detail. He portrays this not only as horrific, but also as creating a responsibility to act: 'We cannot see what we have seen with our own eyes and take refuge in the false comfort of indifference or impatience. We have to take a stand.'[91] The values of humankind demanded such a response:

> Most of us have a vision of the 21st century world with the triumph of peace and prosperity and personal freedom; with respect for the integrity of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities within a framework of shared values, shared power, and shared plenty; making common cause against disease and environmental degradation, against terror, organized crime, and weapons of mass destruction. This grand vision, ironically, is threatened by the oldest demon of human society, our vulnerability to hatred of the other, those who are not like us. In the face of that, we cannot be indifferent at home or abroad. That is why we are in Kosovo.[92]

Clinton explicitly portrays these as 'Christian values' at Easter during the conflict[93] – apparently making the most of the religious season to hammer his message home. Elsewhere, these were also American values and a classic exceptionalist commitment to freedom and equality:[94] '[I]f we want to lead the world for peace and freedom, we've got to stand up against ethnic cleansing and mass killing. That's what Kosovo is about.'[95] This call to values was facilitated by the repeated construction of the victims of Kosovo as 'innocent'.[96] This seemingly established the moral need for intervention, where Clinton stated:

> We've seen innocent people taken from their homes, forced to kneel in the dirt, and sprayed with bullets; Kosovar men dragged from their families, fathers and sons together, lined up and shot in cold blood. This is not war in the traditional sense. It is an attack by tanks and artillery on a largely defenceless people whose leaders have already agreed to peace. Ending this tragedy is a moral imperative.[97]

The rhetorical cherry on the cake, however, occurred when the president went so far as to invoke the Holocaust; where many would consider this a limit, if not surpassing that limit, of emotive construction:

> And so I want to talk to you about Kosovo today, but just remember this: It's about our values. What if someone had listened to Winston Churchill and stood up to Adolf Hitler earlier?

[91] Clinton, 'Remarks on Departure for Europe and an Exchange with Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 686.
[92] Clinton, 'Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 553.
[93] Clinton, 'Statement on the Observance of Orthodox Easter', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 536.
[94] Clinton, 'Remarks to the Arkansas State Democratic Committee in Little Rock, Arkansas', *PPPUS, Book 2* (1998), p. 1271; Clinton, 'Remarks at a Reception for Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis of California in Los Angeles', *PPPUS, Book 2* (1998), p. 1438.
[95] Clinton, 'Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Las Vegas', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 799.
[96] Clinton, 'Remarks Prior to Discussions with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and an Exchange with Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1998), p. 355; Clinton, 'Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Philadelphia', *PPPUS, Book 2* (1998), p. 1734; Clinton, 'Remarks to Kosovo International Security Force Troops in Skopje', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 993.
[97] Clinton, 'Address to the Nation on Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 451.

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> Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough, how many lives could have been saved, how many Americans would not have had to die?[98]

Critically, Clinton was not merely constructing the humanitarian case, but also precluding his critics. The president was heavily criticised at this time for pursuing NATO intervention – both politically and in terms of public protest[99] – where the legitimacy of the administration's supposed humanitarian stance and the way this bypassed the UN was questioned.[100] Consequently, Clinton's rhetoric was not simply an emphatic expression of the humanitarian taboo, but the pre-emption of his critics, where they sought to undermine him on these same ideational grounds. Clinton both: (a) explicitly and deliberately refused to acknowledge even the existence of criticism within his rhetoric (where this would deny his critics a platform on which to challenge his policy); and (b) pre-empted that challenge via the argument that not acting would have grave consequences. In relation to the latter, Clinton effectively established that failing to act would be illegitimate, even illegal. It would let the bad guys win (regardless of the ethics of the method by which they would be stopped). He used the taboo to silence his critics. The comparison between this and Rwanda is, therefore, clear. Indeed, the main difference is the sheer number of quotes here, detailing these different lines of strategy, as opposed to the few citations in the previous case study. The emotive nature of this rhetoric aside, it demonstrates that there *was* rhetoric. Clinton was saying something. He avoided commenting on Rwanda because he wanted to ensure no one else would start saying anything either. In contrast, here he was committed to whipping up a humanitarian frenzy, one that would support his aims in the region.

