



Doing Something

Neoclassical Realism, US Foreign Policy and the No-Fly Zone, 1991-2016

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A thesis submitted to the Department of International Relations of the London School of Economics and Political Science for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; London, September 2017

Declaration

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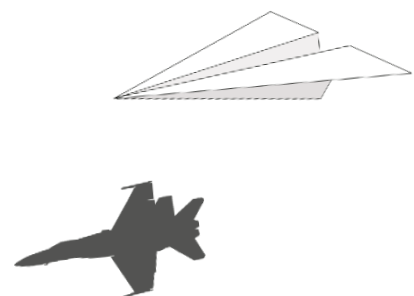
Abstract

This thesis investigates the continuous use of no-fly zones across different US administrations. In doing so it seeks to advance theories of international relations and foreign policy, conceptualizations of foreign policy executive decision-making processes, and the empirical study of US administrations from 1991 to 2016.

No-fly zones were ostensibly employed both for the protection of civilians in intra-state conflict and/or for coercive diplomacy. However, based on theoretical accounts as well as empirical observations, the no-fly zone is not in fact suited for these purposes. As the existing literature on coercive diplomacy, air strategy and no-fly zones is frequently grounded in rationalist and (structural) realist thought, it cannot easily account for continuous “sub-optimal” choices.

Therefore, this thesis turns to neoclassical realism, and demonstrates the compatibility of ideational variables with realist ontology, epistemology and methodology. It employs ideas as an intervening variable in the transmission belt from systemic conditions to foreign policy choice to explain no-fly zone use in US foreign policy. In a permissive international environment, decision-makers use ideas to guide their interpretation of systemic conditions, and to wield them as tools of persuasion in foreign policy deliberations. Decision-making in the US foreign policy executive is then conceptualized as a competition between diverging ideas about systemic incentives and constraints, as well as about appropriate strategies to mobilize state power. Absent agreement or presidential leadership and under pressure to act quickly, decision-makers use the no-fly zone to patch over ideational divides in the foreign policy executive and “do something”.

This suggested causal mechanism is investigated in three detailed case studies on US foreign policy towards northern Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya. Three deviant case studies on decision-making vis-à-vis Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, and Syria delineate scope conditions and illustrate the causal primacy of systemic factors in determining US foreign policy.



Acknowledgments

Allegedly, there is a fascinating story behind every PhD. Mine, however, started out as a seminar paper during my postgraduate studies, then became a (sloppy) MA dissertation, and slowly developed into the piece of writing you now see before yourself. Its topic has been with me for years, and has (surprisingly, perhaps) mostly survived the many academic loops, empirical hurdles, and intellectual dead-ends I have encountered and tried to overcome along the way. Its creation and current form would not have been possible without the steadfast support of my supervisor Toby Dodge. I cannot thank him enough for his feedback, kindness, and serenity in the face of perpetually missed deadlines. I am very grateful to my two examiners, Lawrence Freedman and Steven Lobell, for their time and effort in reading and providing feedback on this thesis.

At LSE and beyond, many friends and colleagues have helped me throughout the dissertation process. Nick Kitchen, James Strong and Luca Tardelli took considerable amounts of time off their busy schedules to read and critique my work meticulously. David Schäfer suffered through an entire draft to provide detailed feedback. Florian Blum, Marian Feist, Aaron McKeil, Andreas Müringer and Andreas Aagard Nøhr have been infinite sources of ideas, debate, support and friendship. A fantastic group of IR PhDs deserve a special shout-out: Maggie Ainley, Emmanuelle Blanc, Tina Blohm, David Brenner, Andrew Delatolla, Jonathan Freeman, Rachel George, Anissa Haddadi, Sidharth Kaushal, Evelyn Pauls, Adrian Rogstad, Joanne Yao – I couldn't imagine better company when trying to understand fuzzy sets, hammer out research questions, and generally muddle through. The FPA, conflict, theory and security & statecraft workshops had too many members to name them individually, but they all deserve my gratitude (and many more rounds at the George). The 7th floor crowd and their proud motto (procrastinators unite...tomorrow) have made the LSE feel like home for possibly worrisome amounts of time.

My parents, Bettina and Jörg, have provided professional co-supervision, demanding peer review, loving encouragement, laughter, counselling, and excellent food at home and abroad all in one masterful combination and in a way only they ever could. For that, I am deeply grateful. My sister Erika has always and generously shared her wealth of expertise, gossip, advice, and comic references (especially her unwavering commitment to *knoblistmus*). Maybe better than anyone, my partner in crime (and PhD-ing), Alina Loth, knows of the ups and downs that research in no-fly zones involves (Haha. Get it? Ups and downs and no-fly zones! ... Alina has also had to bear my penchant for obviously hilarious puns, which just as everything else she has managed with grace and astonishing patience). Her love, friendship and support have made and keep making all of it easy.

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Chapter I: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Understanding why and how states intervene in other states' internal conflicts is crucial to evaluate past interventions, better understand foreign policy decision-making, and predict processes and state behavior in future crises. By analyzing the implementation of no-fly zones in three detailed case studies, this thesis aims to contribute to IR scholarship in three ways: firstly, it outlines gaps in relevant literatures, particularly on military strategy, airpower and coercive diplomacy. The theoretical abstraction appropriate to outlining ideal processes of persuasion, compellence and coercion in cases of clear national interest and motivation fails when faced with the multitude of decision problems, ideational bargaining processes and political loops involved in any actual case of foreign policy and tool choice: parsimonious contributions and ideal-policy models inevitably have a hard time when tested against the empirical reality of US foreign policy decision-making. This thesis argues that a neoclassical realist framework that makes use of ideas as intervening variables can help address some of these shortcomings. Secondly, to that end, it re-conceptualizes the foreign policy decision-making process as a sequence of deliberations¹ defined by ideational competition over the correct interpretation of systemic conditions and appropriate response strategies within the US foreign policy executive. Thirdly, it suggests that the no-fly zone is employed because its military-strategic characteristics allow decision-makers to extract themselves from intense ideational competition and “do something” regardless of whether this tool is in fact appropriate to the original policy problem at hand.

This thesis employs as its starting point the structural realist focus on systemic conditions, relative capabilities and the balance of power in determining the interveners' national interest and resulting state behavior. However, as I discuss in further detail in subsequent chapters, such accounts cannot sufficiently (or indeed do not attempt to) explain either specific state behavior or the tools of intervention in particular (Krasner, 2013, p. 339; Saunders, 2009, p. 126). Such explanation, however, is essential to understand both the intricate dynamics of foreign policy decision-making, coercive diplomacy and intervention, as well as specific cases and examples of the American use of military force. Indeed, which tools are available and how they are perceived by decision-makers matters in the decision-making process of the foreign policy executive. As I suggest in the first part of this chapter, the no-fly zone as a tool of US military intervention and/or coercive diplomacy posits a particularly

¹ “Deliberation” or “deliberations” are used here to denote the processes of interaction and communication within the decision-making process of the foreign policy executive. They are not meant to evoke the specific conceptual meaning connoted with Habermasian understandings of communicative action.

striking challenge to conventional explanations grounded in realist and rationalist approaches. Theoretical contributions to military strategy and airpower suggest that a no-fly zone can be operationally and tactically effective, but it is not at all an appropriate tool of intra-state conflict management, and has a particularly doubtful record in the protection of civilians on the ground. As I discuss in a second part of this chapter, in the coercive diplomacy literature, no-fly zones have been categorized as one of many possible tools of a coercive bargaining strategy vis-à-vis an adversarial target. While the wide range of scholarship related to coercive diplomacy makes it an unusually broad and applicable framework to test foreign policy strategies and cases, it tends to focus on effects and outcomes rather than the decision-making processes that lead to the application of a tool (e.g. the no-fly zone). These literatures only provide a start into the guiding question of this thesis: Why would the US choose to employ no-fly zones in military intervention? In turn, linking no-fly zones to US foreign policy decision-making also allows insights into decision dynamics more broadly, i.e. with a view to establishing theoretical principles testable against a larger universe of cases.

As I outline below, where airpower as well as coercive diplomacy literature do discuss the choice of tools to be used (which for several reasons subsequently discussed at length is a rare occurrence), they tend to have a hierarchical concept of decision-making. The choice of tools is derived from a hierarchically superior set of interests dictated by systemic conditions and the national interest. However, this focus on national interest and military-strategic optimization obfuscates the intricacies of foreign policy decision-making. The specific dynamics of decision-making in the US foreign policy executive affect the deduction, interpretation and translation of systemic conditions, and correspondingly, intervention decisions and the choice of tools. In fact, both airpower and coercive diplomacy literatures frequently point towards the essentially political nature of intervention behavior: the theoretical abstraction appropriate (in structural realist analyses) to cases of clear national interest and motivation fails when faced with the empirical multitude of decision-making problems, ideational bargaining processes and political loops involved in any actual case of foreign policy choice. This holds especially in cases where systemic conditions are ambiguous and the international environment is permissive, as will be discussed below. When attempting to explain, then, why the US would conduct military intervention the way it does, analysis must move beyond systemic conditions to consider the decision-making process itself (Hudson, 2005, p. 2). Coercive diplomacy literature points towards the centrality of coercer motivation in successful cases. With few exceptions, however, it lacks an investigation into the causes and origins of this motivation: why would decision-makers embark on coercive diplomacy in the first place, and in what way (i.e. with what tools)? I point out the amendments to these frameworks necessary to answer such questions below. I follow up in Chapter 2 by introducing a framework for the analysis of foreign policy decision-making and no-fly zone use based in neoclassical realism.



1.2. No-Fly Zones as Tools of Intervention

After the 1991 Gulf War, the Bush administration initiated two no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq to protect Kurds and the Shi'a sections of society respectively. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 781 mandated a no-fly zone in Bosnia in 1992, which was subsequently enforced by the Clinton administration from 1993 onwards. In 2011, the US and its NATO allies employed a no-fly zone, ostensibly to protect the civilian population in the Libyan civil war. These no-fly zones established and militarily enforced bans on military flights within a demarcated space of another state's territory, but (initially in the case of Libya) stopped short of strategic air campaigns or ground intervention. Intuitively, in those conflicts, the use of airpower by the conflict parties involved (prior to intervention) did not play a decisive role. In fact, as I outline below, US administrations usually had knowledge of the tool's likely ineffectiveness for conflict management and resolution. *Why, then, did they still employ the tool?* This thesis starts by asking why the no-fly zone has been an attractive tool to US foreign policy executives in the last 25 years.² It will suggest that the reasons lie not in the tool's military-strategic utility or in a careful calibration of means to strategic aims, but in the political dynamics of decision-making in the US foreign policy executive (also cf. Freedman, 2014). In the following section, I develop this primary puzzle. Based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on airpower and no-fly zones, I discuss the characteristics of no-fly zones, their possible strategic and tactical utility in conflict, and their insufficiency and possibly counter-productiveness for conflict management and the protection of civilians in intra-state conflict. I show that these literatures fail to provide a convincing answer as to the no-fly zone's attractiveness for decision-makers, not least because they lack a concept of foreign policy choice.

1.2.1. Strategic Coercion, Airpower and the No-Fly Zone

Though no-fly zones and their enforcement pose several puzzling questions, their prevalence in US foreign policy and intervention is not adequately mirrored in academic debate. One reason why no-fly zones seem to not have attracted much scholarly thought might lie in the fact that despite a long line of historical precursors dating back to the British Empire's air policing after WWI and a similar US strategy in Korea ("air interdiction zone"; K. P. Mueller, 2013), to date only the no-fly zones mentioned above have been established and enforced. Around two dozen authors have dealt with the role of no-fly zones extensively and exclusively, i.e. separate from general discussions of strategic coercion and/or

² While the modern no-fly zone has historical precursors in (imperial) aerial policing and interdiction starting in the early 20th century, its use as a tool of US post-Cold War military intervention limits the numbers of comparable cases to about 15-20 between Iraq in 1991 and Syria in 2017. Depending on how the southern Iraqi no-fly zone and the unenforced monitoring mission in Bosnia are counted, three to five no-fly zones in this period mean that this tool was employed in about 25% of all US military interventions in the post-Cold War era. This relative prevalence of no-fly zone use in US military intervention is not currently reflected in research.

military history. Benard, Francis, Kramlinger, Franke, McKelvey and Cook all discuss strategic airpower frameworks in which the no-fly zone can be integrated (Benard, 2004; Cook, 2012; Francis II, 1999; Franke, 2004; Kramlinger, 2001; McKelvey, 2012). Harrison & Cooper, Gertler et al., and Mueller analyze no-fly zone characteristics with a clear policy focus (Gertler, Blanchard, Dale, & Elsea, 2013; Harrison & Cooper, 2011; K. P. Mueller, 2013). Similarly, Gibbons, Knights, Renner and Shanahan discuss the no-fly zone's use, efficiency and effectiveness (Gibbons, 2002; Knights, 2003, 2011; Renner, 2011; Shanahan, 1996). Brouwers, Harrington, McIlmail, Schmitt, and Ulfstein & Christiansen focus on no-fly zones from a legal perspective, writing about international law, legitimacy, mandates, and rules of engagement (Brouwers, 2014; Harrington, 1992; McIlmail, 1994; Schmitt, 1998, 2011a; Ulfstein & Christiansen, 2013). Additionally, several publications deal with the different cases, although they concentrate on historical description and analysis: the two no-fly zones established over Iraq, particularly on Operation Provide Comfort to protect northern Iraqi Kurds (Brattebo, 2006; Frelick, 1992; Haulman, 2000; Petersen, 1996; A. Roberts, 1993), and the role of the no-fly zone in the Bosnian civil war (Burg & Shoup, 1999; Ripley, 1999; Western, 2005). Newer publications mention the role of the no-fly zone in the 2011 Libya intervention or a hypothetical involvement in the Syrian civil war (Beehner, 2016; Benitez & Pietrucha, 2016; Daalder & Stavridis, 2011; Harmer, 2015; Kildron, 2012; Meibauer, 2015; Nygren, 2015; Zenko, 2016b). Others focus on the norms and ethics of intervention, diplomatic process or regime change and mention no-fly zones as outcomes, examples or case studies (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014; Bellamy & Williams, 2011; Chivvis, 2012; Lango, 2014; Lindström & Zetterlund, 2012). While in these and other contributions, no-fly zones are frequently treated as examples for broader categories (e.g. "(failed) humanitarian interventions" or "just war"), in others they are looked at from a very detailed military (e.g. command structures, tactics; Shanahan, 1996) or aeronautic or technological perspective (e.g. flight parameters, logistics). Two authors treat no-fly zones as "policing tools" (Neocleous, 2014; Peifer, 2009): Neocleous offers an intriguing conception of no-fly zones as an example of sovereign police power. For that reason, he is also the only author who does not distinguish between domestic "no-fly zones" (usually called protected/restricted airspace; e.g. over the White House) and no-fly zones used as tools of intervention. Two musical contributions both called "No Fly Zone" have unfortunately not advanced scholarly understanding of the tool.³

The no-fly zone literature exhibits several particularities that relate to how implemented policy and academic scholarship on this tool develop and interlink. *Firstly*, no-fly zone scholarship comes in waves as interest peaks with empirical cases: the first wave deals with the imposition, aftermath and implications of the no-fly zones over Iraq and Bosnia. Scholarly interest in no-fly zones then wanes despite the tool's persistence in US policy towards Iraq, as well as in policy deliberations on other cases

³ K-Rino, "No Fly Zone", 2012; Trick-Trick ft. K-Young & Royce da 5'9", "No Fly Zone", 2014.

(as discussed in subsequent chapters). The second wave is most likely motivated by the tool's use in the 2011 Libya intervention to protect civilians (as mandated by UNSC Resolution 1973), and the subsequent discussion over a possible intervention in Syria. Closely related literature deals primarily with issues of legality, legitimacy, and details of the mandating process. *Secondly*, there seems to be relatively little overlap and cross-fertilization particularly between the military-strategic literature, produced primarily by military scholars from the US and the UK, and case study authors who focus on trends and implications for their respective fields, i.e. law, politics, norms and so forth. A comprehensive review of the field is therefore in order. *Thirdly*, contributions can be divided into pre- and post-Benard eras, which largely but not completely coincide with the first and second waves (Benard, 2004). While papers written before 2004 have difficulties coming to agreed terms and definitions of no-fly zones, their costs, characteristics, and their strategic framework, contributions after 2004 tend to refer to Benard's definitions.⁴ In this tradition, I start interrogating the tool's properties and characteristics with that same article.

Benard proposes, based on Pape's air coercion framework, that the no-fly zone is a term to describe "a physical area of a nation that is patrolled using airpower of another sovereign state or coalition", where "the patrol takes the form of regular air sorties" (Benard, 2004, p. 455). A no-fly zone is then a certain space defined by distinct and precise territorial demarcations within the territory of one state in which another state patrols to deny use of this space, and to ensure implementation of *whatever rules* it set to hold therein. By this larger definition, the no-fly zone is not necessarily limited to the interdiction of flyovers. Together with suppression of effective air defenses, the latter element is simply one necessary *condition* to enforcement, and may precede other "rules" within the designated territory that the patrolling state wants to enforce. The literature frequently conceptualizes the no-fly zone as one military tool used within a broader coercion strategy employed to address international and intra-state conflicts. Such a coercion strategy seeks to affect the behavior of an opponent by manipulating costs and benefits as it threatens to "hurt or destroy something he values" (Kramlinger, 2001, p. 11; also cf. Freedman, 1998). To be effective, such threats require an opponent that has something to lose, so that the expectation of violence has calculable costs and may achieve a desired outcome. Coercion then is an act of bargaining in which the coerced party may agree to change its behavior and gain an easing in the threat of force in return. This will only work if the different interests of the two parties are not diametrically opposed. Pape distinguishes four fundamental strategies of air coercion: punishment, risk, decapitation and denial (Pape, 1996, p. 58). Punishment raises costs or risks to civilian populations, risk manipulates the opponent's perception of the likelihood of

⁴ In addition to Benard's contributions, the prominence of his article in the no-fly zone literature might have to do with accessibility: it used to be the first scholarly contribution both on conventional search engines as well as in standard academic databases for the term "no-fly zone" (as of 2014, Gertler et al.'s report has taken up this position).



punishment, a decapitation strategy strikes against key leadership. Denial operates “by using military means to prevent the target from attaining its political objectives or territorial gains” (Pape, 1996, p. 13). The coercing state could (threaten to) capture the enemy’s territory or destroy its entire or parts of its military capabilities. It is this strategy that can, with a bit of conceptual stretching, be applied to no-fly zones, as they deny adversarial use of territory (i.e. airspace), may preventively take out adversarial air capabilities, and threaten to use established aerial superiority to enforce additional rules or employ additional offensive measures (e.g. an air campaign). Pape goes on to differentiate between the strategies of direct air support, and strategic and operational interdiction. The first provides cover to ground forces, while the second strikes against the opponent’s sources of military production or strives to isolate them from combat theaters (Pape, 1996, p. 71), and the third strikes against supply networks, reinforcements, and command-and-control facilities (Pape, 1996, p. 72). Can a no-fly zone fulfill these functions, and what then differentiates it from an air campaign or strategic bombing? The no-fly zone does exhibit features of a denial strategy: it effectively captures and occupies a part of the opponent’s territory (air space). Also, it will most likely preventively destroy those adversarial military assets and infrastructures that may threaten air superiority both inside and at the borders of its demarcation. Lastly, it can be employed to threaten the use of established air superiority for compellence and deterrence both inside and at the borders of its demarcation. However, there are two important differences: firstly, a no-fly zone is strictly rule-bound. It communicates specific violations of its rules which may lead to the use of force. If, however, the opponent complies, the no-fly zone seems, as long as air superiority is not threatened, to be a rather passive-defensive tool of airpower, whereas Pape’s air coercion functions have a distinctly offensive character. Secondly, rules are enforced only within the distinct territory of the no-fly zone, implying that elsewhere the opponent may still govern its air space as it pleases. This classifies the no-fly zone as a tool of limited intervention, conventionally used in military operations other than inter-state warfare.

The no-fly zone’s limited nature may make it comparable to sanctions, although crucial differences remain (Cortright & Lopez, 2011). Different alternative courses of action are often portrayed in an “ascending scale of seriousness in terms of the commitment of resources, the impact on third parties, and the according degree of risk in use” (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 163). “Sanctions”, although potentially encapsulating a vast array of political, diplomatic and other measures, usually refer to economic sanctions, which are placed towards the lower end of this escalation scale and have attracted much scholarly attention (Baldwin, 1999). Contributions have mostly aimed at refining the effectiveness and applicability of different types of sanctions (mostly economic and some diplomatic, including e.g. asset freezes, travel bans, or embargos), with a focus on the desired behavioral change in the target, likelihood of escalation, utility in bilateral and multilateral arenas, as well as the practice of economic



sanctions throughout the decades (Cortright & Lopez, 2000; Ronzitti, 2016). Despite a large body of literature, it remains unclear if sanctions “work”, not least because there is no general agreement on how to measure effectiveness (Cortright & Lopez, 1995, p. 6). Scholars on sanctions literature have come to the insight that the “principal objectives” of sanctions, i.e. specific behavioral change in the target, are not the only reason why sanctions are used (Cortright & Lopez, 1995, p. 7; Samuels, 2007, p. 44). It remains slightly unclear why inexplicit motives and hidden agendas should be included in objective assessments of the *effectiveness* by which sanctions affect behavioral change, but the idea that “other objectives can always be identified, among them [...] demonstrating resolve to allies or domestic constituents, and sending symbolic messages” is relevant to coercive diplomacy onset (Ronzitti, 2016; see below) as well as the study of decision-making dynamics in the foreign policy executive more broadly (Cortright & Lopez, 1995, p. 7): Sanctions might be useful to deal with political problems perceived by the sender, more specifically, the decision-maker, no matter the effect on the target (I. Cameron, 2005; Cortright & Lopez, 2000, 2011; Eriksson, 2005; Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; Wallenstein & Staibano, 2005). Sanctions literature does not usually concern itself with the direct application of military force, however, which marks the crucial difference to no-fly zones. In addition, sanctions can be used against allies as well as adversaries (Samuels, 2007, p. 60), and their use is regulated fundamentally differently in international and national law (Hufbauer, Schott, Elliot, & Oegg, 2007, p. 33). While thinking about policy alternatives in the form of an ascending scale on which decision-makers might move upwards and downwards has advantages, including comparability across a larger number of cases as well as a realistic perspective on strategic combinations of tools (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 164), it thus also obfuscates differences in nature between the different tools.

