

## Reconsidering Humanitarian Military Intervention

*Thorsten Gromes & Matthias Dembinski outline the findings from their article, "[Practices and outcomes of humanitarian military interventions: a new data set](#)," published online in July 2019 for [International Interactions](#).*

Do humanitarian military interventions decrease or escalate levels of deadly violence? Do they tend to shorten or prolong violent conflicts and mass atrocities? Under which conditions do humanitarian military interventions succeed or fail in stopping or reducing the killing? When answering these highly relevant questions, scholars have mainly referred to single case studies, and therefore comparative research on these issues is rare. A new data set promises academic relief by establishing a basis for such much-needed comparative analyses. It covers all humanitarian military interventions since the Second World War and presents information on target countries prior to, during, and after interventions. The data set also includes information on the interventions themselves, including their mandates, aims, activities, and aftermath.

Applying a widely-shared definition, we understand humanitarian military intervention as the threat or use of force, with the declared intention of protecting citizens in the targeted country from widespread violence. Defining this concept—recently also discussed under the label of the Responsibility to Protect—can be a contentious issue. Taking this into consideration, our data set includes information covering further aspects of humanitarian military interventions. This allows users to adapt our data set to their favored definition. The compilation consists of data matrices and structured case descriptions that document all coding decisions.

The data set allows us to reconsider certain commonly-held assumptions. For instance, the claim that humanitarian military interventions are on the wane is refuted by the number of ongoing operations and of violent conflicts that might trigger further humanitarian military interventions. Many commentators stress the dominant role of Western states and organizations. Our data set demonstrates that humanitarian military interventions are not a Western monopoly, as evidenced by interventions carried out by Russia, India, and African organizations.

The data set documents death rates caused by violent conflicts prior to and during interventions. This could be used to investigate the accuracy of further assumptions surrounding humanitarian military interventions, such as that most humanitarian military interventions worsen the situation in the target country, reduce the extent of organized violence, or have no impact at all.

The data set could also be used to explore the average effect of humanitarian military interventions by comparing crisis-ridden countries that experienced an intervention with a matched group of cases that exhibited the same relevant properties but in which no humanitarian military intervention occurred. Cases with humanitarian military interventions could also be compared with each other to identify conditions under which they are associated with either an escalation or a de-escalation of deadly violence. The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt's 'Data Set on Humanitarian Military Interventions since the Second World War' paves the way for these and other politically relevant analyses.

[Read the published article at Taylor & Francis Online.](#)

[Check out more posts on the Beyond Academia blog.](#)