On another level, this narrative was a valuable resource in achieving the normative invalidation of the sovereignty argument. This was not simply the construction of Kosovo as a crisis that needed to be stopped on the basis of moral or altruistic feelings, but explicitly where there existed a technical requirement for intervention based on perceptions of the taboo. Over the demands of the sovereignty taboo, there was a clear case for action; not least where this played into new debates on sovereignty as dependent on appropriate responsibility. Clinton's rhetoric repeatedly expressed the idea that Serbia had both instigated a plan that endorsed genocide[101] (note the reference to 'planned' action as opposed to unrestrained/spontaneous violence, where this implies a higher level of intention and broken responsibility), and violated international commitments relating to implementation of this. In relation to the first point, Clinton explicitly deemed this an intolerable attack on an ethic people: 'The tragedy in Kosovo is the result of a meticulously planned and long-premeditated attack on an entire people simply on the basis of their ethnicity and religion.'[102] This strategy was one that

[98] Clinton, 'Remarks at the Legislative Convention of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 429.

[99] Richard A. Falk, 'Kosovo, world order, and the future of international law', *The American Journal of International Law*, 93:4 (1999), pp. 847–57; Michael Mandelbaum, 'A perfect failure: NATO's war against Yugoslavia', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:5 (1999), pp. 2–8. For criticism of the criticism, see James B. Steinberg, 'A perfect polemic: Blind to reality in Kosovo', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:6 (1999), pp. 128–33.

[100] Louis Henkin, 'Kosovo and the law of humanitarian intervention', *The American Journal of International Law*, 93:4 (1999), pp. 824–8; John J. Merriam, 'Kosovo and the law of humanitarian intervention', *Case Western Journal of International Law*, 33:1 (2001), pp. 111–54; Marjorie Cohen, 'NATO bombing of Kosovo: Humanitarian intervention or crime against humanity', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 15:1 (2002), pp. 79–2016.

[101] William Clinton, 'Remarks Following a Meeting with a Congressional Delegation and an Exchange with Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 653.

[102] Clinton, 'American Society of Newspaper Editors', p. 551.

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included numerous acts of intolerable behaviour: 'concentration camps, murder, rape, the destruction of priceless religious, cultural, and historical sites, books, and records'.[103] Moreover, that:

> Serb forces have pushed nearly 1.4 million people, three-quarters of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, from their homes. They have killed thousands, confiscated identity papers, separated parents from children, buried victims in mass graves, told Kosovars, 'Take a last look around, for you will never return to Kosovo.'[104]

In contrast to not talking about the actual killing in relation to Rwanda, Clinton describes the reality of the Kosovo crisis in brutal detail. He even exaggerated it. It has since been revealed that Clinton vastly manipulated the fatality rates to imply that significantly more people had died than actually was the case.[105] He did this to support the repeated claim that Kosovo was a 'humanitarian' situation and an unquestionable crime against humanity;[106] specifically where Clinton said this would be the basis of US support in that Americans recognised the need to respond on these grounds.[107] As such, this rhetorical approach deliberately opened up the normative invalidation of the sovereignty claim by arguing this was beyond tolerability, that is, the sovereignty taboo could not stand in light of these circumstances.

In relation to Milosevic breaking international commitments, this comprised a similar rhetoric. Clinton pushed the line that Serbia had violated key agreements, which then could be used to show they were no longer entitled to sovereignty-based protections. In relation to the massacre at Racak in January 1999 – which involved the mass killing of 45 people, and was a major factor in the decision to take interventionist action through NATO – this was not only portrayed as 'a deliberate and indiscriminate act of murder designed to sow fear among the people of Kosovo', but a 'clear violation of the commitments Serbian authorities have made to NATO'.[108] It was not merely a hideous act that violated expectations of humanitarian behaviour, but the breaking of a commitment – whereby doing so absolved the US on any respect for Serbian sovereignty. Similarly, Clinton condemned Milosevic for failing to sign a peace agreement with NATO and Kosovar Albanians in the March of the same year. This situation was presented as a case in which NATO was justified in continuing action in the absence of this commitment to peace; not least where not doing so would 'undermine the credibility of NATO, on which stability in Europe and our own credibility depend'.[109] Clinton also attempted to justify why Milosevic should be deemed a war criminal – a clear attempt to create further grounds for intervention on the basis of international and legal technicality.[110] As such, Clinton was creating a framework of understanding that disputed, and

[103] William Clinton, 'Remarks to the Community at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 689.