Several strategic coercion and airpower authors focusing on the no-fly zone try to offer a strategic framework in which the no-fly zone can be integrated (Francis II, 1999; Franke, 2004; Kramlinger, 2001). They aspire to highlight characteristics of successful air strategies in “operations other than war” and to that end compare no-fly zones over Iraq and Bosnia, focusing on various items including “tactical airpower goals”, “desired end states”, efficiency of implementation and effectiveness compared to primary objectives (Francis II, 1999, pp. 28–29). While they vary in their assessment of the case studies, they tend to agree that even though the no-fly zones proved effective in achieving tactical objectives, they failed to achieve their primary (strategic) objectives because of a mismatch between those and what no-fly zones can achieve (Francis II, 1999, p. 19). Frequently, they contend that such shortcomings relate to various outside factors: e.g. “low risk expectations” (Francis II, 1999, p. 41), the desire for a “quick tool” (Francis II, 1999, p. 48), or short-cut heuristics in strategic planning (Francis II, 1999, p. 49). In his influential contribution, Benard summarizes previous approaches and identifies three different types of strategic tasks for a no-fly zone: air cover, air occupation, and air

deterrence. Air cover serves to “provide [...] tactical support to ground troops”, specifically by “targeting enemy’s ground assets and providing aerial reconnaissance” (Benard, 2004, p. 456). It is meant to take “some of the burden off the ground troops in tense and volatile environments” (Benard, 2004, p. 457). As such, air cover is an auxiliary air strategy that presupposes a force fighting on the ground. This comes close to more classical understandings of earlier “air exclusion zones”, e.g. in in the Korean war. Air cover may also “assist in the protection of designated safe-areas for non-combatants”, which can be helpful in “situations where the warring factions cannot be easily distinguished from one another or where the situation is for other reasons too blurred for more direct intervention” (Benard, 2004, p. 457). The air occupation task moves further away from this auxiliary nature. Benard notes that “in some situations, ground forces will be unnecessary or countries will be unwilling to provide troops [...]” (Benard, 2004, p. 457). Then, air occupation may be “less risky than actually maintaining troops on the ground [while] they can accomplish many of the same things with precision munitions, the ability to easily destroy large targets and the sheer intimidation factor of their presence” (Benard, 2004, p. 457). However, its usefulness is limited to conflicts where warring parties are identifiable, and the terrain is “not too complex”: “air occupation is still not effective against light infantry units in mountainous or jungle terrain, or in targeting other forms of guerilla fighters” (Benard, 2004, p. 457), much as Pape constrains air coercion to conflicts against conventional forces, rather than guerillas which are “less sensitive to shortages and less predictable” (Pape, 1996, p. 74). This characterization is at odds with the types of situations no-fly zones have been used for in practice. Air deterrence follows closely the deterrent function of air presence already outlined above. While “this type of policy precludes a country from actually using force”, it may “fuse the positive elements of prevention and deterrence [and provides] a buffer between two warring entities without risking significant casualties [...] [T]he mere threat of an air-strike should be enough to accomplish this goal” (Benard, 2004, p. 458). If, however, deterrence fails, the proximity of airpower to the theater allows for a fast switch to prevention, and expulsion of the aggressor (Benard, 2004, p. 458).

As noted above, more recent contributions are most likely motivated by the imposition of the tool and additional measures to protect civilians and prevent mass atrocities in the 2011 Libyan intervention. Some of them continue in the tradition of strategic coercion and airpower (Nygren, 2015), but now, aside from effectiveness and strategy, also point out various conceptual difficulties (McKelvey, 2012), elaborate on the misperceptions of the tool held by decision-makers and the public, and contrast their simplistic understandings with the “reality of what such a task entails” (Cook, 2012, p. 6). Cook explains:

“When considering a no-fly zone option, a nation cannot merely consider the cost of deploying assets versus a simplistic model of the benefits of success. When deciding whether the commitment of resources can achieve success that makes it viable, three factors need

consideration. The first is what resources need to be committed, the second is for how long, and the third is to what benefit is the action being taken” (Cook, 2012, p. 15).

This unfortunately ignores the political realities of tool choice, as acknowledged by the author: “[N]o-fly zones have existed in a vacuum of theory and definition while enveloped in other acts of political leverage” (Cook, 2012, p. 19) and “theory does not provide any framework on which to make resource-based decisions” (Cook, 2012, p. 28). This already implies a crucial problem of theories of air coercion in general, which will be further discussed below: the lack of a political decision-making framework for the analysis of the choice of tools. Driven by a need for summary, fresh analysis and evaluation to inform policy-makers, Harrison & Cooper, Gertler et al., and Mueller focus on cost prognosis (Harrison & Cooper, 2011, p. 3), utility and likely effectiveness (Gertler et al., 2013, p. 7; K. P. Mueller, 2013, p. 3), and limitations of the tool (K. P. Mueller, 2013, p. 8). The primary contribution of these publications lies in empirically confirming the no-fly zone’s low-cost character. Gertler et al. mention that the no-fly zone is inherently flexible in its application depending on primary objectives, and can serve as a “precursor to other military actions” (Gertler et al., 2013, p. 7). They also observe empirically that “mid-range” operational goals seem to be preferred in comparison to long-term strategic plans. Mueller adds to his overview of historical cases and the assessment of their relative importance and the success of no-fly zones an analysis of “thematic variations” and different possible sets of objectives (K. P. Mueller, 2013, p. 8). Similar to the sanctions literature, the author makes a distinction between “overt justifications” of no-fly zones, such as protection and coercion, and more “hidden motives”, which may either not have been openly stated or evolved over the course of the mission. Such hidden motives may lie in “battlefield preparation” (the use of no-fly zones as a precursor of further-reaching use of force for other purposes) or a weakening of the opponent through continued blockade, but also in “doing something” in response to a crisis or “locking in” commitment (K. P. Mueller, 2013, p. 10). Unfortunately, Mueller does not follow up on the theoretical implications of these observations (undoubtedly limited by the constraints of the reporting mechanism under which he writes).

1.2.2. The Limitations of No-Fly Zone Literature

The no-fly zone literature outlines important military-strategic functions of the tool in armed conflict and interventions. The definition of a no-fly zone as a means of coercion depicts it as an auxiliary, yet important, part of an overall air strategy in armed conflict, particularly in conventional wars in which air superiority can be achieved. A no-fly zone is then a rather “passive” territorial demarcation in which air superiority is established by one party, and this air superiority is used to coerce the opponent into compliance both inside and at the borders of its demarcation. To many authors, asking why that specific tool would be used comes down to a simple answer: it is the best tool available to deal with the given situation. However, no-fly zones exhibit fundamental flaws with respect to unconventional

warfare, namely in interventions into intra-state conflict. These are often fought by “semi-professional combatants, with little heavy and mostly old-fashioned weaponry”, and, with regards to no-fly zones, “very little or no airpower at hand” (Berdal & Economides, 2007, p. 40; Gray, 2012; Kaldor, 2013). These aspects of conflict facilitate the adoption of no-fly zones: “Airpower’s flexibility, range, speed and autonomy provide capabilities well suited to peace operations” (Francis II, 1999, p. 61), and make tactical control and air superiority easily achievable. Also, the huge gap in technological capabilities makes violations of the air component of no-fly zones comparatively unlikely (Peifer, 2009). Therefore, in most empirical no-fly zone cases air-to-air-engagement plays only a minor role compared to air-defense suppression, patrols without incidents, or non-violent shows of force (Benard, 2004, p. 469).

However, intra-state conflict theaters complicate the correct identification of targets, and make the desired differentiation between civilian populations that are meant to be protected and combatants that civilians are meant to be protected from a very difficult task. This would already indicate the difficulty of matching rules of engagement with the mandated goal of “protection of civilians” even in designated areas. The problem is exacerbated when dealing with the protection of civilians outside such areas, either literally as a moral dilemma or strategically - both when safe areas are relatively small so that transgressions cannot be punished in time, and when they are so large that constant patrolling involves many sorties. While in theory, no-fly zones stop short of all-out bombing campaigns or ground invasion, the operational difficulties in protecting civilians on the ground and in punishing or deterring transgression might lead to “mission creep”. Alternatively, the no-fly zone freezes a status quo on the ground, thereby inviting “perpetual patrol” scenarios. No-fly zones do not in fact contribute to an easing of tensions on the ground: instead, they may simply “level the killing field” by taking whatever airpower was used in the conflict out of the equation. However, the indiscriminate use of other systems such as artillery, missiles, or even chemical weapons, as well as killing by small arms continue on the ground: the no-fly zone may in fact be actively counter-productive as it simulates engagement in conflict resolution, with violence displaced to other means and atrocities going unpunished (Zenko, 2016b). It also may signal to affected populations a false sense of security and protection from violence which it in fact cannot deliver. Evidence of the Bosnian no-fly zone with its complicated command structure and rigid implementation procedures indicates that, even if implemented, a no-fly zone might be difficult to adapt to a changing situation on the ground. In addition, no-fly zone enforcement and especially target identification are dependent on weather and geographical conditions.

No-fly zone implementation thus may seem to neglect the reality and complexity of the conflict on the ground, and its capability to enforce compliance with international demands on its own is highly debatable. Correspondingly, numerous authors suggest that it is neither strategically optimal nor even



appropriate for interventions into intra-state conflict (Cook, 2012; Gertler et al., 2013; Knights, 2011; McKelvey, 2012; K. P. Mueller, 2013; Renner, 2011; Zenko, 2015, 2016b), and that it is altogether unsuitable for the protection of civilians. Its uses in Iraq and Bosnia have supported this argument empirically, with the Bosnian no-fly zones a disastrous failure and in fact possibly counter-productive to the prevention of violence (Burg & Shoup, 1999; Jakobsen, 1998; Zenko, 2016b), and the Iraqi no-fly zones ineffective at best, and irrelevant at worst in guarding civilians against the Ba'athist regime's crackdown or in coercing the regime into cooperation with the international community (Benard, 2004; Dodge, 2010; Oftringer & Bäcker, 1994). Authors dealing with the effectiveness of no-fly zones (Angle, 1999; Benard, 2004; Francis II, 1999; Gibbons, 2002; Knights, 2003, 2011; Kramlinger, 2001; Renner, 2011; Zenko, 2015, 2016b) seem to come to one conclusion: that the implementation of no-fly zones is

“based upon a flawed and unproven hypothesis [...] [T]he ways and means available are insufficient to accomplish the desired ends. Due to the risk of civilian casualties, environmental factors, and the inherent limitations of airpower, no-fly zones are not capable of protecting civilians from government repression” (Renner, 2011, p. 2).

Hence, from the limited viewpoint that air strategy literature has on decision-making processes, that is, a hierarchical decision path in which such options that fulfill military-strategic considerations of utility, efficiency, and effectiveness get picked over others that do not given a strategic goal set and/or budget constraints, it cannot sufficiently explain why decision-makers would opt, and continue to opt, for no-fly zones as a tool of foreign policy and crisis management. It does not address a central question: *why has the no-fly zone been continuously used in situations that airpower theory and empirical evidence suggest it is not (ideally) suited for?*

From the perspective of the strategic coercion and airpower literatures, no-fly zone usage poses a theoretical and empirical puzzle. Air strategy authors tend to bracket the practical murkiness of decision-making processes to categorize policies and identify recommendations to improve implementation or mission success; hence a criticism leveled against this deliberate choice may seem unfair. Yet, if the question regarding the role of no-fly zones is precisely about the politics of decision-making as they were and are rather than as they should be, then the air strategy literature may be helpful to inform definitions and the understanding of terms, but not to answer this research question. In the next paragraphs, I therefore turn to the coercive diplomacy literature, which deals with no-fly zones as one tool in a larger set of possible options in a bargaining strategy. However, as I argue, coercive diplomacy approaches lack a clear conception of tool choice, and hence also fail to offer insights into why specific tools, and dysfunctional ones at that, would be used.



1.3. Coercive Diplomacy and the No-Fly Zone

When the Clinton administration decided to “take a more assertive role” in Bosnia in February 1993 by implementing a no-fly zone, it “embarked implicitly on a variant of coercive diplomacy. The problems that the administration encountered [...] are illustrative of the kinds of complexities and constraints affecting the implementation of coercive diplomacy [...]” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 1). Indeed, coercive diplomacy authors have analyzed not only the Bosnian no-fly zone in terms of coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs, but extended that same mode of assessment to encompass the allied strategy against Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq as well as the use of the no-fly zone in the Libyan intervention. Yet in all three cases the rationale for employing coercive diplomacy in the first place, and within coercive diplomacy the no-fly zone as one tool, remains unclear. In the next paragraphs, I outline the model of coercive diplomacy, and interrogate whether it can sufficiently explain motivations and processes behind the use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy. I argue that based on both the no-fly zone’s strategic properties (as discussed above) and the coercive diplomacy literature’s predictions, using no-fly zones to forcefully persuade targets seems ill-advised. The way in which no-fly zones have been implemented highlights the tool’s non-suitability to communicating urgency, underlining the coercer’s will to escalate, or testing a target’s resolve. And indeed, based on the coercive diplomacy literature’s assessments, coercive diplomacy seems to have failed in all three no-fly zone cases (Art & Cronin, 2003). This unsatisfying analytical result is the result of limitations inherent in coercive diplomacy detailed below.

Coercive diplomacy is a model of the threat and use of force developed by Alexander George in his hallmark publications on “Forceful Persuasion” and “The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy”⁵ based on Schelling’s concept of compellence⁶, albeit in the context of inter-state conflict and Cold War bipolarity rather than modern-day crisis management. A reinterpretation of classical thinkers and a focus on logical methods of analysis by Alexander George, William Simons and Gordon Craig brought the hope of properly refining techniques of statecraft and preventing a failure of deterrence that would lead to nuclear war. In the heyday of bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, coercive diplomacy authors hoped to “remarry” force to diplomacy (Nathan, 2002, p. 131). Intelligent crisis management would be about finding ways to “discretely proportion force”, make it “a calculable instrument in bargaining” (Nathan, 2002, p. 131), and tame its potential for escalation. At the time, it

⁵ The latter contribution will guide this analysis, since it reiterates and adds to the central arguments of the former.

⁶ While the logic of compellence is present in writings of Thucydides, Machiavelli, or Clausewitz, only Thomas Schelling’s hallmark works on *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960) and *Arms and Influence* (1966) brought it ample attention. Compellence means “inducing a person to do something through fear, doubt, anxiety, etc.”, and particularly persuading an adversary to alter a course of action that has already been started or executed (this being the major difference to deterrence; Schelling, 1966, p. 3). Schelling explains that “the threat that compels rather than deters, therefore, often takes the form of administering the punishment until the other acts, rather than if he acts” (Schelling, 1966, p. 4).

was perceived as “a great given that force could serve as a kind of functional strategy, wherein “adversaries” would bargain with each other through the mechanism of graduated increments of military force [...]” (Nathan, 2002, p. 135). Indeed, Schelling wrote in *Arms and Influence* that “[t]he power to hurt is bargaining power [...] to influence somebody’s behavior to coerce his decisions or choice; to be coercive, violence has to be anticipated” (Schelling, 1966, p. 2). Although some authors conceive of coercive diplomacy as a mere rebranding of Schelling’s earlier concept (Schaub Jr., 2003), coercive diplomacy is distinguished from compellence in that it encompasses a “more flexible diplomacy”, which can employ “rational persuasion and accommodation as well as coercive threats” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 7). Coercive diplomacy focuses on the threat of the use of force rather than its actual application to make adversaries comply with demands. To that end, coercive diplomacy entails assumptions about rationality both for the coercer and the coerced: The coercer makes a cost-benefit calculation determining that some specification of coercive diplomacy is the most likely successful strategy in each situation. Unfortunately, literature on why and when decision-makers engage in coercive diplomacy and how they go about the heuristic process of determining coercive diplomacy to be their strategy towards an adversary is scarce, as will be discussed below. With regards to the coerced (“target”), the model postulates “that such diplomacy will be successful if demands on an adversary are backed with a threat of punishment for noncompliance that will be considered credible and potent enough to encourage compliance” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 13), thereby assuming a rational opponent that can assess whether costs and risks of non-compliance outweigh benefits from its current course of action.

Can offensive use of military force, such as empirically visible in no-fly zones, be considered part of a coercive diplomacy strategy? George outlines how coercive diplomacy is to be understood as a “defensive strategy”⁷ employed to “deal with the efforts of an adversary to change a status quo situation in his own favor” and to “persuade that adversary to stop or reverse an action” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 13). It is also a “non-military strategy”, in that it uses force to communicate rather than enforce deliberative positions: it “seeks to persuade an opponent to cease aggression rather than to bludgeon him into stopping” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 10). If used at all, military force in coercive diplomacy is part of a psychological strategy to resolve a conflict of interests, and as such is exemplary and symbolic: it is meant to “demonstrate resolution and to give credibility to the threat that greater force will be used if necessary” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 10). This supposedly lessens the costs of

⁷ In fact, George & Simon go to great lengths to distinguish coercive diplomacy from offensive strategies, explaining that “defensive uses are quite different from offensive ones, wherein coercive threats can be employed aggressively to persuade a victim to give up something of value without putting up resistance”, a strategy that they would label “blackmail” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 7). They caution against militarily powerful states being “tempted at times to believe that they can, with little risk, intimidate weaker opponents”. If the weaker state calls the bluff, the coercer would have to either back off or escalate (George & Simons, 1994, p. 9). It remains unclear whether empirically observable aggressive behavior (i.e. coercive diplomacy failure) falls within the concept’s theoretical boundaries.

achieving goals: coercive diplomacy is more likely to work without bloodshed, as it is less likely to escalate uncontrollably and entails fewer political costs (George & Simons, 1994, p. 9) because it relies on controlled communicative action rather than predetermined automatisms. Nevertheless, the concept has been criticized for its unclear distinction between threatening force and using it, not least because this complicates the assessment of success (Bellamy, 2000, p. 96; Levy, 2008b, p. 542; Rich, 2009, p. 35): “[a]ll of the conditions George identifies as favoring the use of coercive diplomacy can be applied to its use as a more offensive strategy” (Levy, 2008b, p. 542). Indeed, considering the uses of no-fly zones against Iraq or Libya, an array of definitional twists would be necessary to re-interpret forceful aerial occupation as part of a “defensive” coercive diplomacy strategy. Such sophistry about essentially subjective terms has led some authors to thoroughly reject the defense-offense split (Jakobsen, 1998, 2000a). There are three types of answers levied against such criticism: firstly, offensive strategies are supposedly more difficult and thus less likely to be effective, because it is harder to achieve gains than limit losses against an opponent. Differences in motivational asymmetry might not be large enough, because the attacked target has much more to lose and would be more likely not to comply: the asymmetry of motivation would favor the target rather than the sender of coercive diplomacy (Levy, 2008b, p. 540). Secondly, George’s argument that norms of international law and conduct reinforce defensive strategies would be reversed, which undercuts domestic and international support for the coercer. Lastly, the “defensiveness” of coercive diplomacy might have to be seen through the lens of Cold War confrontation, when relations were defined by bipolarity between coercer (in almost all case studies, the US) and targets (e.g. the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis). “Classic” coercive diplomacy begins when deterrence has failed to defend vital interests (hence the inherent assumption that the asymmetry of motivations should favor the coercer rather than the target). Looking at coercive diplomacy through this historical-contextual lens, however, would mean that in modern times (implying complexity, cases of confrontation that do not involve vital national interests, etc.) either “defensiveness” can be abandoned because it is not central to coercive diplomacy, or that coercive diplomacy should be reframed.

The initial model of coercive diplomacy has several other weaknesses, namely that its effectiveness is a context-dependent function of different factors such as the type of provocation, the range of involved interests, the number of actors and their perceptions, and the degree of urgency (Levy, 2008b, p. 540). Military powers “may encounter other constraints, risks, and uncertainties” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 9) when attempting to use coercive diplomacy, including a lack of political-diplomatic support or military readiness at the inception of the crisis that makes a resort to force impossible (George & Simons, 1994, p. 10). Effectiveness and ultimate success of coercive diplomacy depend not only on the asymmetry of motivation favoring the coercer and the target’s fear of unacceptable escalation, but also on factors such as the clarity of the demand, the strength of the coercer’s motivation, and

adequate domestic and international support. Therefore, coercive diplomacy arguably “rests in the last analysis on psychological variables” (Levy, 2008b, p. 540). George & Simons suggest that “the model is only a starting point for designing a particular strategy of coercive diplomacy for a specific situation and also for helping to assess whether that strategy or a variant of it would likely be successful in that situation” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 16).

Deducing a more practical strategy of when and how to engage an adversary has been a major challenge. It also fertilized academic discussion, most likely because of its direct policy relevance and its potential for case study research⁸. George & Simons prescribe four tasks of strategizing: firstly, designing and implementing a certain sequence of diplomatic moves and threats, and in so doing, secondly, choosing from a range of possible coercive options the ones befitting to the situation. Options range from the more cautious try-and-see approach to the more forceful ultimatum, where different combinations of threats, urgency and incentives result in different expected results and escalation risks. The ultimatum particularly is perceived to entail high risks of escalation or failure, because of its all-or-nothing tendency (George & Simons, 1994, p. 274). Thirdly, the assumption of a rational adversary is replaced with a more realistic profile including political, cultural, and psychological variables. In particular, ideas about the opponent’s motives, ultimate objectives, likely rationale or calculus and probable reactions come together to an integrated “image of the opponent”, which can determine the effectiveness of a particular course of coercive diplomacy (George & Simons, 1994, p. 288). This insight points to the crucial role ideas and interpretations of the scenario at hand may play in decision-making processes, which will be discussed further in the following chapters. Fourthly, contextual variables such as history of prior engagement and the expected and/or desired future relationship with the adversary are of causal importance (George & Simons, 1994, p. 20). The global strategic environment, the type of provocation that preceded the use of coercive diplomacy, the consequences of escalation, if coalitional partners are involved in determining an appropriate strategy, and whether the target is isolated or not are all crucially relevant (George & Simons, 1994, p. 274).

The ideal process can be likened to choosing from a menu, where meal options are picked depending on the customer’s predilections:

“The decisions made in specifying [...] strategy at the outset are subject to change during the course of the crisis. The coercive power may stiffen or dilute its demands, enhance or relax the sense of urgency initially conveyed, or soften the threat of punishment and its credibility and move from reliance only on threats to a carrots-and-sticks variant of the strategy” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 17).

⁸ Frequently cited cases include the ultimatum issued against Serbia, Hitler’s strategy prior to WWII, and the Berlin crises. The Cuban missile crisis still serves as a stand-out case for the success of coercive diplomacy: indeed, the framework was built around it. The Vietnam intervention, US support in Nicaragua and US policies towards Iraq (during and after the Persian Gulf War) have often been analyzed as either failures of or misguided attempts at coercive diplomacy.

Conditions that generally favor the success of coercive diplomacy are the clarity of the formulated objective in coercing the target, an asymmetry of motivation favoring the coercer rather than the target, presumably related to the “importance” of the issue in terms of national interest, a clearly communicated sense of urgency that is instilled in the target to make it react to the demands made, leadership in the sense of a clear set of hierarchies that determines who makes and communicates decisions, threats, and possible punishment, “adequate domestic and international support” (left unspecified by George & Simons), the unacceptability of threatened escalation to the target (closely related to the asymmetry of motivations) and the clarity of terms of a potential settlement, that is, when coercive diplomacy stops (George & Simons, 1994, pp. 276–278). Combining the fourth point from above and these conditions, one arrives at the staggering number of 14 variables (five contextual and nine conditional) to specify the abstract model. This complexity and over-specification has led some authors to question the applicability of coercive diplomacy to strategic planning (Rutherford, 2002, p. 39).

Later authors try to answer this challenge (Art & Cronin, 2003; Bellamy, 2000; Blechman & Wittes, 1999; Jakobsen, 1998; Jentleson & Whytock, 2005; Rich, 2009; Schaub Jr., 2003; Schultz, 2001; Walsh, 2005; Zeng, 2004).⁹ They ask what makes cases “good candidates” for coercive diplomacy, and when the strategy might be appropriate or not. With regards to Iraq, for example, because of “the drawn-out nature of the conflict, the relatively large number of confrontations, the nature of the target regime, limited will in the United States for coercive measures, and the difficulties of coalition maintenance”, few of which were predictable from the onset, Iraq was supposedly a “poor candidate” for coercive diplomacy (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 276). The US position towards Iraq was burdened with an ill-defined goal set, even though clearly “[i]t is far easier to use coercive diplomacy to achieve a limited, positive outcome in the short term than to manage a number of competing goals over more than a decade” (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 276). Although George & Simons had seen regime change as a potential goal of coercive diplomacy, success of such a strategy is unlikely if the regime change is “almost certainly suicidal for the current leadership”, because in such circumstances the regime does not have anything more to lose (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 277). Also, coercive diplomacy does not occur in isolation, but is one tool among many that states can and will employ (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 277). This is an interesting argument considering that coercive diplomacy can also be understood as a broader strategy rather than a tool, i.e. when other tools such as sanctions are used in parallel, they

⁹ In fact, they do so wholeheartedly and in large numbers. The following review is limited to those authors who either include cases in which no-fly zones were used, or contribute to how and why specific tools are chosen within coercive diplomacy. It should be noted that there is a considerable time gap between earlier scholars of coercive diplomacy and modern accounts from the mid-90s onwards. This time gap has to do with the focus on deterrence rather than compellence throughout the Cold War. Since the Soviet Union’s disintegration, the lens of bipolarity that was automatically inherent to earlier analyses has been taken off to account for modern complexities, and newer types of challenges and adversaries in the field of coercive diplomacy.



fall under the same coercive strategy. Either this contradiction is due to a terminological confusion of what “tool” and “strategy” mean, or theorists of coercive diplomacy do not always spell out clearly if their arguments are prescriptive or descriptive (i.e. if coercive diplomacy *should* be used as one tool/strategy amongst many, or if it just *is* due to ill-defined policy goals and chaotic implementation).

Many authors contribute an assessment of failures and successes similar to George & Simons’ cases from the Cold War, and tend to find a 30% success rate of coercive diplomacy (for a summary: Art & Cronin, 2003). If coercive diplomacy was indeed the rationale behind no-fly zones, then in all three cases I investigate in further detail below it failed, because more open forms of warfare were necessary to change the target’s behavior (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 360). To answer why coercive diplomacy is likely to fail, coercive diplomacy authors focus on three sets of problems: *firstly*, the correct estimation and testing of (profiles of) resolve of a target (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 371). Even if initial estimates are correct, resolves can change throughout the crisis, and are more likely to harden rather than weaken in the face of threats. A target’s evaluation of such threats and the likelihood of it yielding to coercive diplomacy depends on various contextual factors, such as historic precedent for threats, the reputation of the coercer (derived from other cases, changes over time in coercive strategy; Jentleson & Whytock, 2005), the presence or absence of allied support, or the difficulty of compliance (Blechman & Wittes, 1999). Also, the likelihood of success depends on political and economic factors within the target that influence its cost-benefit calculation, including regime self-perpetuation, economic threats and incentives, and elite interests (Jentleson & Whytock, 2005, p. 53).¹⁰

Secondly, a strategy built on the assumption that ever-greater fear of future punishment can convince a target to change its mind is difficult because humans tend to discount the future against the present (Art & Cronin, 2003). This leads targets to opt for non-compliance more often, which in turn increases the likelihood of escalation, and thus the failure of coercive diplomacy. Engaging in coercive diplomacy in this manner is a risk strategy not only from the side of the target (i.e. how is future risk of punishment discounted?), but also from the coercer’s side: what is the risk of future escalation, and how is that risk evaluated against other possible outcomes; i.e. how high is the propensity or willingness of the coercer to engage? This point is touched upon by numerous authors either from a risk propensity perspective (Herring, 1995; Vertzberger, 1998) or by focusing on threat effectiveness (Blechman & Wittes, 1999) and ideal combinations with inducements and assurances (Jakobsen, 2007; Jentleson & Whytock, 2005, p. 51).

¹⁰ Numerous highly interesting contributions have elaborated on the exact form of this calculation, estimating e.g. key value and probability factors in the adversary’s calculation of whether to comply or not comply derived from expected utility and prospect theory. Aside from the sophistication of these models, it is striking that analysis of decision-making is focused on the target rather than the coercer, and that its outcomes rather than processes are at the forefront of discussion.



Thirdly, then, success depends on the will of the coercing party to escalate. To determine when militarily superior states will use coercive diplomacy, it is necessary to analyze when they will be prone to threaten and use force. Transparent communication channels, prearranged strategies of escalation, and a clear common interpretation of threats, demands and necessary action are necessary so that both the coercing side as well as the target understand what is being demanded and what escalatory steps are considered (Bellamy, 2000, p. 211). In cases where multiple coercers try to coerce (multiple) targets, interaction effects and communication not only between coercer and targets, but also between the coercers themselves (“coalitional consensus”), influence the coercing side’s will to use force and the types of threats they issue (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 49). The clarity of between-coercer communication depends on processes within the respective foreign policy executives of each coalition or alliance member (Zeng, 2004, p. 5). Jakobsen suggests that “[t]he willingness of states to use force [emerges] from interaction among three variables: 1. the nature of the threatened interests; 2. the prospects of military success, 3. the level of domestic support” (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 34). Interests range from vital to tangential: when coercive diplomacy is considered for humanitarian purposes rather than because of “hard” cases of national interest, asymmetry of motivation is more likely to favor the target, and non-compliance is more likely (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 373).

This approach embeds strategies of coercive diplomacy within a theoretical framework, namely (structural) realism, that does provide a causal rationale for the origins of state behavior, namely the relative capabilities and threats as well as position in the international system which determine interests and interest levels. This connection is already evident in George & Simons’s contributions (George & Simons, 1994, p. 274). Correspondingly, the likelihood of military success depends on relative capabilities (as well as risk-averseness) of the coercer, as this increases or decreases the willingness to escalate (Jakobsen, 1998, pp. 40–42). However, the deduction of capabilities, threats, and positions in the international environment is not a straight-forward process, and coercer motivation depends on more than purely interest. The transmission belt between systemic conditions and state behavior may instead be mediated by additional domestic factors: for Jakobson, domestic support can be measured through public opinion polls or media reporting (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 42). Particularly “geopolitical attitudes” as well as other ideational factors may play an important role in explaining public support of coercive diplomacy strategies (Onderco, 2017). Democratic states are particularly constrained in the threats they can make, especially against other democracies (Poznansky & Scroggs, 2016): “Open deliberation and debate, essential for representation and accountability domestically, have profound effects on whether and when democratic governments can effectively use threats of force to prevail in international crises” (Schultz, 2001, p. 1), as decision-makers are forced to compete publicly with their rivals (Schultz, 2001, p. 7). The public nature of decision-making creates “both benefits and liabilities” (Schultz, 2001, p. 2), as the will “of a democratic government to

threaten and use force is positively correlated to the degree of domestic support that such action enjoys” (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 41). This is evident also in the salience of coercive diplomacy strategies in the presidential election cycle (Chiozza, 2017). A foreign policy move or threat that evolved out of such a debate, or that is backed by the opposition, also becomes more credible. Hence, decision-makers should try to “find ways to take electoral and other political considerations into account without sacrificing the soundness of the policy’s strategy” (Jentleson & Whytock, 2005, p. 82). Increasingly, the “relative consensus that prevailed during the Cold War has been replaced by more frequent contention over both the ends and means of foreign policy” (Schultz, 2001, p. 3), thereby both increasing the role of contrasting ideas and paradigms in foreign policy decision-making and also leading to what can be perceived as inconsistency and competition within executives over what is in the national interest, and over appropriate strategies to mobilize state power in response. This crucial insight will form the basis of my theoretical framework introduced in the subsequent chapter.

1.3.1. The Limitations of Coercive Diplomacy Literature

Coercive diplomacy remains an important framework to analyze and understand foreign policy and foreign policy outcomes because of its conceptual clarity, its applicability to a broad field of interaction on different levels of analysis and in different cases from the Peloponnesian War to the Libyan intervention and from trade negotiations to Cold War stand-offs, and because of its descriptive and explanatory power for these cases. Its obvious advantages lie in its clear conceptualization of actors in a (mostly) two-player game, the process of interaction between them, and the likely outcomes both effective and flawed interaction may have. In doing so, it also has a (albeit limited) predictive character, and aids in policy formulation. However, its explanatory value for no-fly zone initiation is severely limited due to several factors that I highlight in the next paragraphs. I instead outline how an alternative framework combining insights from neoclassical realism and foreign policy decision-making literature can address these shortcomings.

To many authors, asking why coercive diplomacy would be used has a simple answer: a state wants something from another state, and rather than using brute force to get it, it tests if it can forego the costs of open warfare by only threatening to use force. But this statement only scratches the surface of foreign policy decision-making: quite apparently, alternatives to coercive diplomacy entail forms of open warfare, but also peaceful forms of diplomacy. Also, coercive diplomacy itself is not one strategy, but entails a multitude of different forms and “ingredients”. Thus, when and why to engage in what form in the first place is not only a relevant question to be asked, but also one of the highest policy importance. Unfortunately, the *when* and *why* questions are highly under-theorized in coercive diplomacy. Coercive diplomacy literature, because of its overt focus on “the art of (military) coercion

in statecraft in general and the efficacy of threats in particular” is “not helpful in answering questions such as why leaders abandon diplomacy and resort to military coercion in the first place” (Kurizaki, 2007, p. 37). As Levy points out, George does not focus at all on the “conditions which led political leaders to embark on a strategy of coercive diplomacy in the first place”, which “risks underestimating their causal impact” (Levy, 2008b, p. 540). Instead, George mentions in a rather superfluous fashion that “[...] theory, in any of its forms and even in its most developed stage, cannot serve as a substitute for the judgment that a decision-maker must make in deciding whether and how to employ coercive diplomacy in any particular situation” (George & Simons, 1994, p. 3). Correspondingly, the choice of strategy depends entirely on “the coercer’s perception of the adversary’s interests and his own willingness to risk escalation and ultimately war to achieve the desired outcome” (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 19). Thus, when asking how exactly leaders combine different tactics, i.e. coercion, persuasion, compromise and positive inducements, and in what sequence, Levy is left with pointing out that “[t]here is no evidence that a particular combination and sequence is optimal under all circumstances, but a substantial amount of research suggests that George is correct that strictly coercive or bullying strategies are not optimal under most conditions [...]” (Levy, 2008b, p. 541). Both points have been taken on by Jakobsen (Jakobsen, 1998), who attempts to remedy one problem by developing his own ideal policy, which remains contested. Tackling the other problem of “first-order” choice towards coercive diplomacy is almost unique to Jakobsen, and I have illustrated above how he conceptualizes different characteristics (namely interest, costs, and domestic support) that play into his process of “will-creation” towards coercive diplomacy. Others only caution against the use of coercive diplomacy as a “default option” or as a “disingenuous” path towards escalation (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. xi), particularly because of the strategy’s potentially “beguiling” characteristics, seeming “easier to do than analysis shows it to be, and than it has proven to be” (Art & Cronin, 2003, p. 49; Jentleson & Whytock, 2005). This lack of optimal strategy and optimal sequence would then lead us to believe that choosing coercive diplomacy and choosing a sequence of “ingredients” is a decision-making problem that must be addressed, and a question of underlying preferences and ideas of decision-makers. However, coercive diplomacy theorists tend to presume coercer motivation as a given and unitary. Most of what coercive diplomacy offers on the coercer’s motivation relates to intensity rather than quality or content: depending on who is more willing to potentially engage in open warfare, the asymmetry of motivation either favors the coercer or the target (Herring, 1995).

Logically, then, the coercer’s motivation (more precisely, its communication) is (at best) treated as a question of strategy optimization, e.g. how to make the most credible and most potent threat, which in turn influences the cost-benefit-calculation of the target. The reason for using tools in a specific sequence, then, is that they solve (in the rationale of the coercer) an optimization problem: they are, at the given time, the optimal tool to forcefully persuade the target. Per this interpretation, the no-fly

zone would be an intermediary step in a sequence of different tools (ranging from sanctions to open warfare) optimized to communicate urgency, motivation and a willingness to escalate further. This interpretation is problematic for (at least) two interrelated reasons: firstly, as the empirical chapters below illuminate further, there is scant evidence to suggest that states a priori conceptualize no-fly zones as preliminary steps towards more aggressive action, i.e. as something to be scaled up where necessary (although all three no-fly zones here under investigation merge with or develop into other tools and policies eventually). Secondly, even they did, this would mean that states in their calculus of how to engage their targets have not only repeatedly been wrong with regards to the no-fly zone (because coercive diplomacy has failed in all three cases), but have also ignored both the strategic properties of the no-fly zone suggested by coercion and airpower literature as well as the suggestions of coercive diplomacy literature as to what necessary conditions need to be in place for coercive diplomacy to work. While that is certainly an empirical possibility, the repeated use of the no-fly zone over more than a decade under several US administrations begs the question whether looking at *underlying motivations* for using that specific tool beyond the broad contours of systemic conditions and given interests might not be a worthwhile endeavor. Thus, even if one accepts the notion of no-fly zones as tools of coercive diplomacy, their distinct role both within the concept in general and the cases remains underspecified if one does not acquire an understanding of their usage that is explanatory (why is it used?) as well as descriptive (how is it used?). The argument that “no-fly zones are used to forcefully persuade a target” is superfluous because it does not consider “first-order” motivations behind their implementation.

This is because the concept of coercive diplomacy (just as structural realism) has a confusing relationship with the notion of agency on the coercer’s side. Who drives the policy decisions to use specific tools of coercive diplomacy? Obviously, different authors have different perspectives on the relevant actors and levels of analysis, but coercive diplomacy was developed out of realist thought with the state as a unitary actor (Schultz, 2001, p. 15). State behavior is derived from systemic conditions in an anarchical structure, and any process or variation within domestic politics is “overwhelmed by the constraints of international competition” (Schultz, 2001, p. 15). As will be further discussed below, such a conceptualization is advantageous because it limits the independent variables of foreign policy decision-making. Attempting to identify every single factor that influenced a specific decision could otherwise amount to a “back-breaking burden” (Hudson, 2005, p. 3; McClosky, 1962, p. 201). However, precisely because of this conceptualization, literature on coercive diplomacy fails to explain continuously suboptimal foreign policy choices. If motivation is given by systemic conditions and the outcome is “primarily driven by efforts to communicate resolve as states try to convince one another that they are willing to wage war if their demands are not met” (Schultz, 2001, p. 4), then it is natural to focus on the specifications of that communication and the results it has on the receiver,



rather than analyzing why (and why *so?*) the coercer used it in the first place. If threats and displays of force are the primary means of communication, and their success depends on the credibility with which they are sent, “the belief they generate in the target that the threatened action will be carried out” (Schultz, 2001, p. 4), it is logical to focus on these threats and the reactions of the target in greater detail, and *not* on the coercer’s motivation to issue them. Thus, coercive diplomacy cannot account for the process of choice of its own strategy, and for how decisions for or against tools are made within this strategy. It lacks explanatory value for the uses of specific tools, e.g. the no-fly zone rather than sanctions. Instead, it is necessary to employ a different set of questions, and re-focus on the decision-making process of the coercer prior to the use of tools. To fully conceptualize no-fly zone initiation, it is necessary to open the “black box” of the state to look at foreign policy decision-making processes. I argue in the next chapter that neoclassical realism is well suited to such an endeavor, as it “seeks to explain variations of foreign policy over time and space by supplementing the structural assumptions of neorealism with a set of condition variables” to contextualize the impact of systemic conditions on foreign policy choice (Wivel, 2005, p. 361).

When conceptualizing the coercer’s motivations and decisions, one must address how these come about, and which variables matter in the decision-making process. Coercive diplomacy, in its most general form, conceptualizes the interaction between two states as a narrow game between a coercer and a target. The game consists of moves and counter-moves these two players can make between them, answering and reacting to the other; hence the focus on urgency, motivation, and transfer of information. As argued above, this way of conceptualizing state interaction is attractive because of its conceptual clarity and relatively easy operationalization: in that sense, it is good theory. However, narrowing the arena in which the actors play to an essentially one-dimensional two-player interaction comes at a price, namely leaving out domestic factors that play into foreign policy creation (Rose, 1998, p. 165). The coercer, in the sense of a decision-maker (e.g. the president or government) does not only play against the target, but also deliberates with other actors domestically. Coercive diplomacy theorists have hinted at this throughout the literature, starting with George & Simons’ short remarks on international and domestic contextual factors. In contributions that are conceptually detached from coercive diplomacy, George writes on the stress factor in crisis decision-making, as well as on the importance of the “operational codes” of different administrations and bureaucracies that play into the way decisions are made (George, 1969, 1984). Authors caution that rather than merely asserting that context matters in some way, coercive diplomacy needs to consider a broad variety of additional contextual variables and think about exactly how, why, and when domestic politics, political competition or negotiations play a role (Schultz, 2001, p. 2). Jentleson & Whytock outline that successful coercive diplomacy is “more likely to be achieved if other major international actors are supportive and if opposition within the coercing state’s domestic politics is limited” (Jentleson &

Whytock, 2005, p. 51), and introduce victims' families as a domestic constraint in their study on Libya. Others have focused on presidential election cycles (Chiozza, 2017) or public support measures to explain coercive diplomacy onset (Onderco, 2017). Similarly, Schultz and Zeng have offered attempts to bring the domestic into play (Schultz, 2001; Zeng, 2004). Others have touched upon the difficulties of coalitional coercion (Bellamy, 2000). There is, however, a tendency to treat these additional arenas as externalities to the logic of coercive diplomacy, as something that either negatively or positively influences the tactical game played between coercer and target, and that usually must be "minimized" (Jentleson & Whytock, 2005, p. 60). In the literature's focus on formulating ideal coercive diplomacy strategy, the reasons for flawed policy tend to be sidelined. To explain outcomes such as the no-fly zone, however, necessitates a focus on and a (re-)conceptualization of foreign policy-decision making. The use of tools is *not* the outcome of a narrow two-player game in a single arena defined only by the national interest. Evidently, intra-administrative politics give meaning to scenarios and humanitarian crises as well as shape the form of response (Farrell, 2010, p. 317; Trumbore & Boyer, 2000). To conceptualize why no-fly zones are used, it is crucial to explicitly theorize the political dynamics of decision-making, and particularly the ideational deliberation within the foreign policy executive.

Coercive diplomacy is in its roots and its focus on a tactical interaction between coercer and target a rational-actor model of state behavior. Rationalist approaches assert that purposeful and goal-oriented actors make a cost-benefit calculation, and engage in strategic bargaining to maximize their utility. Particularly the cost-benefit-calculations of the target vis-à-vis compliance or non-compliance have been spelled out in detail, not least for policy prescription (i.e. how to coerce a specific adversary successfully). The coercer faces a similar calculation when a target, calling the threat, puts it in the position of deciding whether to back out or escalate. Rational decision-making models have two conceptual advantages over other models: firstly, they have a simple and clearly defined frame of decision-making, namely a cost-benefit calculation. Secondly, because of that frame, they can be formalized, and thus more easily empirically tested (Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 6; Stein, 2012, p. 138). As Schaub rightly observes, criticizing models of rational-decision making based on their detachment from behavioral reality and empirical basis is common, but often based on only the simplest forms of "pure" rationalism (which puts arduous demands upon a decision-maker; see below; Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 8). In fact, bounded rationality models have clarified further how rationality interplays with coercion (see below; Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 9). This is especially relevant for short-term decision-making because time and information constraints influence how and why specific tools are chosen over others. And indeed, coercive diplomacy literature has moved away from "pure" concepts of rationality with regards to the target's cost-benefit calculation (Oneal, 1988, p. 602): several authors, including George, have stressed the importance of contextualizing the underlying rational-actor model with more apt behavioral profiles of the target, considering psychological traits of leaders, culture and identity, and other



domestic factors. However, while a range of scholars deals with *target* cost-benefit calculations, detailed conceptualizations of decision-making models for the coercing side are scarce in the coercive diplomacy literature. In addition, coercive diplomacy's (and by extension realism's) (limited) rationality assumption also has left little room for the integration of ideational variables.