[104] William Clinton, 'Remarks for Following Discussions with NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and an Exchange with Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 601.

[105] Kelly Greenhill, 'Counting the cost: the politics of numbers in armed conflict', in Peter Andreas and Kelly Greenhill (eds), *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts: The Politics of Numbers in Global Crime and Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 149–54.

[106] William Clinton, 'Remarks on the Situation in the Balkans and an Exchange With Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), pp. 499–500; William Clinton, 'Interview with Dan Rather of CBS News', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 475.

[107] William Clinton, 'Remarks on Senate Action on Gun Control Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 756.

[108] William Clinton, 'Statement on the Situation in Kosovo', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 57.

[109] William Clinton, 'The President's News Conference', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), pp. 409–10.

[110] William Clinton, 'The President's News Conference with Premier Zhu Rongji of China', *PPPUS, Book 1* (1999), p. 521.

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normatively invalidated, expectations concerning the sovereignty taboo. By not only highlighting Kosovo as the planned and systemic breach of humanitarian expectations, but also the construction of Milosevic/Serbia as internationally pariah, so Clinton portrayed this in terms within which there could be no reasonable claim to sovereign rights. Considerations concerning the sovereignty taboo simply did not apply, under the calculated terms of Clinton's speech.

Clinton's rhetoric on Kosovo demonstrates that even where an actor is prepared to buy into one taboo as the basis of a strategic narrative, that is, the humanitarian impulse (whether genuinely, because it strategically facilitates an actor's aims, or – in this case – a combination of both), this does not preclude the need to invalidate the other taboo (that is, sovereignty). Clinton did not limit his rhetoric to the morality and compassion of his audience. It was extended out to provide a clear basis on which to dispute claims of sovereign protection. Within the highly emotive construction of language there is also a highly practical argument setting out the case for intervention. Moreover, Clinton once again invalidates the taboo not only to ensure the success of his rhetoric in promoting the humanitarian case, but also to deny his potential critics the basis of a counterclaim. It is a rhetorical act of pre-emption. Unlike Rwanda, however, this was not a case of denying them a narrative, but a way of invalidating their argument before they could even make it. Access to language was irrelevant in that Clinton had already undermined the foundation on which that language could be used. Of course, this is not to state that criticism did not occur. Clinton did not get away with intervention scot-free in terms of negative political and public reception. His rhetorical stance, however, eased the realisation of his own political desires and limited the barriers to the success of his strategic doctrine.

Case study 3: Obama and Iraq

Despite Obama's engagement in Libya, the president long proclaimed an aversion to military intervention – humanitarian or otherwise. He has even been labelled a 'modern Jeffersonian' because of his resistance to interventionist strategy.[111] Obama repeatedly advocated that US foreign policy would not adopt armed intervention unless absolutely necessary for national protection. In his 2014 State of the Union he stated: 'I will not send our troops into harm's way unless it is truly necessary, nor will I allow our sons and daughters to be mired in open-ended conflicts.'[112] He continues: 'We must fight the battles that need to be fought, not … large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism.' Obama's doctrinal approach was a direct consequence of 2003 Iraq invasion. Obama frequently highlighted this policy as something not to be relived, explicitly where this: has been taken to represent the immoderation of US intervention; was related to a lack of credible evidence; and has made the world 'weary' of conflict.[113] In relation to this last point, Obama would add: 'And I assure you, nobody ends up being more war weary than me.' Obama openly admitted the affect of Iraq on his foreign policymaking. In relation to Syria, he said: 'I have resisted calls for military action because we cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force, particularly after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.'[114] Instead, Obama insisted that the US must

[111] Jack Holland, 'Obama as modern Jeffersonian', in Michelle Bentley and Jack Holland (eds), *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy* (Routledge: London, 2016).

[112] Barack Obama, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400050/pdf/DCPD-201400050.pdf}.

[113] Barack Obama, 'Remarks Prior to a Meeting with President Toomas H. Ilves of Estonia', *CPD* (2013), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201300583/pdf/DCPD-201300583.pdf}.