1.4. Thesis Overview

In this chapter, I have introduced the theoretical and empirical puzzle driving this thesis based on a comprehensive review of relevant literatures on airpower and no-fly zones as well as on coercive diplomacy. No-fly zones continue to be used as tools of military intervention in US foreign policy in situations for which they are strategically and tactically inappropriate and inadequate at best, and detrimental to conflict resolution and the protection of civilians at worst. Strategic coercion and airpower literature tends to focus on the military-strategic aspects of implementation, and strives to optimize the choice of tools by offering insights into what the no-fly zone can and cannot do. As its focus is on the implementation, utility and effectiveness of tools, this literature has little to offer on questions of prior foreign policy decision-making, and thus cannot satisfactorily answer why no-fly zones would be used the way they were in Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya. The coercive diplomacy literature provides a better angle, as it deals with the incremental escalation of the threat and use of force to deter or compel an adversarial party. The no-fly zone would then be a tool of coercive diplomacy employed after less violent means have failed, and before more violent means are introduced – a step in the ladder of escalation. Indeed, coercive diplomacy can serve as a useful starting point to think about logics of escalation, asymmetries of motivation, and the dynamics of tool choice. Beyond these insights, however, the coercive diplomacy framework lacks a conception of political decision-making which would allow it to accurately describe the process on the coercer's side that begets the use of coercive diplomacy in the first place, and leads to the use of any specific tool. By implying tool choice follows a pre-determined strategy, coercive diplomacy needlessly obscures the intra-administrative intricacies involved in what is frequently a complex political process intervening between systemic conditions and tool choice.

In the next chapter, I offer a framework to address these shortcomings. Employing a neoclassical realist framework, I suggest that the decision for the no-fly zone is neither the result of carefully optimized military strategy given pre-defined national interests, nor the result of a quasi-mechanistic escalation of coercive diplomacy to compel adversarial target states. Instead, given a permissive international environment and unclear systemic conditions, decision-makers employ a variety of ideas to help them appraise the situation, deduce the national interest, and identify appropriate ways and means of mobilizing state power in response. As foreign policy creation is a deliberative process, decision-

makers instrumentalize these ideas to argue, defend their interpretations, and persuade others. This process of competing ideas can lead to deadlock under conditions of weak leadership and time pressure. I argue that precisely because of the inherent military-strategic flexibility of no-fly zones, as outlined above, the tool serves to bridge ideational divides: It “does something” that everyone can agree on. The detrimental results of this inherent short-termism are visible in all cases yet do not seem to diminish the tool’s attractiveness as a political compromise solution. Introducing ideas as intervening variables between systemic conditions and state behavior poses several ontological, epistemological and methodological challenges, which I continue to discuss in Chapter 3. I suggest that neoclassical realism is based in “soft” positivism and a Humean understanding of causality and causal mechanisms, both of which point towards the case study method to test the intricacies of the foreign policy decision-making process. I discuss case selection criteria, reliability, validity and generalization of the suggested research, as well as the within-case design, specifically process-tracing and textual analysis, and the methodological limitations of this research.

Chapter 4, 5 and 6 interrogate the cases of northern Iraq, Bosnia and Libya respectively. I demonstrate the operationalization of the suggested neoclassical realist framework. Within the cases, extensive archival material and other primary and secondary sources are employed to carefully trace the decision-making process, and outline confirming and disconfirming evidence for the role of ideas about US interests and about appropriate response strategies in the American foreign policy executive’s deliberations prior to no-fly zone implementation. The 1991 intervention into Iraq immediately after Saddam Hussein’s forces had suppressed the rebelling Kurdish minority in northern Iraq after the Gulf War provided decision-makers with a new tool to supposedly protect civilians from afar: the no-fly zone developed out of “combat air patrol” (CAP), specifically the accompanying of humanitarian airdrops by jetfighters to cover against adversarial obstruction. Over time, it emerged as a stand-alone tool with the primary purpose of addressing not the necessities on the ground, but the ideational divisions in the White House. The first no-fly zone, still embedded in a quickly growing humanitarian assistance mission, transcended its tactical support role to symbolize, in decision-making deliberations, an ideational compromise between those in the Bush administration worried about “another Vietnam” and those in favor of using the international environment’s new permissiveness to militarily assert American ideals.

The no-fly zone in Bosnia is found to have resulted from similar ideational competition into which both the Bush administration in 1992 and particularly the Clinton administration in early 1993 maneuvered themselves. The international environment was largely permissive, although particularly the European allies constrained potential unilateral engagement as they were worried about their peacekeepers on the ground. The Bush administration initially assessed US interests as limited, but as the situation on

the ground worsened, it became torn between ideas of pragmatism, restraint and the dreaded “Vietnam effect” on the one hand, and ideas about leadership and “clean” intervention by air on the other. It handed off this dilemma to its successor, who soon realized his campaign rhetoric and ideas about US involvement and responsibility in the face of atrocities contradicted those about multilateralism. Throughout, ideas about appropriate strategies of state power mobilization centered on the use of airpower and ways in which such airpower could be limited and restrained. Given systemic stimuli, the no-fly zone resulted from ideational competition within the foreign policy executive rather than from military-strategic optimization in terms of conflict resolution or the protection of civilians.

Similar patterns of ideational competition were at work in the decision-making process towards intervention in Libya. Faced with a largely permissive environment, but amidst discussions of America in decline and a grand strategy re-focus to Asia, the Obama administration struggled to identify appropriate foreign policy when Muammar Ghaddafi’s regime started cracking down on demonstrators and then armed rebels in 2011. The no-fly zone offered a way out of the administration’s ideational competition: because of its military-strategic characteristics, it seemingly bridged the divides between those favoring assertive intervention and even regime change, and those hesitant to backtrack on the administration’s declared policies and involve the US in another conflict theater in the Arab world. Not unsurprisingly, the no-fly zone proved insufficient to address problems on the ground or effectively protect civilians as the conflict persisted, and was replaced with a more aggressive air campaign.

In Chapter 7, I investigate three deviant cases to probe into the framework’s scope conditions, and the relative causal importance of systemic conditions and ideas respectively. In the case of the 1998 Kosovo intervention, similar processes of ideational competition were observable, but systemic conditions were stricter with regards to the US position vis-à-vis allies and partners. The intervention became more aggressive as higher US interests in alliance maintenance and management were at stake. In contrast to Bosnia, then, the Clinton administration assessed its position vis-à-vis its European allies differently, and ideational competition about US interests and appropriate strategies of state power mobilization, while still present, did not result in insurmountable ideational divides. In the case of South Sudan/Darfur, while the international environment was largely permissive, conditions for the specific scenario at hand were in fact not: the Clinton and Bush administrations both assessed US interests as limited and the required capabilities for aerial occupation of Sudanese airspace as prohibitive. While ideational competition over US interests and strategies to respond to the situation in South Sudan still occurred, systemic constraints to US involvement prevented military intervention. In 2011, the Libyan no-fly zone model was suggested for use in the Syrian civil war. However, the

Obama administration was faced with much more restrictive systemic conditions. Although multiple windows of opportunity opened, the administration could not risk a politically as well as militarily costly intervention against Russia's ally. With the open involvement of Russia in Syria, even the most fervent supporters of a no-fly zone in Syria within the Obama administration realized its impossibility. Instead, as I describe, the no-fly zone took on a second life in the US presidential elections in 2015/16.

Finally, the conclusion reiterates this thesis' core theoretical and empirical contributions, especially to neoclassical realism, foreign policy decision-making, and no-fly zone research, as well as its limitations, and explores avenues for further research. It highlights the potential for generalization of the framework to a broader universe of cases both with regards to US foreign policy decision-making, as well as general choice dynamics. It also reiterates this thesis' contributions to understanding the cases under investigation by adding to available empirical material, and revising several interpretations of US foreign policy over the last two decades. Finally, it extrapolates on the potential future role of no-fly zones and similar such tools in modern conflict management and foreign policy deliberations.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction: A Neoclassical Realist Framework of No-Fly Zone Use

That politics is a “battle of ideas” is an old (and perhaps idealistic) concept. And yet, the introduction of ideas and ideational competition into a neoclassical realist framework of analysis may shed light on the dynamics of the foreign policy executive’s decision-making processes more generally, as well as help explain the continuous use of tools that must be viewed as “sub-optimal” from the lenses of structural realism and coercive diplomacy. In the previous chapter, firstly, I introduced no-fly zones as tools of military intervention and coercive diplomacy. Secondly, I argued that using no-fly zones for conflict management, protection of civilians, or a coercive diplomacy strategy is theoretically puzzling. An initial appraisal of no-fly zone implementation in Iraq, Bosnia and Libya only reinforces this puzzle empirically. Most airpower and no-fly zone scholars conclude that the no-fly zone is not good at fulfilling its primary (mandated) objectives – and yet consecutive US administrations continued to employ it. No-fly zones do not fulfill the minimal conditions necessary for a successful coercive diplomacy strategy (signaling motivation, time pressure and a willingness to escalate). Theoretically, this “sub-optimality”, which derives from the assumption that military responses to crises are optimized on the basis of externally given systemic conditions derived from the scenario (e.g. the need to protect civilians), raises two questions specifically for the rationalist-realist frameworks that strategic studies, coercive diplomacy and airpower literature tend to employ: (1) Why would the US act (at all) in situations where no vital national interests are at stake, i.e. where does its motivation to use force/coerce originate? (2) If the US decided to act, why would it do so in a hesitant, “sub-optimal” fashion? Finally, as structural realism lacks specificity when it comes to state action and foreign policy choice (Mastanduno, Lake, & Ikenberry, 1989; Wivel, 2005), it remains puzzling why out of a toolbox of different alternative responses the US would pick a no-fly zone at all.

In the next paragraphs, I formulate a framework of US foreign policy decision-making that can better account for no-fly zone initiation in the cases of northern Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya. In a first step, I base this framework in a methodologically structuralist understanding of foreign policy, and employ insights from structural realist and neoclassical realist theories. Neoclassical realism is a term used to describe several theoretical and analytical approaches which make use of intervening variables to analyze the “transmission belt” from systemic conditions to state behavior. Neoclassical realism operates based on the assumption that the external environment provides causally primary systemic incentives and constraints for state behavior (for other assumptions of neoclassical realism, cf. Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009, p. 14). However, in response to structural realism’s failure (and indeed unwillingness)



to account for specific foreign policy decisions and state behavior contradictory to structural realist predictions, neoclassical realists argue that anarchy and systemic conditions do not actually directly determine state behavior (except in the clearest and most direct of circumstances), but rather *condition* it. This means that the deduction of national interests from given systemic conditions is complex, which opens the causal path for an analysis of intervening variables.

In a second step, based on an overview of neoclassical realist approaches to employing such variables, I argue that the use of ideational factors, specifically ideas, holds much promise for the analysis of short-term decision-making processes. I interrogate different conceptual understandings of ideas based on classical realist and “idealist” literatures, and conceptually differentiate ideas from interests, from beliefs, and from several other types of ideational variables (e.g. ideologies, strategic paradigms). I argue that ideas may be understood as the smallest ideational unit of analysis, and are therefore particularly useful for the analysis of specific instances of foreign policy choice. I then clarify the diagnostic and discursive functions of ideas, i.e. their use as deductive tools to interpret existing systemic conditions, as well as their subsequent use as rhetorical tools of persuasion and argument in foreign policy deliberations. I suggest that ideas as employed in these deliberations may be understood as building blocks of longer-standing ideational discourses and debates on US foreign policy and grand strategy. The degree to which ideas influence foreign policy decision-making depends on the specific state and its position in the international system: the uniquely powerful position the US has in the post-Cold War system allows for a crucial role for the intervening variable of ideas in the executive foreign policy decision-making process.

Finally, I argue that no-fly zones can be understood as the result of ideas intervening in the transmission belt from systemic conditions to US foreign policy choice. No-fly zones are particularly interesting from this perspective because, as I suggest, rather than being the result of specific ideas “winning” over others, they mirror the ideational competition between contrasting sets of ideas about the nature of the specific scenario at hand (be it Iraq 1991, Bosnia 1993, or Libya 2011) and corresponding US interests, as well as about appropriate ways to mobilize US power in response. When decision-makers feel under pressure to come to a decision quickly, but are confronted with contradicting and possibly incommensurable sets of ideas, they come to see the no-fly zone as satisfying different competing sets of ideas at the same time. The no-fly zone, because of its inherent military-strategic characteristics (namely flexibility and low-risk deployment), allows decision-makers to extract themselves from intense ideational competition. The no-fly zone is then best described as a compromise tool rather than a carefully optimized response to externally given systemic conditions. The following paragraphs unpick this dynamic carefully, and suggest a theoretical framework for subsequent case analysis.



2.2. The Independent Variable: Systemic Conditions

Structural realism argues that systemic incentives and constraints are the causal drivers of state behavior. They are derived from an international system organized by the structural rule of anarchy. “Structure” here is an analytical term that serves to describe a set of macro-social arrangements (or “law-like regularities”; Wight, 2006, p. 129), properties of the relationships between units (here: states) in a system. The set of arrangements refers to what may be called the “rules of the game” in the international: the “latent structure” (Waltz, 1979) of anarchy, which is in turn modified by a variety of different factors, such as geography and (military) technology (see Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016 for an overview). Anarchy implies the absence of a formal or authoritative government, which distinguishes the international system from the domestic sphere. Interwoven with the material world, an anarchical international system produces a variety of pressures – i.e. incentives or opportunities, threats or constraints which condition, for the purposes of the study of international relations and foreign policy, a state’s national interests.¹¹ An international system informed by the structural rule of anarchy thus has several implications for state behavior on the systemic level and in the long term.

Firstly, states are permanently interested in and trying to assess their position in the international system and their own as well as other states’ relative capabilities to deduce the level of threat they face as they worry about their own security and survival (Waltz, 1979, p. 131). These relative power capabilities consist of different factors, to various degrees deducible or “measurable” by outside observers (including decision-makers): Waltz’s seven components – population size, size of territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence – may serve as a good example (Waltz, 1979, p. 131; Christensen, 1996). Structural (Waltzian) realism’s central prediction for an anarchical system defined in terms of power would be that states react to (changes in) the power of other states as well as their assumed intentions and actual behavior (or how they chose to employ their capabilities) through some form of hedging or balancing behavior (Kitchen, 2010, p. 117; Lobell et al., 2009, p. 32; Waltz, 1979, p. 131). While most states are on average capable to correctly assess these systemic stimuli, those that do not will fail to prosper: “Over the long run, [...] regimes or leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic incentives put their state’s very survival at risk” (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 7). *Secondly*, the “more extensive the disparities [are] in power [between states], the greater the opportunities for intervention” for the more (or most) powerful one (Young, 1968, p. 180; Vertzberger, 1998, pp. 145–146). By contrast, *thirdly*, the more balanced power relations are between states (e.g. great powers), the less likely are instances of intervention (rather than war).

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of structure, its numerous definitional challenges and methodology, see: Levi-Strauss, 1963; Wight, 2006, pp. 121–176. Levi-Strauss makes the point that the term “structure” “[...] has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built after it” (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 279). “Structure” as such is an analytical term to describe properties of relationships between units in the system (here: anarchy), which is mirrored in the structural methodology (rather than ontology) found in Waltzian neorealism (Wight, 2006, p. 131ff.; Waltz, 1979).



Great powers do not intervene against each other, although they are by trend prone to intervene in peripheries (Vertzberger, 1998, pp. 145–149). This has implications for when no-fly zones will *not* be used – as tools of intervention they are unlikely to be directed against other great powers.

An anarchic system defined in terms of power and the corresponding level of uncertainty over how other states choose to employ their power provides the overriding interest for states for their own survival, security, and welfare. Other interests can be ordered according to the importance their protection has for this underlying goal. Correspondingly, scholars frequently suggest a layered hierarchy of interests (supreme, vital, strategic, and tactical interests, as well as moral/ideological interests; Freedman, 1998; George & Simons, 1994, p. 3; Jakobsen, 1998, p. 36). Supreme national interests are at stake where the defense and security of the homeland are directly threatened. They are at times subsumed with vital interests, such as domestic welfare and tranquility. Strategic interests revolve around the need for security and order in the geographical vicinity and an acceptable global or regional balance of power (including stable alliances and international institutions). Tactical interests subsume several lower level interests, e.g. access to markets, natural resources, commodities, production facilities and capital, but also the “protection of values and ideas concerning world order, principles of international law, systems of government and human rights” (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 36) and importantly, the will to sustain and/or improve a country's international status (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b) or prestige (Taliaferro, 2006a).¹² This has implications for decision-making: governments should be less likely to invest political capital (“suffer pain”) for interests that are further down the hierarchy of importance for state survival. In structural realism, a government’s willingness to threaten and use force would then depend *only* on the extent to which supreme national interests are threatened: as the stakes go up, the likeliness of the use of force increases (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 36). Correspondingly, where supreme interests are less directly threatened, decision-makers should be less likely to see the situation as zero-sum, and thus more likely to consider other interests and factors.

Where systemic incentives and constraints that touch on supreme interests, i.e. concern the survival and welfare of the state and its citizenry, are direct, “obvious” and easier to deduce, in other cases of more localized relevance or of lesser interests, appropriate state behavior may be more difficult to determine. Indeed, states may experience various degrees of leeway (“geopolitical slack”) in a more permissive international environment (Trubowitz, 2011, p. 17). This holds particularly for very powerful states such as the US after the Cold War. Leeway need not be binary (in that it either exists or not): as highlighted in the case chapters below, systemic stimuli may be more or less direct in different

¹² Based on a hierarchy of interests, desired foreign policy behavior *in general* makes up a state’s grand strategy, i.e. a formulation of the state’s interests and the corresponding appropriate general ways and means to achieve them in a variety of important issue areas and locations in the future (see below).

scenarios. For example, in 1991, the international environment is arguably at its most permissive for the US. However, by 2011 and Libya/Syria, this leeway, while still existent, contracted for several reasons and produced major constraints on America's room for action. On the one hand, the existence of (some) leeway opens the state's foreign policy up to "lesser" interests on which excess capabilities can be spent. On the other hand, the existence of leeway does not make the interpretation of existing systemic conditions *for specific cases* and the corresponding deduction of interests easier, but in fact harder – a lack of direct systemic pressures may mean a lack of clearly defined interests (in that sense: an unclear relevance of a specific case to national interests), and correspondingly a lack of appropriate strategies to mobilize state resources.¹³ This creates a problem for purely structural realist paradigms.

From a structural realist perspective, to analyze (or indeed to make) intervention decisions,¹⁴ one "should focus only on the position of units in the system" (Onea, 2012, p. 143). State behavior is a function of the distribution of relative capabilities of states. Executive decision-makers¹⁵ have the role of perceiving systemic conditions (specifically, the distribution of relative capabilities, "the intentions and actions of other states and non-state actors", and "feedback that suggests existing strategies are suboptimal or counterproductive"; Lobell et al., 2009, p. 32), deducing the national interest, and pursuing a foreign policy accordingly. In structural realist approaches, however, an actual foreign policy *choice*, e.g. whether and how to intervene, only exists in two situations: either there are two options that have exactly the same costs and consequences, which makes choice somewhat redundant (Kitchen, 2010, p. 122). Alternatively, the "transmission belt" does not quite work: systemic pressures are difficult to interpret and error may occur (Onea, 2012, p. 142). This second choice is then a function of uncertainty (Kitchen, 2010, p. 122). Instead of interrogating this concept, however, structural realists assume that states which fail to adhere to systemic pressures will be punished in the long run (Quinn, 2013, p. 172): structure is a "selector" (Waltz, 1979, p. 73) which influences rather than determines state behavior by "rewarding some types [...] and punishing others" (Gilpin, 1983, p. 85; Wivel, 2005, p. 359). For example, states that do not expand at the peak of their power "risk seeing their more opportunistic rivals securing significant gains at their expense" (Onea, 2012, p. 143). States that engage in military intervention even though their interests were in fact not at stake (or vice versa)

¹³ This holds even if national security strategies, White Papers or other such documents have been produced to provide guidance. Situational differences and specificities make deliberations over which declared general policy or goal apply to the respective case almost inevitable.

¹⁴ On the unclear relationship between description and prescription in structural realism, cf. Kitchen, 2010, p. 122.

¹⁵ Note that neoclassical realism entails a "top-down" view of the state, which means, firstly, that systemic conditions ultimately drive foreign policy behavior, and secondly, that the executive is tasked with, and best equipped to, perceive systemic stimuli and deduce the national interest. This is because the executive receives "privileged information from state agencies" and is therefore "more aware of the national interest and the dictates of the international system than are other domestic actors" (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009, p. 27). Also, based on a Weberian reading of state-society relations, the "national security executive has interests which transcend any class or sector, namely the national interest" (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 27; Trubowitz, 2011).

pay a price in terms of balancing behavior by other states. However, there is little evidence to suggest this systemic punishment actually happens (Onea, 2012, p. 145). The central prediction of structural realist approaches would be that the US would prefer to remain a unipole (Dueck, 2004, p. 519; Monteiro, 2014, pp. 166–172), regardless of whether it wants to aggressively expand or merely secure its position (Mastanduno, 1997, p. 134; quoted in: Dueck, 2004, p. 520). Structural realists are then faced with a double conundrum with regards to no-fly zone usage: either systemic conditions dictated aggressive assertion of power and thus intervention (Dueck, 2004, p. 518), which means that this restrained tool choice was a deft and sustained error in calculation. Alternatively, systemic conditions did not dictate intervention to secure the American position in the system (Dueck, 2004, p. 519), which raises the question why the US used the no-fly zone or any military tool for intervention repeatedly. Quite clearly, a reliance solely on systemic conditions is problematic when trying to explain specific, contradictory state behavior. Even Waltz agrees that “structurally we can describe and understand the pressures states are subject to. We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures without knowledge of their internal dispositions” (Waltz, 1979, p. 71). This holds particularly when the US at the height of its relative power as the unipole of the system *continuously* chooses sub-optimal, indeed seemingly irrational, policy solutions to project power. Simply explaining away as errors of judgment the continuous choice of suboptimal policies in executive decision-making is analytically unsatisfying.

The focus only on the importance of systemic conditions obfuscates some of the intricacies of foreign policy decision-making that affect intervention decisions and the choice of tools. In turn, that is not to say that in periods of leeway systemic incentives and constraints do not matter at all. Even in more permissive scenarios (with less direct systemic stimuli), the structural rule of anarchy and the layout of the international system condition state behavior, in that there are still limits to what a state can and cannot do: relative distributions of power, capabilities, and national interests still frame each decision in ways which limit possible foreign policy behavior. This has direct implications for the use of no-fly zones in the post-Cold War era. Intervening in Iraq (post-Gulf War), Bosnia, and Libya did not touch on supreme American interests of survival and welfare: all three cases of no-fly zone implementation are tangent to lower interests in leadership, stability, alliance management and upholding world order. This suggests, then, that the decision to intervene with no-fly zones is not an all-or-nothing consideration of state survival or welfare, where costs do not matter and no risk is too high. Instead, when decision-makers perceive the situation to constitute a relatively low threat for supreme interests, military-strategic considerations (i.e. necessity, military effectiveness) step into the background in favor of other, more subsidiary interests originating in the domestic sphere. Hence, to explain why no-fly zones are used despite the low threat to supreme interests, one needs to move beyond a *sole* focus on systemic conditions (Wivel, 2005, p. 373), and meaningfully integrate a variety of factors possibly intervening, i.e. getting in the way, of an accurate appraisal of systemic conditions.



This is where neoclassical realism offers an extension and improvement of structural realist approaches.

2.2.1. Neoclassical Realism and Intervening Variables

Neoclassical realism differs from other realisms (classical, offensive or defensive) primarily in the degree to which the translation of systemic conditions into specific state behavior is explicitly analyzed rather than simply assumed.¹⁶ In line with structural realism, neoclassical realism assumes systemic conditions, and by extension interests provided by these forces, as “exogenously given” (P. A. Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 944). Interests evolve from “the situation in which the state finds itself” (Waltz, 1979, p. 134), i.e. they derive from material reality and can therefore in principle be known and are not as such constructed. However, neoclassical realists argue that while a state’s behavior is indeed a product of systemic conditions, the actual policies it pursues are mediated by additional *intervening* factors, be they individual, domestic, or derived from state interaction (Dueck, 2009, p. 139). In that sense, structural realism and neoclassical realism complement each other: each seeks to explain a phenomenon the other cannot (Taliaferro, 2000, p. 132; although Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell propose that NCR may also aspire to systemic explanations similar to structural realist theories, Ripsman et al., 2016). The core contribution of neoclassical realism with regards to foreign policy decision-making has been its attempt “to explain variations of foreign policy over time and space by supplementing the structural assumptions of neorealism with a set of condition variables governing the size of the impact of anarchy and polarity on foreign policy” (Wivel, 2005, p. 361). This is possible because neoclassical realism has a *less strict* understanding of the constraints systemic conditions impose on state behavior: The system “is not a monolithic, impenetrable, entity [...] against which actors stand virtually powerless” (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 150). The structural rule of anarchy is treated as “a permissive condition rather than an independent causal force” (Walt, 2002, p. 211) which shapes opportunities and provides incentives and constraints (Hudson, 2007, p. 143). They do not determine foreign policy behavior specifically unless they directly touch upon core national interests of survival (Hudson, 2007, p. 144), or in contrast very clearly do *not* affect any important interests whatsoever. The former would lead to immediate action, the latter to continuous inaction. Usually, systemic conditions are neither “accurate nor specific enough” to guide decision-makers to only one possible course of action (Rose, 1998, p. 147), nor obvious even to the most adroit observer to make clear predictions as to the manner, type, timing or geographic location of military intervention (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 4; Vertzberger, 1998, p. 145). Systemic conditions instead give states “considerable latitude” in defining their interests, and “merely [set] parameters” for state behavior (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 7).

¹⁶ For excellent discussions of the various other differences between and assumptions of classical realism, neo-realism, and neoclassical realism, cf. Kitchen, 2012; Lobell et al., 2009; Ripsman et al., 2016).

They generate “conditions of possibility for state action” (Hudson, 2007, p. 143), and thus lead to a probability distribution over foreign policy choices by “limiting the menu” of available policy alternatives (Rose, 1998, p. 147).

In this way, stimuli derived from an anarchical system still have primary causal effect on foreign policy creation. It is the decision-maker’s task in any given scenario to deduce from systemic stimuli a set of national interests upon which the state does or does not act. This insight consciously recalls the focus of “classical realist” authors on the practice and skills of statesmanship, and on leaders’ abilities to navigate the anarchical environment (Gilpin, 1984; Morgenthau, 1965; see below). However, this task is difficult for several reasons: firstly, decision-makers “may not necessarily track objective material power trends closely or continuously” (Rose, 1998, p. 147). Also, they may be uncertain which interests are at stake, and which state behavior is appropriate in response (Kitchen, 2010, p. 120; Wivel, 2005, p. 360): “The calculations and perceptions of leaders can inhibit a timely and objectively efficient response or policy adaptation to shifts in the external environment” (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 7) particularly in short-term decision-making. Secondly, decision-makers are limited in their choice by existing frameworks of the international system (e.g. international institutions) as well as “domestic political incentives and constraints” (Dueck, 2009, p. 139; also: Lobell et al., 2009, p. 37), such as party politics, institutional set-up, law, and so forth. As a result, they “do not always have complete freedom to [...] direct national resources as they might wish” (Rose, 1998, p. 147).

Here, many neoclassical realist scholars distinguish themselves from structural realists. For the latter, a state’s (relative) power is directly determined by its countable resources, wealth, military etc. In contrast, neoclassical realism argues that state power is defined as the “portion of [total] power the government can extract for its purposes” as well as “the relative ability to extract and mobilize resources from domestic society” in any given case (Christensen, 1996, p. 11; also: Foulon, 2015, p. 14; Rose, 1998, p. 162; Taliaferro, 2006b, p. 470; Zakaria, 1998, pp. 35–39; Mastanduno, Lake, & Ikenberry, 1989). This matters when systemic conditions are unclear and/or “only” lesser interests are at stake. Fundamentally, in situations of such leeway, these intervening factors can quite literally *get in the way* of an accurate appraisal of systemic conditions and deduction of interests. Systemic conditions are then mediated by other intervening variables (Table 1), but remain analytically superior to them. This means that such other factors need to be considered *within* a framework consistent with systemic thought. Intervening variables are not determining causes of state behavior in themselves. Instead, they influence and constrain its exact form. They lead decision-makers to “implement the precise conduct, framing, and timing of [...] intervention in a manner that may appear puzzling or anomalous from a neorealist perspective” (Christensen, 1996, p. 4; Dueck, 2009, p. 139).

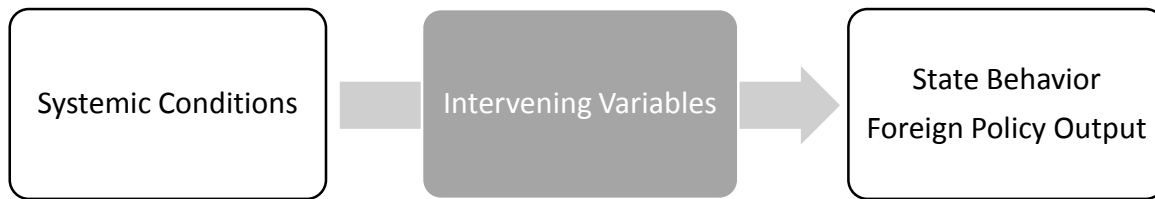


Figure 1: The Foreign Policy Process in Neoclassical Realism

Not least because of this broad argumentative thrust, some authors have argued neoclassical realism has developed into the “new orthodoxy” for scholars aligned with realist thought as its “logical and necessary extension” (Rathbun, 2008, p. 1). A substantial number of authors employs neoclassical realism both theoretically as well as for empirical studies with such different intervening variables (and combinations thereof) as alliances and strategic interaction, regime type, domestic constituencies, public opinion and media pressures, culture and identity, and ideas and beliefs (Brooks, 1997; Christensen, 1996; Dueck, 2004, 2008, 2009, Kitchen, 2010, 2012; Lobell, 2003; Lobell et al., 2009, 2016, Marsh, 2012, 2014, Onea, 2012, 2013; Rathbun, 2008; Schweller, 1997, 2003; K. Smith, 2016; G. H. Snyder, 1991; Steinsson, 2017; Sterling-Folker, 2009; Taliaferro, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Wivel, 2005; Zakaria, 1998). It therefore remains difficult to identify a generalizable set of intervening variables. Indeed, the breadth of approaches has made some authors question whether neoclassical realism qualifies as a “school of thought” (Wivel, 2005, p. 362), and criticize it for a lack of clear theoretical structure and an eclectic range of intervening variables (Kitchen, 2010, p. 119; Quinn, 2013, p. 171). In response, two distinct ways of ordering and mapping neoclassical realist intervening variables have developed: firstly, to “free neoclassical realism from the accusation of being an ad hoc approach” (Wivel, 2005, pp. 367–370) and “unify” the approach, authors have attempted to specify the various intervening variables’ likely influence and interaction. In the most recent and ambitious such attempt, Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro organize and try to integrate different approaches by (1) suggesting different neoclassical realist contributions address different types of questions, and by (2) introducing a temporal dimension combined with different degrees of uncertainty to explain which variables matter to what degree. Their insight that a combination of temporality, political dynamics and external contexts play a role in determining which variable is more likely to mediate systemic conditions is intuitive, highly relevant, and allows their organization into a single theoretical framework (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 118). However, it obscures the ontological and epistemological differences between various authors employing these different variables in their analyses, and unnecessarily complicates the framework where it suggests that intervening variables operate cumulatively (first leaders’ images, then bureaucratic politics, then domestic institutions, and so forth). Secondly, an array of review

articles and overviews have attempted to map and categorize rather than integrate different approaches (Lobell et al., 2009; Onea, 2012; Quinn, 2013; Rathbun, 2008; Rose, 1998; Wivel, 2005), e.g. by distinguishing between defensive realist and offensive realist neoclassical realist approaches (Taliaferro, 2000), or through a typology based on other theoretical approaches from which intervening variables are “borrowed” (Lobell et al., 2009; Rathbun, 2008). Others suggest a categorizing principle according to the degree to which neoclassical realist approaches deviate from structural realist assumptions (Onea, 2012; Quinn, 2013). This serves to highlight ontological and epistemological difference and innovation (but also possible problems), albeit without suggesting integration or unification, and provides the basis for my own categories in the following paragraphs.

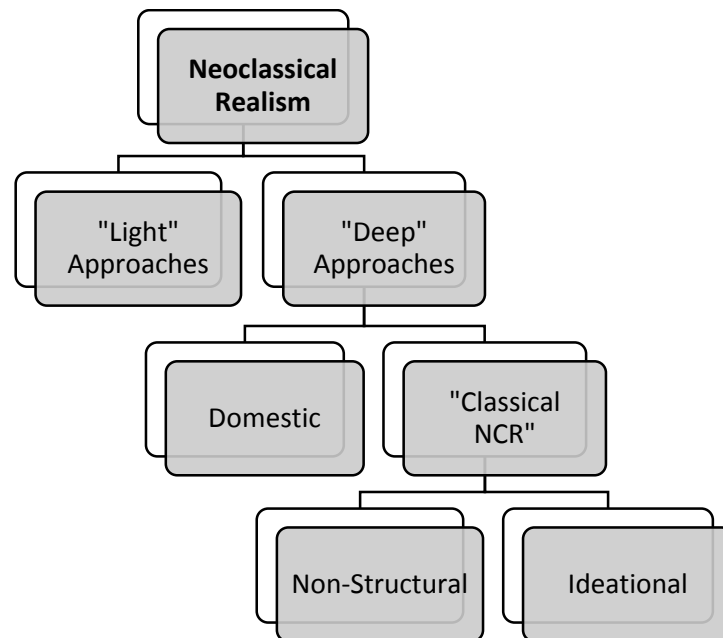


Figure 2: Typology of Neoclassical Realist Approaches

Firstly, there are neoclassical realist authors who treat intervening variables as incrementally adding explanatory value to structural realism: only when systemic variables cannot analytically sufficiently explain state behavior, domestic variables intervene to introduce error (a failure of the “transmission belt”) into the equation. Intervening variables get “pushed out” of the consideration again the stronger systemic variables become. In the long run and for most decisions on foreign policy, structural variables preponderate – and structural realism is upheld. Here, neoclassical realists “refine rather than refute” structural conceptions (Rathbun, 2008; Schweller, 2004, 1997; Zakaria, 1998).¹⁷ This version of neoclassical realism could also be labelled “NCR light” (also cf. Quinn, 2013, pp. 174–176). “NCR light”

¹⁷ Rathbun thinks that therefore, NCR is not actually theoretically distinct from structural realism. Similarly, liberal theorists question NCR’s added value (Legro & Moravcsik, 1999).

suffers from a theoretical weakness: it is unclear and often only context-dependent in which cases systemic variables do or do not actually determine state behavior. Although specific cases of state behavior are analyzed in detail and impress through accuracy and explanatory power, “NCR light” as an approach is post-facto by trend, and almost irrefutable theoretically. It becomes a “subordinate and subsidiary component” of structural realism (Quinn, 2013, p. 160). By its acceptance of a structural realist framework and a focus on explaining away error,

“NCR’s core claim [...] would be no more than that certain states, under certain conditions, may pursue suboptimal policies, at least for a period, before the system as a whole reasserts itself through the mechanisms of punishment and selection. Its research agenda would be the specification of those state attributes that lend themselves to these aberrations, and tracking the steady selection of such anomalies out of the system” (Quinn, 2013, p. 176).

Secondly, in contrast to these authors, others may be categorized as “deep NCR”. They are united by the greater degree and the more permanent role they assign to different intervening variables. In “NCR light”, systemic conditions are mediated by other intervening factors only in exceptional circumstances and in a limited fashion, which leads to problems regarding scope conditions for intervening variables, and to the charge of additive explanation. In “deep NCR”, systemic pressures derived from anarchy are looser so that they will never alone determine what states will do. NCR is then explicitly not merely an extension of structural realism: the intervening variables work permanently rather than in exceptional cases (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 21, 2016).¹⁸ Decision-makers *always* consider systemic conditions “in the light of domestic political incentives and constraints”,¹⁹ and increasingly more so when systemic conditions favor it (e.g. in the case of very powerful or very powerless states; Dueck, 2009, p. 139; Lobell et al., 2009, p. 37). Decision-makers make their own choices, and can set their own goals and preferences for foreign policy. This invites a more careful investigation of motivation, mirroring the call for agent-specificity made in the preceding chapter. Along these lines, numerous authors have focused on domestic factors such as institutional constraints, public opinion and media reporting, intra-administrative competition, mobilization, and the extraction of resources (e.g.: Christensen, 1996; Cladi & Webber, 2011; Edwards, 2013; Lobell, 2003; Marsh, 2014). They tend to prefer directly measurable, quasi-structural domestic variables, which may be surprising given that domestic politics were never in the focus of classical realism in the first place (Onea, 2012, p. 144). Empirically, there is a problem regarding no-fly zone initiation with this set of variables. Namely, while broad trends are visible in institutional framework, public contestation, domestic public opinion and media reporting at the respective times no-fly zone use was debated, they were highly contradictory, underwhelming in

¹⁸ Onea categorizes these approaches as “semi-orthodox” (Onea, 2012). The difference to “orthodox” approaches seems to be a question of nuance, however, which is why the two are grouped together here.

¹⁹ Quinn aptly notes that the “deep” approach also leads to a theoretical problem: “Deep NCR” often does not specify in what ways it still upholds basic tenets of structural realism (specifically the causal primacy of systemic conditions), when violations of systemic conditions can be continuous and without punishment (Quinn, 2013).

the degree of pressure they could have arguably created on decision-makers (for example, a large part of the American populace did not care about policy decisions on post-War Iraq in 1991, Bosnia in 1992/93, or Libya in 2011), not at all pointing to specific policy solutions, and for the most part not present in White House documents relating to no-fly zone use.

An increasing number of authors argue their work incorporates insights from classical realism in a more stringent matter than their institutionally inclined counterparts – although again they do not agree which the “true reading” of classical realist authors might be. Precisely because the somewhat arbitrary classification of “classical realist” is used for vastly different authors, this version of neoclassical realism comes in two different variants: one focusing on the role of strategic interactions, and another focusing on the role of ideational factors. *Firstly*, authors that focus on strategic interaction posit that structural realism does not sufficiently nuance non-systemic international variables intervening in the foreign policy decision-making process, e.g. diplomacy, diplomatic history, negotiations, or bargaining processes between states that play out on the international sphere (Onea, 2012; Resnick, 2010, 2013; K. Smith, 2016). This could include multilateral processes (e.g. UNSC deliberations), bilateral processes (talks between leaders), formal and informal goings-on, as well as anticipation of such processes rather than their actual occurrence (Onea, 2012, p. 146). However, this raises a new theoretical problem: focusing on strategic interaction as an intervening variable may imply unclear conceptions of individual agency or motivation, as well as specificity. Do decision-makers care about strategic interaction in their foreign policy creation automatically and always to a similar degree (probably not), or do they need to be motivated to care (probably yes)? If so, what makes decision-makers care about strategic interaction in the first place? This problem becomes acute when specific choices with regards to systemic conditions occur in which actual strategic interactions seem to play a minor role. Closely related, just like domestic variables employed in institutionalist approaches, strategic interactions rarely if at all narrow the playing field left open by permissive systemic conditions enough to account for specific policy choice.

Secondly, authors of the second and closely related variant employ ideational factors (cultures, identities, beliefs or ideas) to a stronger degree than do their NCR colleagues (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 109; Dueck, 2004, 2008; Hadfield-Amkhan, 2010; Kitchen, 2010, 2012; Onea, 2013; Quinn, 2010; Taliaferro, 2006a). Apart from the analytical value per se, this allows them to interrogate the role of perception, deduction and interpretation of systemic conditions specific to the decision-making process, and distinguish themselves more clearly from structural realist approaches that also stress the role of perceptions (e.g. Walt, 1985). Even those authors that focus on strategic interactions between states as their primary intervening variable leave considerable room for the power of ideas, held either individually or interpersonally (socially), to shape decision-maker’s interpretations of the

world. Correspondingly, a growing number of authors focus on ideational factors such as national identity, or specific nationalistic sentiments (e.g. “Britishness” in Hadfield-Amkhan, 2010; also: Sterling-Folker, 2009; Layne, 2006). Especially after the 2003 Iraq war, authors interrogate the role of specific paradigms or worldviews (e.g. “neo-conservatism”) as coherent sets of ideas influencing current US foreign policy (Davis, 2006; Dueck, 2009; K. Smith, 2016). Others suggest such strategic paradigms can help explain grand strategic positioning and changes in US foreign policy more generally, arguing that “ideas have a role in the making of grand strategy because they help specify national interests amidst conditions of uncertainty” (Dueck, 2004, p. 529; Kitchen, 2010, 2012; Onea, 2013). Dueck’s four US grand strategic paradigms (“strategic disengagement”, “balance of power realism”, “primacy”, and “liberal internationalism”) and Onea’s categories (“assertiveness” and “restraint”) point in a potentially fruitful direction (Dueck, 2004, pp. 513–516; Onea, 2013) that will be explored below. Still, in these approaches, ideational content can be about a wide variety of different things: for example, it may include ideas about strategic interaction, i.e. how a state can and should behave on the world stage. Ideas could also be about how decision-makers should behave vis-à-vis their constituency, or how technology will shape the future of warfare (Kitchen, 2010).

This broad range of possible application necessitates a re-examination of why which ideas (and ideas about *what*) are relevant for foreign policy decision-making in specific cases, and *how* they are relevant procedurally. The broad nexus of perceptions, identities, beliefs and ideas remains problematically underspecified and wrought with conceptual difficulties: which types of ideational content matter, how they are constructed, related to systemic variables, and what their content is remains contested (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 21). Combining insights from these authors leads one to consider the possibility that different, potentially *incoherent* ideas (Dueck, 2004, p. 518; Marsh, 2012) about the nature and extent of systemic constraints and incentives, about what constitutes the national interest, and how the state should mobilize resources *compete* in any given decision-making process. Indeed, this links back to the insight (which is by no means unique to neoclassical realist authors) that any foreign policy decision-making process “may entail considerable bargaining within the state’s leadership [...]” (Lobell et al., 2009, pp. 25–26) based on different ideational positions. Clearly, such divisions do not only occur in long-term decision-making and grand strategy formulation, but instead within and in answer to specific decision-making scenarios, including short-term, crisis-type cases. *Continuous* “sub-optimal” state behavior then points to a general dynamic between causal systemic stimuli within each case, and intervening and competing ideas on the appraisal of systemic conditions and appropriate state action.

Purely based on this short outlook, the employment of ideational factors as intervening variables in neoclassical realism seems to hold considerable promise both for the development of the approach as well as for the analysis of concrete cases of decision-making. However, introducing ideational variables



to neoclassical realism poses several ontological and epistemological questions which must not be overlooked (including the realist dedication to rational choice and methodological individualism, as will be further elaborated below; Foulon, 2015, p. 2). This merits a reconceptualization of ideational variables in neoclassical realist approaches to foreign policy decision-making.

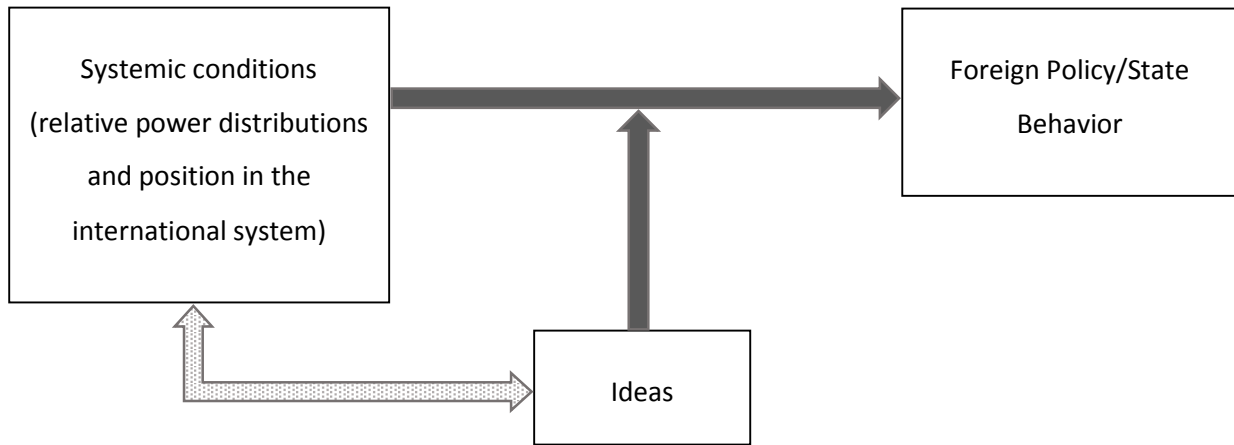


Figure 3: A Neoclassical Realist Framework employing Ideational Content as an Intervening Variable (based on: Lobell, Taliaferro, & Ripsman, 2016; Kitchen, 2010; Dueck, 2004).