[114] Barack Obama, 'Address to the Nation on the Situation on Syria: September 10, 2013', *CPD* (2013), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201300615/pdf/DCPD-201300615.pdf}.

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'avoid the mistakes of the past'[115] and 'should have learned a lesson from our long and immensely costly incursion in Iraq'.[116] He also lay out the importance of moving away from intervention as a go-to option in respect of foreign policymaking: 'The alternative would be for us to play Whack-A-Mole every time there is a terrorist actor inside of any given country, to deploy U.S. troops. And that's not a sustainable strategy.'[117] In relation to current issues in the Middle East, this translated into an outright, unqualified, and repeated rejection of future intervention: 'We will not be sending U.S. troops back into combat in Iraq.'[118]

Constructivist Tal Dingott Alkopher interprets this as a case of norm decline: the product of the weakening commitment to humanitarian intervention post-Iraq.[119] Wesley Widmaier and Luke Glanville would object as they argue, in contrast, that Obama's more pragmatic foreign policy facilitated the humanitarian impulse argument, actively promoting concepts such as R2P.[120] However, both stances are problematic. The first is difficult because Obama was heavily criticised for refusing to intervene, also in Syria, thereby indicating that the humanitarian taboo still has substantial weight; specifically, that it is sufficient to require normative invalidation should a policymaker wish to ignore it. The second viewpoint is also misrepresentative because Obama's moderation was not one that promoted intervention, but actively rejected it. The president's ideological approach was not unrestrained pragmatism, but pragmatism as expressed through the rejection of heavily unilateral and military-based foreign policy. As such, to the extent Obama still engaged with the humanitarian taboo (where the fact he recognised the narrative again demonstrates that this is still an important factor, *contra* Aklopher), this comprised a process of normative invalidation.

The quotes already outlined in the above paragraph evidence this strategy, specifically one that denied the humanitarian taboo in favour of US self-interest. Obama did not dispute the humanitarian nature of the crisis – not only Iraq, but also Syria – yet he invalidates this by creating a case in which the US is not sufficiently capable of taking on the task. Norm invalidation takes place where the taboo is constructed as irrelevant in the face of US inability. In a further example, Obama constructed what the US had already done in respect to intervention in Iraq as an extraordinary sacrifice: 'Over the past decade, American troops have made extraordinary sacrifices to give Iraqis an opportunity to claim their own future.'[121] Within this context, the actions already carried out (regardless of the way Obama's

[115] Barack Obama, 'The President's Weekly Address: September 13', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400662/pdf/DCPD-201400662.pdf}.

[116] Barack Obama, 'Remarks on the Situation in Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters: August 9', *CPD* (2014), {available at: www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400606/pdf/DCPD-201400606.pdf}.

[117] Barack Obama, 'Remarks With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in New Delhi, India and an Exchange With Reporters: January 25', *CPD* (2015), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201500051/pdf/DCPD-201500051.pdf}.

[118] Barack Obama, 'Remarks on the Situation in Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters: June 13', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400454/pdf/DCPD-201400454.pdf}. See also Barack Obama, 'Remarks on the Situation in Iraq: August 7', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400602/pdf/DCPD-201400602.pdf}; Barack Obama, 'Address to the Nation on United States Strategy to Combat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Terrorist Organization (ISIL): September 10', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400654/pdf/DCPD-201400654.pdf}; Barack Obama, 'Remarks on the Situation in Iraq and an Exchange With Reporters: June 19', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400470/pdf/DCPD-201400470.pdf}.

[119] Tal Dingott Alkopher, 'From Kosovo to Syria: the transformation of NATO Secretaries General's discourse on military humanitarian intervention', *European Security*, 25:1 (2016), pp. 49–71.

[120] Wesley W. Widmaier and Luke Glanville, 'The benefits of norm ambiguity: Constructing the wider responsibility to protect across Rwanda, Iraq and Libya', *Contemporary Politics*, 21:4 (2015), p. 376.

[121] Obama, 'Remarks: June 13'.

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predecessor Bush constructed this as a response to humanitarian need) are dismissed as 'beyond the call of duty'. The reference to the 'extraordinary' indicates that this was not a proportional response to the demand of humanitarian impulse, but a voluntary, unnecessary, and excessive gesture on the part of the US. This was one that should not be repeated, in that continuing to do more than required would eventually weaken the US. In this way, Obama constructed the humanitarian argument as irrelevant, or at the very least insufficient, to compel an already tired US into overstretch.

In a further layer of rhetorical construction, Obama also constructed the push for self-interest as a humanitarian action in itself, and not only as a benefit to the US. As already highlighted above in relation to Clinton's self-interested motivation with regards Rwanda, while the self-interest argument may have sway with aspects of a domestic audience, merely proclaiming that you are acting for yourself tends to hold little weight, especially when attempting to convince (or at least ward off) humanitarian supporters. Obama, however, effectively covers this up by stating that non-interventionist policy is compliant with American Exceptionalism (AE) and the moral values underpinning this. He uses the normative structures associated with AE to take the place of the humanitarian impulse – the implication being that this policy is still driven by proper and moral feeling. People can support non-intervention and still do the 'right' thing. In line with the argument above that the US is incapable of multiple acts of intervention, Obama demonstrates that AE cannot be achieved without resort to moderation. The US risks exhaustion, at which point it will not be exceptional any longer. Moreover, exceptionalism has never required the US to intervene in every case (as history will attest) and that the protecting US interests is the best way to exert AE and help the world. Obama says:

> [W]hile America has never been able to right every wrong, America has made the world a more secure and prosperous place. And our leadership is necessary to underwrite the global security and prosperity that our children and our grandchildren will depend upon. We do so by adhering to a set of core principles: We do whatever is necessary to protect our people.[122]

Obama reconstructs AE as concerned with putting Americans first, where this then permits the US to realise its exceptionalism and provide security to the world. As well as invalidating the humanitarian taboo, Obama also reconstructs a derived substitute in its place. This is still concerned with upholding the rights of people across the globe, but also prioritises US interests as a necessary precursor. Critically, this is a limited rhetoric. It appeals only to a domestic audience; and in that sense, it is worth noting that Obama was still heavily criticised for his foreign policy, especially concerning non-intervention in Syria. Yet this again supports the main thesis of this article. It demonstrates that unless an actor adopts a strategy that fully invalidates a taboo (or provides a full substitute, as in the case here), this will weaken the chances of rhetorical success. Actors may be strategic, but they have to be total in their approach or they risk creating normative loopholes that potentially undermine their overall strategy.

Normative cherry-picking is also relevant to Obama's dual invalidation of the sovereignty taboo. As well as a case of US self-interest, Obama also presented intervention within the terms that this does not work anyway:

> And the one thing we have learned is, is that when we do things alone and the countries – the people of those countries – aren't doing it for themselves, as soon as we leave we start getting into the same problems. So we've got to do things differently.[123]

[122] Obama, 'Weekly Address: September 13'.
[123] Barack Obama, 'Remarks at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: September 17', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400669/pdf/DCPD-201400669.pdf}.

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Such an approach ostensibly plays into the sovereignty taboo where it implies the country in question should resolve matters itself. This is the message Obama conveyed in stating that the only involvement the US should have was to train and develop the Iraqi army to deal with threats such as Islamic State alone: 'American forces will not be returning to combat in Iraq, but we will help Iraqis as they take the fight to terrorists who threaten the Iraqi people, the region, and American interests as well.'[124] This plan was identified as the only solution to the crisis, where US intervention would never solve it:

> But it [peace] can only last if the people in these countries themselves are able to arrive at the kinds of political accommodations and compromise that any civilized society requires. And so it would be, I think, a big mistake for us to think that we can, on the cheap, simply go in, tamp everything down again, restart without some fundamental shift in attitudes among the various Iraqi factions. That's why it is so important to have an Iraqi Government on the ground that is taking responsibility that we can help, that we can partner with, that has the capacity to get alliances in the region.[125]

More bluntly, Obama said Iraqis must take charge, '[b]ecause ultimately, it is up to the Iraqis to bridge their differences and secure themselves.'[126] This could be seen as a case of playing the sovereignty card. Yet Obama also necessarily invalidates this taboo when he invokes the US interest argument. As with the rejection of the humanitarian impulse on the basis of US interest, so too goes the sovereignty debate. If intervention itself is deemed redundant, then both taboos are invalidated. What is seen here, therefore, is that same strategic action in respect to AE, where aspects of the taboo are still drawn upon in order to shore up the wider rhetorical approach. Obama breaks apart the taboo he has invalidated and mines it for linguistic resources that can still be applied in his favour; in this case, the idea that this was never America's problem and that it belongs within the sovereign borders of Iraq.