2.3. Ideas as an Intervening Variable

Neoclassical realism posits that an imperfect transmission belt exists between systemic conditions and state behavior because

“[the system’s] influence on outcomes must pass through intervening domestic-level processes that can amplify, obstruct, or distort it. Those intervening variables condition whether, how, and when states respond to the international systemic pressures that underlie crisis behavior, “ordinary” foreign and security policies, longer-term patterns of grand strategic adjustment, and international political outcomes” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 118).

To remedy some of the shortcomings in existing neoclassical realist literature, and to more carefully combine the employment of ideas as an intervening variable with rationalist and individualist frameworks, ideas are here understood to have two functions: (1), a diagnostic function that connects interests and ideas, where ideas guide the deduction of material reality for each individual decision-maker (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 2; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 3; Khong, 1993, p. 10), and (2), a discursive function, where such individual mental events are externalized, or carried, into deliberations by individuals, and wielded as tools of persuasion and deliberation. This reconceptualization addresses several problems inherent in existing frameworks, clarifies the relationship between interests and ideas, as well as between ideas and beliefs, and allows ideas to have interpersonal relevance in ideational competition during foreign policy deliberations.



The concept that ideas can be “effective forces” in human conduct (Weber, 1915, p. 280), and yet are intricately connected to and bound by interests, can be traced back in (proto-)realist writing to Machiavelli, Niebuhr, Carr, and Morgenthau (M. C. Williams, 2004, p. 634), as well as, by extension, to Weberian concepts (Barkawi, 1998; Frankel, 1996; Lawrence, 1987; Morgenthau, 1965; M. C. Williams, 2007). For Machiavelli, while fortune and necessity narrow the range of alternative action, they still require statesmen to apply their wisdom and prudence to grasp opportunities presented to them. Indeed, part of the point of his writings is to outline notable instances of prudent and imprudent judgment (Machiavelli, 1517, pp. 86, 127). In Niebuhr’s writings the focus lies on moral choice, including the search for justice in the international given the interest-driven nature of the international system. Niebuhr develops the conception of a state’s “wise self-interest” (DiJoseph, 2010, p. 62; Niebuhr, 1959, p. 277), which implies that states may (and should) seek to incorporate into their behavior wider, communal or moral interests all the while pursuing their own (Kitchen, 2010, p. 126; Niebuhr & West, 2013). Niebuhr also argues that the morally good lies not in “specific moral ideas”, but in the “process by which dissimilar moral ideas” are considered and resolved (Wrightson, 1996, p. 369). The process of deliberating and judging the normative and moral contents of possible state behavior, given the constraints of interests and power, and the resulting distinction between good and bad statesmanship, arguably lies at the core of much of classical realist writing. For Carr, similarly, the relation between the imperatives of the international system and resulting state behavior is not simply deterministic: although “[i]n the international order, the role of power is greater and that of morality less” (Carr & Cox, 2001, p. 151), there is still “something which [the decision-maker] can think and do, and [...] this thought and action are neither mechanical nor meaningless” (Carr & Cox, 2001, p. 87; quoted in: Kitchen, 2010, p. 125). Also, ideas are carried in rhetoric, defined as the “art of persuasion” which is “part of the equipment of a political leader” to mobilize support and incentivize action alongside interests (Carr & Cox, 2001, p. 120; Kitchen, 2010, p. 125). The most influential such ideas are based on universal principles, including on a “general sense of obligation” that may operate in the international as well as the domestic (Carr & Cox, 2001, p. 125). The notion of ideas as both individually anchored and deliberately employed is investigated further below.

Where analysis of Morgenthau’s writings has frequently focused on his second principle of political realism (“interests defined in terms of power”), Morgenthau acknowledges the impact, indeed the importance, of ideas, particularly for ethics, evaluation and political judgment in harnessing the positive potential of politics (M. C. Williams, 2004, p. 634, 2007). He identifies ideas as a “source for change” (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 11; quoted in: Kitchen, 2010, p. 124) whose role lies in the mitigation, by prudent statesmen, of the most visceral forces of anarchy and competition between states: moral ideas individuals hold mean they will not consider morally wrong means or ends (Kitchen, 2012, p. 81). Instead, they take into account a wide possible variety of “cultural and moral ideas” that may go

beyond the supreme interest of state survival (Morgenthau, 2005, p. 11; Kitchen, 2012, p. 81). This distinguishes politics from the mere application of violence (Morgenthau, 1938, p. 125; M. C. Williams, 2004; Kitchen, 2010, p. 125). Morgenthau is deeply influenced by Weberian thought (M. C. Williams, 2004, p. 641): Weber's "theory" of interests, ideas, and the relationship between the two concepts, albeit not always clearly developed and at times even contradictory, continues to influence realist writing. By extension, it has inspired neoclassical realist authors to investigate the role of ideational content in the deduction of interests (Dueck, 2004, p. 521; Kitchen, 2010, p. 129). It is in Weber's writings that the next section finds a starting point for the introduction of ideas into an interest-based framework of foreign policy decision-making. This is necessary as proto-realism and classical realist writings do not provide an analytical framework in the sense here desired: while they open up the theoretical space for considering the role of ideas in relation and contrast to interests and power, they are perhaps better understood as "philosophical insights about human nature, power and politics" rather than a parsimonious theoretical structure with predictive capacity (Kitchen, 2012, p. 83). Therefore, conceptual clarifications are necessary to situate ideas vis-a-vis interests and beliefs, as well as clarify their role in foreign policy decision-making processes.

2.3.1. Interests and Ideas

In (structural) realism, a state's national interests are derived from material reality, i.e. the distribution of capabilities and relative power in an anarchical system. However, the accurate appraisal of these systemic conditions and their translation into interests is complex, time-consuming, and fraught with difficulty, especially so under conditions of uncertainty, lack of or ambiguous information and time constraints (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a, p. 13; also: Jervis, 1997; Edelstein, 2002; Rathbun, 2007). Ideas are those concepts that guide decision-makers in their interpretation of the reality of the international system and the deduction of interests. They function as "cognitive devices", "knowledge structures" (Khong, 1993, pp. 10–13) or "mental shortcuts", and help to order and simplify complex situations, and "specify national interests amidst conditions of uncertainty" (Dueck, 2004, p. 521). Ideas, as per their *diagnostic* function, aid in the decision-maker's appraisal of the scenario at hand and its stakes in terms of national interests (Khong, 1993, p. 10). Importantly, by this understanding, ideas are based in individual human cognition, which makes them conceptually different from interests that can (in principle) be known as material facts. Ideas help individuals fill gaps of knowledge about the material world of the international system, so that decision-makers start from "predispositions that lead actors to notice certain things and to neglect others" (Jervis, 1976, pp. 198–199; Rose, 1998, p. 152; Foulon, 2015, p. 18): ideas contain information as to the relevance of some material facts over

others.²⁰ This upholds (structural) realist commitments to rationalism,²¹ to the distinction between material and ideational factors, and to prioritizing the former in explanation (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 18; Keohane, 2000, p. 129; Kitchen, 2010, p. 128; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 199).

The core assumptions of any type of rationalist approach lie in the context-dependence of rationality, the irreducible material nature of context, and the rational character of human conduct (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 18). As a further specification, Simon suggested two different types of rationality: firstly, substantive rationality means a rational process has led to a decision that can be shown to be optimal. Substantive (“ideal”) rationality can in principle be attained if interests can be known as material facts (Goldstein, 1993, p. 250). However, both permissive international environments as well as the empirical reality of short-term decision-making put unrealistic conditions on the processing and scope of available relevant information (Oneal, 1988, p. 601; Geuss, 1981; Lukes, 1974; Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 74). Purely and substantively rational choice models are simple and parsimonious, just as structural realism’s theoretical strength lies in its insistence on a single independent variable. However, predictions derived from “pure” rational actor models are frequently analytically deficient for specific empirical outcomes precisely because ideas do not matter in them (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 18; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 195). In reality, and especially under external constraints of time and information, decision-makers are bound by their human nature, which leads them to favor simplicity and employ ideational heuristics (Oneal, 1988, p. 601; Stein, 2012, p. 133). Secondly, procedural rationality refers less to the outcome and more to the process of decision-making (Simon, 1956, p. 119). Under procedural rationality, decision-makers still choose between “options based upon the costs and benefits associated with their probable consequences” (Schaub, 2003, p.3), and are in a general sense “goal-oriented and purposive”: they will probably “diligently [consider] the anticipated consequences of [their] actions” (Oneal, 1988, p. 602). However, they “satisfy rather than maximize utility and they simplify the world by adopting interpretive categories” (Christensen, 1996, p. 17; Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1980, p. 123). Decision-makers may end up choosing acceptable alternatives given these ideas, rather than optimal solutions given their actual interests (Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 11; Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1980, p. 124). Ideas therefore function as “inputs” into rational decision-making (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 196): they do not “challenge the premise that people behave in self-interested and broadly rational ways” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 5). Even though such an understanding of rationality has come under criticism for alleged theoretical deficiencies (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 18), it has definite conceptual

²⁰ This allows for divergence both of opinion and of possible outcome within the bounds of systemic conditionality, as will be further elaborated below (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 6ff.).

²¹ The most explicit such connection of structural realism to rationalism can be found in Mearsheimer’s “fifth assumption” (Mearsheimer, 2014). Waltz disagrees because a purely systemic analysis of international politics, precisely by its disavowal of first and second image analyses, cannot actually have a concept of choice in the first place (Waltz, 1979, p. 118). Note that rationalism does not necessarily equate with rational choice theory (Barkin, 2003, p. 328)

advantages when it comes to describing, analyzing, and empirically testing decision-making processes (Oneal, 1988, p. 621), including with regards to short-term decisions (Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 6; Stein, 2012, p. 138). Commitments to rationalism, then, are both grounded in the theoretical assumptions of neoclassical realism, in which state behavior is fundamentally and primarily driven by a rational appraisal of material facts, as well as in the utility they provide for the analysis of empirical outcomes.

For Weber, ideas matter because of their ability to “handle practical problems” (Eastwood, 2005, p. 94; J. A. Hall, 1993, p. 44), which matches with Goldstein & Keohane’s categorization of ideas as “strategic roadmaps” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 8). Ideas, then, function like “switchmen” (“switches” in a modernized translation) to “determine the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest” (Weber, 1915, p. 280; Swedberg, 2005, p. 130). This insight is used by neoclassical realist authors employing ideational content as intervening variables because it indicates both the primacy of interests in the causal mechanism under interrogation, as “material and ideal interests directly govern men’s conduct” (Weber, 1915, p. 280), as well as the role ideas play in ultimately determining outcomes. Interests, in Weber’s metaphor, seem to dictate a direction of travel, just as systemic conditions condition state behavior: “everywhere the first impulse to social action is given as a rule by real interests, i.e. by political and economic interests” (Bendix, 1977, pp. 46–47; quoted in Eastwood, 2005, p. 91). Weber employs an under-determined terminology with regards to distinguishing “material” and “ideal” interests, including immediately prior to the “switchmen” quote (Eastwood, 2005, p. 93). “Ideal interests” are to be understood as, for example, “interests in religious salvation, the interest in the growth of knowledge through scientific research and many others” (T. Parsons, 1975, p. 668; Swedberg, 2005, p. 130). Such concepts, for Weber, are still interests, which is why they can be equated with material interests (Swedberg, 2005, p. 130; Eastwood, 2005, p. 93). Interests, however, do not determine the exact tracks on which the train of human action will run. Instead, ideas are understood as switching or re-routing this train to have it run the course to reach a specific outcome. For Weber, ideas are developed and promoted by *interested* actors, and in turn constrain them (Eastwood, 2005, p. 92; Swidler, 2000, p. 270). Weberian thought, in these broad contours, is largely consistent with introducing ideas as intervening variables in neoclassical realism.²²

To function as *intervening* variables, ideas need to follow interests in causal sequence. The mechanism Weber employs to this end relates to “elective affinity” which denotes the mechanism by which certain

²² Points of contention remain with regards to the autonomy Weber assigned to ideas (Swidler, 2000, p. 269) and to what degree they “only” channel existing interests, or in turn also influence interest formation (Eastwood, 2005, p. 91ff.; Swedberg, 2003, p. 16): for example, Marianne Weber in her commentary on the “switchmen” quote has argued that “the causal sequences [between interests and ideas] run back and forth” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 130). Swedberg also argues that for Weber “interests are always subjectively perceived” (J. A. Hall, 1993, p. 48; T. Parsons, 1975, p. 668; Swedberg, 2005, p. 122; Weber, 1978, pp. 59, 211).

interests predispose specific ideas (Gerth & Mills, 1948, p. 62; T. Parsons, 1975, p. 668; Eastwood, 2005; Swidler, 2000). Ideas are then not simply “free-floating” (J. A. Hall, 1993, p. 44; Yee, 1997, p. 1024; Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 24). Instead, Weber argues that there “exists a tendency for certain ideas and groups to gravitate towards one another” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 121) because those groups of individuals find it in their interest to hold some ideas over others which they then “elect” because of affinity, “a point of coincidence or convergence” (Gerth & Mills, 1948, p. 63; Blau, 1996, p. 1160; Eastwood, 2005, p. 91; Weber, 1978, pp. 468–518, 2013, p. 95). Thus, elective affinity may describe the relationship between Protestant ideas and capitalism (Swedberg, 2005, p. 83), or, possibly, between ideas surrounding military technology and US decision-makers. Importantly, the causal relationship between interests and ideas denoted by elective affinity is “not strong enough to be designated ‘determining’” (Kalberg, 2002, p. lxxxvi; Swedberg, 2005, p. 83), which is an important distinction to Marxist approaches (J. A. Hall, 1993, p. 47). Rather, it implies a compatibility and possibly likelihood that ideas are carried by some groups of people, and not others (Swedberg, 2005, p. 121). Elective affinity connotes a higher likelihood (but *not* certainty) that people hold ideas that mirror their interests, or because it is in their interest to do so (Kitchen, 2010, p. 128; Quinn, 2010, p. 23). Ideas that correspond to people’s respective interests are most likely to influence their behavior (Swedberg, 2005, p. 121). Since ideas are different from interests, however, and no direct causality or determinacy is implied, ideas may still contradict interests. Ideas also may have unintended consequences, and in that sense very directly *get in the way* of an appraisal of material facts: Weber speaks of “a universal ‘Tragedy’ [...] that dooms every attempt to realize ideas in reality” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 121; Weber, 1915, p. 204).²³ In neoclassical realist terms, then, decision-makers’ ideas may be erroneous given material facts, even though ideas that run counter to national interests are less likely to first gain and then sustain support among decision-makers. This is because a decision-maker’s self-interest and the national interest are aligned in that only if a decision-maker decides in such a way that the national interest is furthered will she stay in power, gain personal prestige, or build her legacy as a leader (Trubowitz, 2011, p. 4; Kitchen, 2010, p. 129). As Gerth and Mills argue, “ideas are discredited in the face of history unless they point in the direction of conduct that various interests promote” (Gerth & Mills, 1948, p. 63). This has implications as to when ideas are abandoned, as outlined below. In a next step, I discuss the relationship between ideas and beliefs, which has been both a commonplace definitional equation in rationalist approaches as well as a point of much contention. I differentiate the two concepts based on the deliberative *use* of ideas. Ideas are understood as beliefs carried by individuals into decision-making processes, which aligns both with a Weberian understanding of how

²³ Notably, this “tragedy” consists of an organization existing “as a result of an attempt to realize ideas; and this organization soon develops its own interests and becomes ruled by careerists” (Swedberg, 2005, p. 121). This finds an echo in Keohane & Goldstein’s institutionalization of beliefs (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 20).

ideas operate in human action as well as with neoclassical realism's ontological and epistemological commitments.

2.3.2. Beliefs and Ideas

I have established a distinction and interrelation between interests and ideas (or what ideas are *not*) and outlined their diagnostic function with regards to material facts, without explicitly delving into the core definitional question of what ideas *are*. Indeed, as noted above, a large amount of literature on ideas suffers from unclear conceptions as to the nature and function of ideas in the various processes under analysis (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 197). In much of the literature that attempts to integrate ideas into rationalist-positivist frameworks, ideas are simply defined as *beliefs* "held by individuals" (e.g. Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p. 3; Beland & Cox, 2010). Beliefs describe "views or opinions held by political actors that are relatively limited in scope or relate to relatively circumscribed areas of politics" (Berman, 2013, p. 223). This implies, firstly, that ideas (as beliefs) are cognitive products of the (human) mind, and by their nature inherent and internal to the individual (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 198; Yee, 1997). That means they are in the process of their creation connected to the "material world" only "via our interpretations of our surroundings" (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 3). They are at once deeply individual and "shared" by larger groups of individuals, which makes them influential for human action more generally (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 7) and fits with an intuitive understanding of the social impact of ideas, but also creates a conceptual problem which I explain below (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206). Secondly, ideas (as beliefs) may be understood as the smallest ideational unit of analysis, and as building blocks for larger ideational sets. Different authors have developed a frequently three-pronged system for classifying different beliefs according to their generality, i.e. 1) specific policy ideas (P. A. Hall, 1989; Kingdon, 2010), 2) programmatic ideas that underpin the policy ideas, also "paradigms" (J. A. Hall, 1993) or "programmatic beliefs" (Berman, 1998), and 3) philosophical ideas, e.g. "public philosophies" (J. L. Campbell, 1998), "deep cores" (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993), or Weberian worldviews. Goldstein & Keohane develop a similar classification of beliefs: "world views", "principled beliefs", and "causal beliefs" (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b). World views exhibit the broadest scope as they define the "universe of possibilities of action". This corresponds with Kitchen's "ideas about the world" (Kitchen, 2010, p. 123). Principled or normative beliefs are about distinguishing "right from wrong" (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 9), and provide guidance for what should or should not be done (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 24; Kitchen, 2010, p. 123). Finally, causal beliefs infer a connection of causality between events, peoples and things (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 3). Such causality can be narrowly understood, as when ideas relate to e.g. cause-effect chains between two sequential events. It can also be broadly applied, by establishing a general relationship of some sort in an individual's mind between e.g. a specific foreign policy stance or a presidential leadership

style and broader societal trends or vice versa: that the post-Cold War order influences US foreign policy positioning is not directly causal, but assumes a linkage between order and state behavior. If ideas/beliefs are viewed as causal in this way, their role in decision-making is understood (relatively narrowly) as providing strategic guidance for human action. Ideas as causal beliefs “provide guides for individuals on how to achieve their objectives” and “imply strategies for the attainment of goals” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 10): therefore, where (not least because of looser systemic conditions) more than one strategy is not only possible but potentially desirable, which decision is taken is based on the ideational input of the decision-makers (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 17; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b). Correspondingly, Saunders argues that “leaders’ causal beliefs [...] have profound consequences for the decision to intervene and for the choice of intervention strategy” (Saunders, 2009, p. 121). Indeed, causal beliefs have been employed most frequently in empirical policy analysis (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 198). Equating ideas with beliefs in such a way has two major advantages but also (at least) one shortcoming, which I address with a crucial definitional reformulation below.

Firstly, connecting ideas to beliefs, perhaps counter-intuitively, is consistent with the retention of commitments to rationalism inherent (if not always explicit) in (neoclassical) realism. Secondly, conceptualizing ideas as beliefs connotes them as inherently individual cognitive products (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206), which corresponds with (methodological) individualism. Rationalism and individualism may be understood as analytically connected because the former tends to take the individual as its “basic unit of analysis” for specific instances of rational choice (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 17; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 194).²⁴ Social phenomena, such as state behavior, are then understood as based in the actions, decisions and motivations of individuals. Equating ideas with beliefs serves to clearly distinguish these approaches from others treating ideas as socially produced and defined (Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 17; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206). At the same time, the definitional exclusion of ideas’ social effects and dimensions makes equating ideas with beliefs theoretically and methodologically awkward: beliefs are treated as both internal mental events and as publicly employed tools in policy deliberations external to specific individuals, or as coordination points under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty (Weingast, 1995). This is evident in authors alternately conflating or using simultaneously, at times literally in parallel, “ideas” and “beliefs” (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206). Indeed, Laffey & Weldes point out how Goldstein & Keohane recognize, in contradiction to their own definition, that “ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 20; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206). While this critique falls short in some regards (Kitchen, 2010, p. 125), it points towards an at times unacknowledged discursive function

²⁴ The connection between rationalism and individualism is not automatic: for example, Habermas’ communicative action model implies individualism, but not rational choice (Heath, 2015). Weingast’s choice model is rational, but not in fact clearly individualist (Weingast, 1995).

of ideas as tools in deliberation, as “language-in-use” (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206). This corresponds with an intuitive understanding of ideas as actively and purposively shared between individuals, which authors defining ideas as beliefs in fact often share: based on their use of methodology and empirical cases, these authors often seem interested not in individual beliefs, which would imply a tendency to produce individual profiles, character studies, biographies of decision-makers, etc., but rather in ideas in use, e.g. in speeches, memos, meeting minutes, newspapers, archival documents, etc.

To account for these shortcomings, a definitional clarification is in order. Ideas are here understood as externalized or *carried* beliefs. This implies that in addition to their diagnostic function, ideas also have a deliberative function. Individual beliefs have interpersonal relevance and matter in policy deliberations when they are introduced by individual participants, e.g. decision-makers. This aligns with a Weberian understanding of the origins of ideational content (Swidler, 2000, p. 270): Weber argues that ideas are “effective forces” only if they are “carried by demarcated and influential groupings” (Kalberg, 2002, p. lxxx; Swedberg, 2005, p. 17). Even Goldstein & Keohane, despite defining ideas as beliefs, then add that beliefs need to in fact be “shared”. Ideas do not achieve relevance on their own, but must be “championed” by carriers, who are “individuals or groups capable of persuading others to reconsider the ways they think and act” vis-à-vis given systemic conditions (Berman, 2013, p. 228; Blyth, 2002; Berman, 2001; Checkel, 1997). This insight has been picked up by many analysts of ideas in politics (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 207): ideas are thus beliefs “introduced” (P. A. Hall, 1989, p. 367) or “inserted” (Sikkink, 1991, p. 252) into political deliberations by “carriers” (Goldstein, 1993, p. 14; Sikkink, 1991, p. 242), or “political entrepreneurs” (Goldstein, 1993, p. 18; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 13; Sikkink, 1993, p. 142) who are “advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea” (Kingdon, 2010, p. 122).