The process of normative invalidation, while necessary, is not limited to one taboo. Both can be invalidated, depending on the strategic needs of the actor. Critically, this does still involve the process of invalidation: an actor cannot simply introduce an alternative rhetorical strategy without addressing these taboos. Yet this study demonstrates the extent to which an actor can be strategic within the confines of this normative restriction. These taboos are resources; not just as an entire narrative, but also through individual elements of that narrative that can be separated according to the desire and the rhetorical skill of the actor. Even following an act of normative invalidation, these can still be rhetorically employed to achieve strategic ends, as long as this does not disturb the original invalidation. For example, that Obama could only draw on the narrative of humanitarian impulse because this was effectively reconstructed within the context of AE, and so this did not disrupt the initial invalidation. This is not simply a question of restraint, therefore, but strategic control. It is a case in which an actor, although having to address and neutralise these taboos, can also play with that normative situation in ways that rhetorically benefit their own interests.

Conclusion

Normative dilemma has typically been reduced to an issue of decision-making. Yet norms do not simply influence what actors think, but how they communicate – specifically where this relates to the rhetorical strategies employed to gain support for their policy and see it enacted. Norms create an ideational framework that limit and shape the rhetoric actors seek to construct. In the case of intervention, those

[124] Obama, 'Remarks: June 19'.
[125] Obama, 'Remarks: August 9'.
[126] Barack Obama, 'Remarks at the American Legion National Conventional in Charlotte, North Carolina: August 26', *CPD* (2014), available at: {www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201400621/pdf/DCPD-201400621.pdf}.

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actors are faced with two competing taboos, each with their own set of expectations and demands that a policy must seemingly fulfil. Yet the conflicting nature of these taboos means no strategy can satisfy both. In this situation, one or both of the taboos will necessarily be rejected. This act of rhetorical rejection, however, does not make those normative demands disappear. The binary nature of the normative environment surrounding intervention means actors must neutralise the excluded taboo, otherwise its continued influence will undermine rhetorical strategy, as well as providing potential critics a more than sound basis on which to construct opposition. This process has been identified here as normative invalidation. Any rejected taboo must be invalidated in order for rhetorical strategy to succeed.

This is evident in the case studies examined here. The rhetorical strategies analysed have all specifically been designed to take account not only of the justification given for a specific interventionist stance, but also the taboo(s) not adopted in this respect. Explicit efforts have been made to nullify these normative expectation associated with these taboos. In the case of Rwanda, this was a situation in which the humanitarian argument was taken out of consideration because of, and in preference to, sovereignty claims. The construction of Rwanda as civil conflict defused the humanitarian stance by presenting the situation as one in which involvement would be politically wrong. Yet Clinton was sufficiently strategic not to let this insistence undermine his employment of an entirely oppositional strategy in Kosovo. Here humanitarian claims were pushed forward as the moral option, not least where these also underpinned assertions that Milosevic had negated all rights to sovereign protection by failing to respect the responsibilities that sovereignty demanded. Once again, Clinton engaged in a strategic process of normative invalidation, even where this lies in direct contrast to his former strategy. Finally, Obama has shown that rhetorical strategy need not necessarily respect either taboo; but that even here, both taboos still need to be invalidated if that strategy is to hold. Yet the Obama example also demonstrates the extent to which this process can be strategic, where he still cherry-picks certain aspects of the invalidated taboos in order to buttress his rhetorical approach.

These examples demonstrate that actors are not simply bound by the taboos characterising their political and social environments. Yes, taboos restrain, both in terms of behaviour and language. This is especially relevant where taboos have legal weight within the international community. But this is far from the end of the story. Actors are also agency-driven agents, who can utilise and manipulate taboos to achieve their own self-interested ambitions. In the same way that it has long been recognised that actors can put self-interest before any sense of legal or conventional obligation, these examples prove that actors are similarly strategic in their rhetorical dealings with those norms. Actors may play by the rules, but this does not preclude that they can play with the rules also.

Biographical information

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