Assuming that the basis of ideas lies in individual beliefs which are then externalized into policy deliberations is crucial for three reasons: firstly, it differentiates this thesis from approaches that treat ideas as distinctly social phenomena, e.g. ideologies, cultures, or “zeitgeist” (which by definition are collective and durable; Berman, 2013, p. 224). Per their use as *intervening* variables, it does not lend ideas *independent* causal force, even though it places ideas in a causal mechanism from systemic conditions to state behavior. Secondly, it conceptualizes the translation from individual cognitive beliefs to use of ideas in (social) deliberations: it does not matter as much for US foreign policy decision-making in Bosnia what President William J. Clinton²⁵ *actually believed* at any given moment. Indeed, to attempt to investigate precisely which beliefs any one individual had at any one point in

²⁵ Hereafter: “Clinton”. Where necessary to distinguish from Hillary Rodham Clinton, first names will be employed. This establishes the naming convention for this thesis: politicians, officials, advisers and other people involved in the case studies below will be introduced with full title and full name at their first mention. Thereafter, only their last names will be used.

time is a futile exercise. It matters which of those beliefs Clinton chose to carry into the decision-making process as ideas. Thirdly, by extension, ideas influence relations between their carriers and others, and thus have discursive importance particularly in foreign policy decision-making processes.²⁶ Crucially, the importance of ideas as points of political convergence increases the more discursively equal the involved decision-makers are (that is, presidential leadership style may matter), as well as the more uncertain actors are about the scenario and the exact consequences of different alternatives they are to choose from (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 29; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 17, 173ff.; Weingast, 1995). This matters for a tool such as the no-fly zone, which is employed discursively amidst permissive systemic conditions and is also malleable, even unclear, in its military-strategic properties. Externalized into deliberations, ideas provide “an edge in the battles of the day or guidance through uncertain periods” (Berman, 2013, p. 228; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b). Ideas can thus be wielded instrumentally and strategically to convince by use in language (Blyth, 2002, p. 39; Krebs & Jackson, 2007, p. 36; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 208). Laffey and Weldes critique this understanding of ideas as an “unspoken commitment” to metaphors of “ideas as commodities” and “ideas as objects in language” (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 208), but acknowledge that it retains commitments to rationalism and individualism while also allowing for a clearer distinction between individual beliefs and public ideas. The conception of foreign policy decision-making as a sequence of deliberative exchanges and “battles” of ideas has important implications (see below). Importantly, for scoping and methodological reasons,²⁷ this thesis limits its analysis to ideas that are uttered in the specific decision-making process of the respective cases (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 13).

Where do ideas come from, and why do they persist? As ideas are grounded in individual beliefs, a detailed answer may be beyond the purview of this thesis, which for the most part limits itself to an analysis of existing ideational patterns and their use and interaction in decision-making. There are many possible reasons why individuals hold specific beliefs and carry them into deliberations: upbringing, socialization, invention and innovation (Weber would go as far as argue that “ideas occur to us when they please, not when it pleases us”; Weber, 1922, p. 136), acceptance in an institution of which an individual is a part, or general pervasiveness amongst a population or culture. Importantly, with regards to foreign policy deliberations, there may be existing structures (earlier ideas, analogies, codes) which mediate which ideas decision-makers can easily understand, articulate, and are thus likely to adopt (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 32; Alexander & Smith, 1993; Hay, 1996; Saunders, 2011, p. 29). The evolution of ideas is interesting with specific regards to the no-fly zone itself. It may be possible to

²⁶ Beyond deliberations amongst decision-makers, ideas may also be used strategically in *public* debates to maximize support for decisions (Western, 2005, pp. 16–20). Where relevant, such debates are included in the case analysis below.

²⁷ In particular, the commitment to methodological individualism, which in turn derives from epistemological (rather than ontological) necessity (for an overview of this particular debate as well as a contrasting view, Gofas & Hay, 2010, p. 21).

suggest that the no-fly zone itself, through years of continued application, has become detached from military-strategic utility and indeed material reality, and developed into shorthand in domestic political discourses. Specific ideas gain traction and then persist not only because of simplicity or inherent argumentative strength, but because easier ideas are more likely to be understood by decision-makers (Berman, 2013, p. 227). They may resonate because of perceived “fit” between them and the contours of particular events (Berman, 2013, p. 229; P. A. Hall, 1989). The no-fly zone allows decision-makers to express a range of incommensurable ideas simultaneously, and yet remains easy to understand which in turn makes it more likely to be adopted (Blyth, 2002; J. L. Campbell, 2002; Colander & Coats, 1993; Goldstein, 1993; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b; Kingdon, 2010). An idea may be successful in foreign policy decision-making, then, not because it solves a problem particularly well, but because it provides “the clearest road [map] out of troublesome or uncertain policy situations” (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 29). However, objective determination of simplicity or clarity of an idea is often impossible, so that such analysis tends to be post hoc and lacks in prescriptive value. It has instead been suggested that those ideas which allow decision-makers to build political coalitions are most likely to be adopted (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 29; Goldstein, 1993). This is also a possible explanation for why the no-fly zone continues to be employed in US foreign policy deliberations. Carriers of ideas are often disinclined to give up ideas even in the face of contrasting, more valid claims or if the ideas they carry turn out to not fit well with material reality. Instead, they tend to disregard or discredit the contradicting source (Foulon, 2015, p. 18; Jervis, 1976, pp. 45–46, 291–294, 410–413, 1988; D. W. Larson, 1989; Festinger, 1962). Decision-makers may in fact be more likely to seek out those interpretations of reality that best fit their already existing ideas (Bryan D. Jones, 1999; D. W. Larson, 1989; Lau, Smith, & Fiske, 1991). This implies that if carriers of an idea can saturate deliberations with metaphors and other discursive short-cuts “well enough so that they become part of people’s taken-for-granted cognitive schema, then people will tend to prefer their position” (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 32). The concept of a no-fly zone is influenced by historical experience, and applied to seemingly similar contexts schematically depending on what the decision-makers think the no-fly zone does, regardless of whether (a) that would actually be what it does, and (b) that choice of action contradicts given systemic conditions.

Ideas can (in principle) be “measured” against other ideas, especially if different ideas compete in deliberations. The strength or power of an idea may be analyzed by a variety of supposedly objective metrics, e.g. truth, coherence, feasibility, utility, effectiveness, or simplicity. The fundamental problem with such endeavors (outside of ontological and epistemological quarrels) is of course a priori disagreement over the definition of these metrics. The strength of ideas (and thus the causal relevance of some ideas and not others) may also be judged by observation, e.g. degree of acceptance within a population, or prominence in political discussions. Then, ideas may turn out to be more important than others not because of their internal characteristics, but because of the power position of their carriers,

which in turn makes them more likely to be made explicit or set on the decision-making agenda (Dueck, 2004, p. 522). The problem with such assessment is that it tends to be post-facto, and thus non-predictive and potentially unfalsifiable. With regards to assessing the strength of ideas, I attempt to remedy these shortcomings through a focus on specific cases, and by employing a carefully calibrated methodological approach which relies on process tracing and triangulation of primary and secondary sources (see below). In a next step, I outline how ideas as externalized beliefs are used as discursive tools, and what role ideational competition plays in decision-making.

2.3.3. Ideational Competition and Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Different ideas compete in the foreign policy decision-making process. Given a specific scenario, different high-level advisors within US foreign policy executive (i.e. mostly in the White House) propose to the president actions they deem appropriate in answer to the perceived situation, and base these proposals on their ideas (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 122). Clearly, ideas can be combined in coherent ideational paradigms: for example, some authors identify distinct “theories of grand strategy” (Dueck, 2004, p. 522) or “national ideologies” (Quinn, 2010, pp. 22–24) in which a worldview or interpretation of the international system is combined with a normative agenda and a set of means to achieve ends. Grouping specific ideas into such coherent paradigms is useful practically, i.e. for political persuasion, as well as analytically, e.g. for identifying longer-term trends in grand strategy. However, the influence of coherent ideational paradigms on short-term foreign policy decision-making processes is overstated for two reasons: firstly, the nature particularly of crisis decision-making tends to make clear-cut answers derived from ideological frameworks difficult. Secondly, even within an administration or a close circle of advisers, people carry different, indeed incommensurable ideas. They are likely to reach consensus with those individuals that carry similar ideas, and run into conflict with others (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 4). This competition between divergent ideas in the foreign policy decision-making process can be understood as a “discourse”: it concerns the “interactive process of conveying ideas” (Schmidt, 2008) during which carriers of ideas engage in exchange and communication, or “language games” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 8; Wittgenstein, 1972). This extends to specific instances of speech, e.g. face-to-face communication, but also to exchanges of texts, emails, and other procedural “conduits” (see below). Such processes are not characterized by internal or ideological consistency, but instead by contradiction and confusion over how to correctly interpret systemic stimuli: “Ambiguity and incoherence in ideas opens space for politics” as decision-makers seek “to make policy decisions reflect their preferred interpretation” (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 9), and to persuade other decision-makers to share their ideas. Decision-makers utilize ideas to compel their opponents “to endorse a stance they would otherwise reject” (Krebs & Jackson, 2007, p. 36). Foreign policy deliberations can then be interpreted as a process of ideational competition: the ideas that decision-makers carry “vie with one



another for dominance and autonomy” (Kitchen, 2010, p. 132; Zelikow, 1994, p. 153; Holland & Aaronson, 2014). Decision-making becomes a process of “pulling and hauling among individuals with different perceptions at stake” (Allison & Halperin, 1972, p. 57). Which ideas prevail in this process may depend on their internal validity, on who holds them, on the degree of their pervasiveness (Kitchen, 2010, p. 132; Zelikow, 1994, p. 153), or on their plausibility in the judgment of a particular audience (Laffey & Weldes, 1997). At other times, ideational conflicts may simply go unsolved and linger (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 4). In yet other cases, deep ideational divisions are glossed over by compromise solutions (see below). The subsequent empirical chapters illuminate this ideational competition, its processes and dynamics, and the role of the no-fly zone as a compromise tool in three cases across different presidential administrations.

I posit that the no-fly zone is particularly interesting because its use and nature bring to the fore conflicting sets of ideas as well as the process of ideational competition over them. But what are these conflicting ideas *about*? Following neoclassical realist terminology, I argue that ideational competition in short-term US foreign policy decision-making concerns two categories of ideas: firstly, ideas about the nature of systemic conditions, the scenario at hand and corresponding US interests in it (situational appraisal, “what/where/when”); and secondly, ideas about appropriate ways and means of mobilizing state power in response (appropriate action, “how”). In contrast to much of the literature on intervention decisions (e.g. Huth, 1998; A. Smith, 1996; Taliaferro, 2004; for a similar critique, cf. Aydin, 2012; Saunders, 2009, p. 126), the second category explicitly links systemic conditions, ideas and tool choice (Saunders, 2009, p. 126). Naturally, these two conceptually different categories overlap in practice: from specific interpretations of a given scenario often flow specific goals, and ways and means to address it (Saunders, 2009, p. 122). However, the distinction is necessary and analytically useful especially when looking at no-fly zone initiation. This is because the no-fly zone as a specific means routinely conflicts with interpretations of the scenario and corresponding US interests: indeed, this thesis’ primary puzzle lies in a mismatch between purported goals and means of US foreign policy, specifically during military intervention.

With regards to situational appraisal, ideas have as their starting point and principle aim the diagnosis, i.e. interpretation and contextualization (and subsequently the deliberation in decision-making processes) of given systemic conditions. However, they may lead decision-makers towards vastly different alternative foreign policy stances that cannot easily be predicted as the result purely of either systemic conditions or ideological alignment. Differentiating distinct ideational patterns in competition with each other has a long academic and historical tradition. This tradition centers on what the US position in the international system is and should be, what US interests are, and how the US should behave when faced with challenges. In US foreign policy, concepts of American exceptionalism,



“manifest destiny” and the civilizing mission (“city upon a hill”) influence grand strategic positioning (McCartney, 2006; McCrisken, 2003; Merk, 1963; Twing, 1998). Numerous authors have debated the analytical merits of political identities and ideologies, from isolationism and imperialism (Nordlinger, 1996; Quinn, 2010) to the four “traditions” of US foreign policy (Mead, 2002). Correspondingly, Western identifies four important sets of beliefs in executive decision-making (Western, 2005, pp. 6–14), and Dueck observes four grand strategic paradigms (see above; Dueck, 2004, pp. 513–516; for similar approaches: Kohout et al., 1995; Nacht, 1995; Nau, 2002, 2013; Posen & Ross, 1996). Other authors have identified “liberal interventionism” (for Kosovo) or “neoconservatism” (for 2003 Iraq) as crucial stepping stones for decisions (Nabers, 2016; K. Smith, 2016). Frequently, the end of the Cold War is hypothesized to have intensified the struggle between a restrained ideological “narrative of exemplar” and an assertive “narrative of intervention” (Barreto, 2013, p. 180; F. Cameron, 2002; McEvoy-Levy, 2001). Correspondingly, Dumbrell identifies a debate, especially during the 1990s, between the “forces of realism, caution and the logic of [...] sovereignty” on the one hand, and “compassionate warriors” of humanitarian intervention on the other, between “pluralists” and “solidarists” (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 62). Saunders classifies sets of beliefs as either “internally focused” or “externally focused” with regards to intervention (Saunders, 2009, p. 129), and Onea suggests that different ideas in US foreign policy are characterized by their alignment with a stance of either assertiveness or restraint (Onea, 2013; also: Gholz, Press, & Sapolsky, 1997). Similarly, Fitzgerald & Ryan suggest a struggle between the needs to feel “good, safe and strong”, the appropriate interpretation of historical precedent, and American leadership and responsibility in US (and specifically Obama) foreign policy (Fitzgerald & Ryan, 2014).

While building on this tradition and trying to integrate its insights into a neoclassical realist framework, ideas as used here differ from these approaches in crucial ways: *firstly*, it is my contention that ideas underlie any deductive process concerned with the appraisal and interpretation of systemic conditions, scenarios and corresponding US interests, no matter what specific party or ideological affiliation decision-makers adhere to. Ideas favoring assertive and interventionist US policies are found in both Democratic and Republican “camps”, and ideas of prudence and restraint are equally represented across both the partisan as well as the theoretical aisle. Across administrations, and with changing political and contextual circumstances, these ideas may find different discursive iterations, i.e. be expressed in different codes or metaphors (J. A. Edwards, 2007; Khong, 1993; Paris, 2002; Riker, 1996). The ideas that underlie these iterations may flow out of and feed back into American identity or culture (Hunt, 1987). *Secondly*, I argue ideas matter not only in the long-term formulation of grand strategy, but also in short-term executive decision-making scenarios, that is, as argued above, all the way down to the deliberation and choice of specific tools of intervention (Saunders, 2009, p. 126). *Thirdly*, as the point is to outline ideational competition and the role the no-fly zone plays in this competition, ideas

are not to be understood as coherent sets (see above). I do not suggest, for example, that there are (only) two prevailing sets of strategic paradigms or ideologies consisting of various ideas, or that all ideas individuals carry in the decision-making process are or must be in any way realistic, consistent, coherent, or match with truth conditions. Broader, ideal-typical categories (“isolationism”, “interventionism”, etc.) are useful to order a complex array of different ideas, and discern long-term patterns of US foreign policy. However, these broad categories manifest in different layers and ideational subsets held by decision-makers in any given scenario, and may thus limit the accurate description of ideational competition within any specific foreign policy decision-making process. Instead, the variable of “ideas” is employed here to deconstruct notions of ideological or paradigmatic consistency and tease out constitutive ideational parts. Ideas may be understood as the building blocks of larger ideational constructs, i.e. paradigms, ideologies and identities. Thus, looking at ideas present in specific foreign policy deliberations allows a glimpse at the microfoundations of broader and more long-standing societal and political discourses on America’s role in the world. This in turn suggests that ideas understood as context- and time-specific views of what US interests are in a given scenario and what the US should do about them, ever diverging and conflicting, are present in any foreign policy decision-making process to differing degrees, regardless of supposed strategic paradigms or ideologies adopted by the respective administration in charge.

With regards to appropriate ways and means of state power mobilization, ideational competition centers on military strategy, tools and technology, about what capabilities can and should achieve, and how their use connects to US grand strategy and interests.²⁸ Frequently, these ideas are subsumed in respective literatures under the umbrella term “strategic culture”, which (though rarely clearly defined) may be understood as the “total sum of ideas” shared by foreign policy and security elites on the appropriate combination of foreign policy goals and means to achieve them (J. L. Snyder, 1977, p. 8). Decision-makers continuously deliberate and reproduce this culture (Gray, 1999, p. 131) by employing a system of different codes and metaphors (Johnston, 1995). As suggested by these definitions, the strategic culture literature tends to emphasize consistency, continuity, and coherence not least because of its focus on longer-term strategic positioning (e.g.: Echevarria, 2014; A. R. Lewis, 2012; Weigley, 1977; for a critique, see: Bloomfield, 2012). It therefore suffers from analytical shortcomings: as argued above, I focus not on the combination and aggregation of different ideas in long-term discourses, but rather on specific foreign policy deliberations where decision-making is defined by ideational competition and inconsistency. Contributions on strategic culture have usefully

²⁸ Oftentimes, an elaboration of ways and means finds its way into strategic and military *doctrine* (e.g. discussions over the “Powell doctrine” prominent in the 1990s). However, systemic appraisal and formalized doctrine need not match in a scenario. Also, which part of doctrine applies to a given scenario is frequently unclear (as discussed in the case studies below). Finally, ideas need not be formalized into doctrine for them to matter in foreign policy decision-making.

identified different building blocks of longer-term strategic debates about appropriate state power mobilization likely to surface in US foreign policy deliberations. These ideas center on technological superiority and the minimization of risk in “wars of choice”, and have led authors to identify an “American way of war” (Boot, 2003; Buley, 2007; Kamara, 2015; Linn & Weigley, 2002; Weigley, 1977). This links the study of ideas about the appropriate mobilization of state power given a specific scenario with the study of military technology and tactical innovation in the US context (Futter & Collins, 2015; Adamski, 2010; Buley, 2007; Benbow, 2004; E. A. Cohen, 1996).²⁹ Correspondingly, numerous recent publications focus on how the US foreign policy executive employs, thinks and talks about technology in intervention and crisis management (K. P. Mueller, 2015; Dyson, Aslam, Rauxloh, & Aaronson, 2014; Aslam, 2013).

With specific regards to no-fly zone use, conflicting ideas about ways to mobilize US power center on the use, efficiency, effectiveness, and risk of airpower in external intervention into intra-state conflict or as a means of coercive diplomacy. To some decision-makers and advisers, information technology, precision weaponry, the use of unmanned weapon systems, robotics and network-centric warfare enable modern militaries to lift the “fog of war”, and transform their entire organization (Arquilla, 2008). It is argued that this development goes hand in hand with the “technologization” and “digitization” of military operations, with effects on three layers that are closely interconnected: command and control structures; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; and advanced weapon technology. Particularly since Operation Desert Storm (see below), the capability of modern airpower to “maintain a long-term coercive presence with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability linked to precision-guided munitions” (Kramlinger, 2001, p. v) have impressed US decision-makers. The limitations and risks of modern military capabilities and airpower particularly in non-conventional conflicts, e.g. in correctly identifying targets, differentiating between civilians and combatants, or coping with natural challenges such as terrain, appeared to decrease continuously. This supposed technological advancement would not only guarantee superiority in almost any conflict the US chose to engage in, but further the applicability of advanced military systems and airpower to more complex conflict theaters. Technological advancements would bring new possibilities to the battlefield as well as decrease monetary and other costs of missions by upgrading existing technology and materiel.

The potential for safer, calmer and faster “zero-casualty warfare” is important not least because the US is decreasingly willing to risk soldiers’ lives (Coker, 2002; Kaldor, 2013). However, this risk-

²⁹ Much of this literature focuses on the concept of a possible “Revolution in Military Affairs”, i.e. a change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of new technologies, strategies, tactics and military organization (Futter & Collins, 2015; Buley, 2007).

averseness may be offset by increased willingness to use advanced military capabilities, and indeed substitute actual strategy with reliance on military technology (Caverley, 2014; Harris, 2008; Rasmussen, 2006). Correspondingly, other decision-makers and advisers warn of an overt trust in advanced military technology and aerial capabilities (as evidenced in subsequent chapters). Despite supposedly risk-less warfare, high-tech weaponry can be destroyed by less advanced systems (although at a lower likelihood). In that case, “technologization” increases the foregone costs without benefit to the personnel aboard or the mission. Also, more complex technology may increase the risk of systemic failure, or of not detecting technological errors in routine inspections, which in the case of aircraft may result in the loss of the entire weapon system. Continued proliferation of advanced technology to poor or failing countries, non-state armed militias, or terrorist groups increases the risk to intervention forces, because it increases denial capabilities (Vertzberger, 1998, p.154). Irregular adversaries show a surprisingly high willingness to make use of advanced capabilities and have been able to adapt their fighting style even to the large gap that currently exists to an extent that their level of sophistication surprises even the intervention forces sent to control them (Arquilla, Ronfeldt, & Zanini, 2001). This further increases the complexity of fighting on the ground. Imprecision of air-based weaponry remains an important issue, particularly in missions that aim at protecting civilians as part of their mandate. Air-based campaigning, no matter the advanced technologies used, still cannot fulfill the highest standards of precision that would be necessary to differentiate clearly between legitimate targets and innocent bystanders. Data from Iraq to Libya show that air-based forms of intervention such as the no-fly zone inflict low and decreasing damage to own materiel and personnel, but continue to harm or kill civilians (“collateral damage”). Even highly advanced and precise systems can still not achieve the degree of possible discrimination that a soldier on the ground can apply. This dilemma in turn leads advanced militaries to slow down the targeting process to make sure that attacks are technologically, legally and politically feasible, which prolongs the duration of engagement. Finally, an over-reliance on airpower risks severe goals-tactics mismatches of the kind the no-fly zone embodied in Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya. Ignoring the limitations of airpower and concomitantly the many benefits of non-violent instruments as well as other military tools regardless of the situation at hand would lead to detrimental consequences down the line: from “mission creep” to never-ending engagement (“perpetual patrol” in the case of no-fly zones), from military over-extension to ever-more complex conflict theaters, all of which negatively affect US interests.

In any given decision-making process, these categories of ideas (about the nature of a scenario and corresponding US interests as well as about appropriate ways and means of state power mobilization) overlap in a complex discursive process of ideational competition, during which they are employed as discursive tools by their carriers to persuade, counter-argue, rhetorically balance, or coerce (Holland & Aaronson, 2014; Schmidt, 2010). Indeed, these diverse ideas are likely to contrast and contradict



each other. In the foreign policy process, decision-makers are tasked with distilling an appropriate overall foreign policy based on systemic conditions and deliberation of competing ideas. This sequence of decisions is difficult and often time-intensive, particularly so when systemic conditions are unclear and scenarios complex. In such situations, decision-makers may seek to extricate themselves not by careful deliberation, but by “doing something” solutions such as the no-fly zone.

2.3.4. Ideational Competition and the No-Fly Zone

Deep ideational competition can become a problem for foreign policy decision-making and individual leaders or administrations. Decision-makers face a predicament when faced with intense ideational competition during deliberations (i.e. contradicting ideas about systemic conditions and corresponding interests, as well as appropriate ways to mobilize state power) all the while external conditions make it (seem) necessary to act quickly. This links the notion of ideational competition to the concept of (perceived) crisis, and sets a scope condition for this theoretical framework. The every-day usage of the term “crisis” for all sorts of troublesome situations has made its definitional clarification an item of much debate. Crises can be classified per numerous characteristics, including causal force, scope and intensity, location (either geographically or e.g. in societal spheres), or duration (Brecher, 1979; Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997; George, 1984; Rike, 2003; A. R. Roberts & Ottens, 2005; U. Rosenthal, Hart, & Kouzmin, 1991; U. Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997; Welch, 1989). Others have pointed to a crisis’ inherent complexity and multidimensional interconnections (Dynes, 1970; Gundel, 2005). Newer definitions focus on predictability, path dependency, and potential countermeasures (Gundel, 2005). Common to conventional definitions of crisis is the concept of “a decisive moment which denotes the favorable or unfavorable outcome of the evolution of a situation” (Gundel, 2005, p. 106). The stakes are suddenly raised (from the perspective of the decision-maker), e.g. by reports of atrocities. Many authors add the condition of a significant threat to national interests to explain action or inaction of decision-makers, and argue that a crisis must affect national interests “enough” to be acted upon decisively: widely used definitions include a “threat to basic values”, “a high probability of military hostilities” or a large degree of human suffering as perceived by decision-makers (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997; Knecht & Weatherford, 2006, p. 709). I contend that this narrow definition of crisis and national interests is not necessary for the analysis of no-fly zone use in US foreign policy (Knecht & Weatherford, 2006, p. 709). Raised stakes or “trigger moments” have the primary effect of creating a sense of urgency and time pressure, which can culminate in a (perceived) need for quick action even if “only” lesser interests are at stake as it raises the expected costs of “doing nothing” (Saunders, 2009, p. 134). Since the usual administrative procedures are too slow for situations where every hour might count, quick action necessitates highest-level decision-making.

Given a specific scenario, different high-level advisors within the US foreign policy executive (i.e. mostly in the White House) carry their ideas into deliberations which aim to grapple with or solve the problem at hand (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 122). There are then, in principle, four alternative paths to foreign policy outcomes: firstly, decision-makers may converge, through deliberation of their different ideas and persuasion, on a common position vis-à-vis the interpretation of systemic conditions. This common position may still be erroneous given actual systemic conditions (in the sense of structural realist predictions), but formulated based on intra-administrative agreement. Alternatively, new developments in the international environment or other changes to the decision context (e.g. a presidential election) may change the respective scenario fundamentally so that ideational competition becomes less intense and possibilities for agreement increase. *Secondly*, given the hierarchy of US foreign policy decision-making, presidential leadership may help break through ideational competition amongst high-level advisors. The president as the ultimate decision-maker can impose a decision and “choose” a side. There is a considerable likelihood that presidents, as (frequently) experienced statesmen elected to lead the country, have good own ideas as well as intuition and the necessary conviction in their own competence to decide which course of action is best suited to the specific scenario at hand. However, they then “own” the decision, especially if made against the advice of trusted advisers and experts, which may appear risky given that systemic conditions in a permissive international environment may be difficult to interpret and interests hard to formulate. Therefore, most US presidents since at least 1990 relied to a considerable degree on the expertise of their secretaries, advisers, and generals (see below). *Thirdly*, absent agreement or decisive presidential leadership, ideational competition may simply be left to linger, and a decision is delayed despite pressures to act quickly. Given both the obscurity of systemic conditions as well as intense ideational competition over the right course of action, “doing nothing” may be a sensible approach (Regan, 1998, pp. 759–765; Saunders, 2009, p. 134). However, inaction can also be politically problematic, not only in terms of a potentially worsening scenario on the ground, but also in terms of delay and domestic backlash (cf. Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2004) and wider signaling effects (e.g. with regards to America’s position as “leader of the free world”). Especially during moments of (perceived) crisis, with suddenly raised stakes, possibly accompanied by media and public attention, the impulse to act may be difficult to overcome. Therefore, *fourthly*, decision-makers may seek to extricate themselves from intense ideational competition by employing faux compromise solutions, such as the no-fly zone. In this case, ideational divisions in the executive decision-making bodies (in this case, the White House) are patched over (rather than solved) with a “half-way in” solution that panders to multiple ideas at the same time. Note how this fourth alternative outcome is 1) more likely the more ideas conflict (i.e. the lower the ideological homogeneity within an administration and, correspondingly, the lower the likelihood of convergence), 2) more likely the more

presidents rely on advisers for decision-making, 3) more likely the more intense (perceived) external pressures to act quickly.

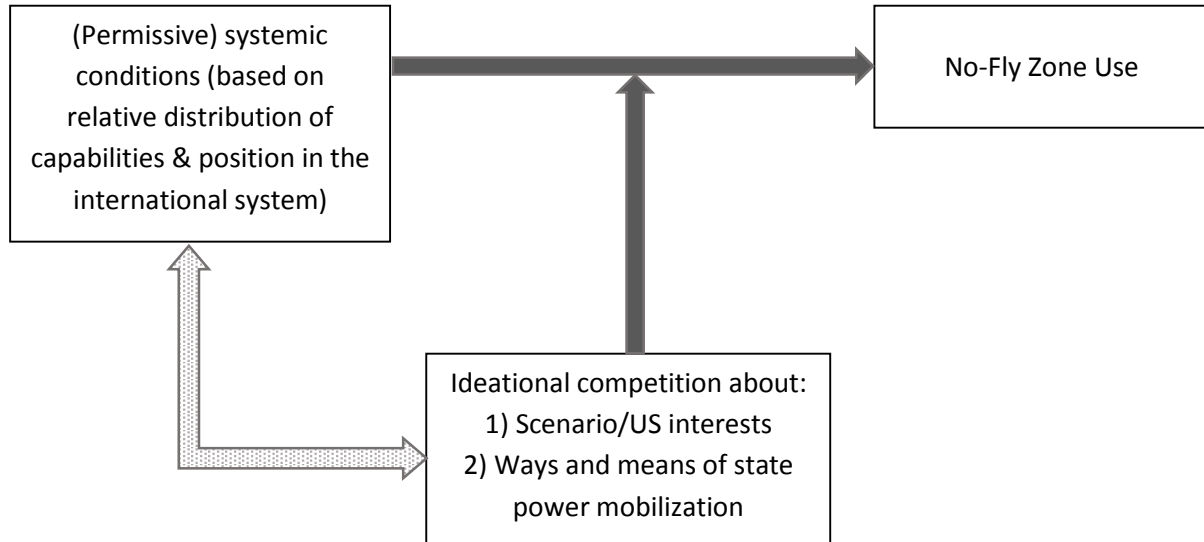


Figure 4: A Neoclassical Realist Framework of Foreign Policy Decision-Making and No-Fly Zone Use

The no-fly zone is attractive for decision-makers not because it is necessarily the best or even a good tool to address the situation on the ground. Rather, it serves to bridge ideational divides because it (seemingly) answers to contrasting ideas present within the foreign policy executive. Its inherent military-strategic flexibility makes it attractive to decision-makers not able or willing to decide. As outlined in the previous chapter, a no-fly zone is defined as a delineated space in which one state patrols to ensure implementation of *whatever rules* it set to hold therein, and to deny another state the use of that air space (Benard, 2004, p. 455). By this definition, the no-fly zone is not necessarily limited to the interdiction of flyovers. The latter element is a necessary condition to enforcement, and may precede other rules that the patrolling state wants to enforce. It has been outlined above that no-fly zones are distinct from economic sanctions in that they directly apply military force. Indeed, used for military intervention and/or coercive diplomacy, no-fly zones effectively capture and occupy parts of the opponent's territory (air space), likely preventively destroy adversarial capabilities that may threaten air superiority, and threaten to use the established air superiority for compellence both inside and at the borders of its demarcation. In other ways, however, no-fly zones are more limited, and may signal restraint and passivity: firstly, unless stated (and then sometimes labelled a "no-movement zone" or "no-drive zone"), no-fly zones are expected to suppress and/or destroy "only" a specific part of adversarial capabilities, namely air-related assets. Secondly, rules are enforced within the distinct territory of the no-fly zone, implying that elsewhere the adversary may still govern its air space without interference. Thirdly, the no-fly zone in general is rule-bound: included in its declaration is a list of

violations of its rules which may lead to the use of force. If the opponent complies and air superiority is not threatened, the no-fly zone seems to be a passive-defensive rather than active-offensive tool of airpower. By this interpretation, a no-fly zone freezes a status quo on the ground and creates safe areas rather than aggressively intervening to alter the conflict landscape (Posen, 1996). As air strikes are dependent on adversarial escalation, the no-fly zone does not present an ongoing international debate with *faits accomplis*: no-fly zones cannot be used to effect regime change on their own (McIlmail, 1994). Once transgressions are effectively discouraged, air strikes should stop. Fourthly, a no-fly zone may seem to be easily retractable if the adversary assures compliance (albeit risking “perpetual patrol”, Benard, 2004, p. 460) and flexible enough to enable further coercive measures (although it can lead to “mission creep”). Fifthly, no-fly zones are cheap compared to other tools (such as full air campaigns), given the infrastructure to enforce them (air bases or carriers). They can be implemented quickly, as little materiel and personnel must be moved and air components can cover additional distance – assets are essentially removed from the conflict theater for the entire intervention period. This is attractive to policy-makers looking to avoid delay costs given pressures to act quickly, and to signal commitment to stated primary objectives, but shying away from high-cost operations. Most importantly, no-fly zones are expected to very rarely result in loss of own materiel or life, making their implementation a nearly riskless “zero-casualty” mission (Coker, 2002; E. V. Larson, 1996; Luttwak, 1995). Lastly, no-fly zones have so far been implemented multilaterally, which, particularly if overseen by international bodies, makes unilateral hawkish decisions more difficult (Podliska, 2010).

The no-fly zone allows decision-makers to evade complex ideational competition: namely, no-fly zones serve to satisfy decision-making constraints and accommodate both critics and proponents of intervention in the foreign policy executive. The foreign policy choice is then detached from its actual strategic or military value – and indeed often from any detailed planning. The resulting cause of action (no-fly zone initiation) is not (only) a function of the actual scenario (i.e. systemic conditions, the situation on the ground, the conflict or crisis) but instead mediated by an intervening variable, namely diverging ideas within the foreign policy executive about the conflict, corresponding US interests, and appropriate ways and means to respond. While the no-fly zone as a faux compromise tool served to cut the Gordian knot of conflicting ideas, it is also apparent both to outside observers as well as to the respective administrations itself that the tool has considerable disadvantages, which may threaten the initial compromise. Decision-makers rely on the no-fly zone *knowing* that it is not an optimal tool to intervene into intra-state conflict, but rather because they interpret it as an acceptable solution to “do something”. In that sense, the compromise overcomes ideational competition for a while and may buy time which could be used to gain additional information, debate the merits of different ideas further, and work out better solutions. However, it also invites both “mission creep” (the decision to use a no-

fly zone sets a precedent for subsequent decisions), as well as short-termism more generally (continued ideational divisions continue to be patched over with similar solutions). As a result, “doing something” decision-making leads to policy results that are unsatisfactory from all angles (Dieck, 2013), and seem irrational from the standard structural realist and rationalist perspectives (Christensen, 1996, p. 7). In subsequent chapters, I investigate the dynamic of no-fly zone initiation in decision-making processes leading up to the Iraq, Bosnia and Libya no-fly zones.

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed a theoretical framework based on neoclassical realist and foreign policy analysis literature insights on the foreign policy decision-making process. I proceeded in three steps: firstly, I argued that systemic conditions are primary causal drivers of state behavior. However, they leave leeway for decision-makers to shape foreign policy. The political process taking place in the transmission belt between systemic conditions and foreign policy choice opens the door for a closer look at ideational competition in policy deliberations. Secondly, based on realist as well as FPA approaches, I argued ideas should be understood as grounded in individual beliefs, and entailing both a diagnostic function, in that they help decision-makers interpret material reality and deduce interests, as well as a discursive function, as they are carried into policy deliberations as tools of persuasion. In such deliberations, diverging ideas compete. Finally, I argued that this ideational competition centers on two core questions, namely the nature of the given scenario and corresponding national interests in it, as well as appropriate ways and means of mobilizing state power in response. Given external pressures for quick action and absent presidential leadership, intense ideational competition can produce faux compromise solutions as decision-makers may wish to extricate themselves from lengthy deliberations. Having to cater to multiple sets of contrasting ideas quickly and at the same time, decision-makers opt for ineffective and suboptimal policy solutions. I argue that employing the no-fly zone repeatedly for a purpose it is not actually suited to suggests such a “doing something” dynamic. In the next chapter, I suggest a methodology by which ideas can be traced in the foreign policy decision-making process and linked to both the intervention decision in general but also the choice of this tool specifically, as well as the degree to which they influence choice approximated. This has implications for the employed method, namely archival research and the analysis of process documents in three case studies on US foreign policy decision-making and no-fly zones.

Chapter III: Methodology & Methods

3.1. Introduction: Neoclassical Realist Epistemology

In the previous chapter, I suggested that a structural realist focus solely on systemic factors obfuscates the importance of ideas as intervening variables that mediate a state's foreign policy response to systemic stimuli. No-fly zones, then, should be understood as flawed based on the mismatch between mandated goals and military-strategic characteristics, as well as based on the mismatch between systemic conditions and their continuous use in US foreign policy. This mirrored the puzzle this thesis seeks to address: Why would the US continuously since 1991 choose a no-fly zone to intervene in intra-state conflict? Note that this type of puzzle is derived from an anomalous process or causal sequence based on previous literature as well as predictions of structural realism (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 102). I suggested that a neoclassical realist framework employing the intervening variable of ideas (understood to be grounded in individual beliefs, and to have a diagnostic and a discursive function) and the resulting ideational competition addresses this puzzle. Neoclassical realism builds on, and seeks to move beyond, its structural realist roots to provide clarification on the causal mechanisms of foreign policy choice, including in anomalous cases (from the perspective of structural realist predictions). To that end, neoclassical realist authors (just as structural realists would) employ systemic factors as the independent variable and foreign policy choice/state behavior as the dependent variable, but make use of unit-level factors as intervening variables to better describe and explain fault lines in the "transmission belt" from systemic conditions to state behavior. As a "school of thought" or "research paradigm",³⁰ neoclassical realism is (explicitly or implicitly) committed to "soft" positivism and Humean causality, which has implications for the subsequent choice of methods.

"Soft" positivism refers to neoclassical realist commitments to testing theory against empirical evidence with the goals of generalization and prediction on the one hand (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 105), and awareness of limitations inherent to the social sciences on the other. *Firstly*, this implies the acceptance of core positivist assumptions, including that knowledge can be gained about an objectively real world through diligent investigation and experimentation. With regards to qualitative methods, neoclassical realists assume it possible to "make contingent causal inferences about observable phenomena that can be verified through careful case research" (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 105). These inferences are probabilistic (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 107). *Secondly*, these assumptions are

³⁰ I aim to capture commonalities between neoclassical realist authors and to that end group them together in, interchangeably, "neoclassical realists", a "school of thought" or a "research paradigm". The use of these terms is similar to Ripsman et al., 2016. Some authors doubt that authors allegedly belonging to neoclassical realism may even be grouped together in the first place (cf. Foulon, 2015).

difficult to consistently uphold in the social sciences because the object of study (human behavior) introduces a range of problems related to subjectivity, interpretation, unpredictability, and research ethics, which make it hard (if not impossible) to define, measure, and evaluate the object of research objectively and accurately based on agreed experiments, standards, and devices (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 105). The studied individuals themselves may render any account based on their own interpretations (e.g. through interviews on which ideas individuals thought mattered in their decision-making) inherently subjective. This has implications for the methods chosen in this thesis, as explained below. It also makes cumulative findings and generalization more difficult (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 105). *Thirdly*, this does not imply that theory building and testing are impossible for neoclassical realists or for social scientists generally. Objects of research are instead assumed to be comparable and similar enough to discern generalizable patterns which can be tested against broader case universes. Neoclassical realists search for such patterns by careful process tracing and textual or discourse analysis, as detailed below. This aims at evaluating “the causal impact of specific hypothesized independent variables (IVs) and intervening variables (IIVs) on the dependent variables (DVs)” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 106). Such generalizable patterns may “inform predictions and generate policy relevant advice” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 106).

The commitments to discernible variables or events (“both contingent and contiguous”; Ball, 1978, p. 101; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 203), and to the independence and temporal priority of cause over effect, rather than constitutive or iterative effects between different variables (e.g. interests and ideas), means that neoclassical realism employs a Humean concept of causality (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 28; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). Here, causality refers to the “difference between the systematic component of observations made when the explanatory variables take one value and the systematic component of comparable observations when the explanatory variables takes on another value” (King et al., 1994, p. 76; 81-82; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 203).³¹ Ideas intervene in the causal path between systemic conditions and state behavior if there is an observable alteration in the dependent variable which is not explicable solely by reference to models generated by structural realist approaches, and if this alteration can be traced to patterns of co-variation between ideas and subsequent state behavior (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 204): similar ideas intervene into the causal path to similar effect given systemic conditions, dissimilar ideas intervene into the causal path to dissimilar effect given systemic conditions. Note that such a model does not lend ideas *independent* causal force.³² Understanding interests and ideas as distinct variables requires their differentiation as discussed in the previous chapter.

³¹ This conception of causality may be contrasted with others rooted in scientific realism (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 204).

³² This circumvents several problems discussed by Gofas & Hay (2010, p. 17ff.).



Combining “soft” positivism, Humean causality, as well as structuralism, (methodological) individualism and assumptions of (procedural) rationality (as discussed in the previous chapter) into a neoclassical realist framework of foreign policy decision-making creates not only a sufficiently delineated and inherently consistent theoretical approach, it also has methodological implications: specifically, it points at case study research and the analysis of causal mechanisms through process tracing (King et al., 1994, p. 86; Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 204). In the next paragraphs, I explain how neoclassical realism uses small-n, qualitative research to identify causal mechanisms of foreign policy choice. I detail the rationale for choosing the case study method, as well as case selection criteria and several limitations to this approach. This thesis includes detailed case studies on US foreign policy decision-making towards northern Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya, as well as shorter, “deviant” case studies on Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, and Syria. I make use of primary data gathered in archives across the USA, as well as secondary sources such as newspapers, biographies, and relevant publications to arrive at a thick description and careful tracing of foreign policy decision-making processes within these cases. I explain these methodological choices and discuss their limitations, specifically, the complications inherent in interrogating the effect of ideas on decision-making through qualitative textual analysis. This chapter concludes with an outlook onto the case studies.

3.2. Methodology and Methods

This section focuses on the selection of method, namely case study analysis, and how it relates to the research strategy and the theoretical framework. It also discusses case selection, generalizability, and validity of the proposed research.

3.2.1. Neoclassical Realism and the Case Study Method

In this thesis, three case studies on no-fly zone initiation are analyzed to probe and further develop the theoretical framework. I study the respective foreign policy decision-making processes in case studies to uncover the indirect and complex links between systemic conditions, ideas as intervening variables, and decision-making outcomes (Wivel, 2005, p. 365). Case study analysis is an approach in which “the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information [...] and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 73). Case study research in social sciences generally concentrates on an instance of greater complexity (Mabry, 2008, p. 214) and is geared towards “deep understanding” of phenomena which it derives from the documentation of “concrete details” (Mabry, 2008, p. 218; Merriam, 1998, p. 19). In case study research, data is used to provide a description of the case narrative, which details the history of the case, chronology of events,



and important other aspects (Creswell, 2012, p. 75). In-depth analysis and comparison of key themes then serves to disentangle the cases' complexities. Choosing the case study method is neither self-explanatory nor random, but instead derived from neoclassical realism's theoretical and methodological commitments.

This thesis employs neoclassical realism from a parsimonious starting point in systemic conditions, but strives to explain specific decision-making processes. It assumes a causal linkage between systemic incentives and constraints, and a state's foreign policy choices. This link is indirect, complex, and mediated through decision-makers' ideas. Firstly, while it would in principle be possible to study the causal linkage between independent, intervening, and dependent variables quantitatively (especially when systemic outcomes are investigated, cf. Ripsman et al., 2016), specific materializations of this linkage can only be uncovered in the first place by detailed case studies (Schweller, 2003; Wivel, 2005, p. 365). Neoclassical realism is, in that sense, theory with a "direction": it strives to be as parsimonious as possible, but conceptually devolves from the grand-theoretical level to consider additional dimensions necessary to causally explain specific behavior. As observed by Ripsman, Taliaferro & Lobell, neoclassical realism is committed to explaining causes for specific outcomes in individual cases that fall within the respective investigation's scope (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 108; George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 132–135). This commitment is not easily commensurable with quantitative research and its focus on controlled conditions and on the evaluation of "average effect of hypothesized causes across the universe of cases (or at least across a random sample)" (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 108). Arguably, the combination of parsimonious theory with a greater awareness of complex reality is both a strength of neoclassical realism as well as a potential weakness. The addition of unit-level intervening variables to account for complex processes makes it more difficult to identify which variables are more important than others (i.e. have greater causal effect). Such a strategy leads to tensions between "on the one hand providing a [generalized] theoretical explanation [...] and on the other hand giving a rich empirical account of the foreign policy of a particular country" (Wivel, 2005, p. 364). In answer to this problem, King, Keohane & Verba suggest transposing quantitative research methodology, i.e. the search for causal effects rather than the explication of causal mechanisms, into case study research (King et al., 1994, p. 85). It seems more reasonable, however, to instead allow for the choice of qualitative or quantitative methods based on the research question, and point out the linkage between qualitative and quantitative methods in small-n theory building and subsequent theory testing of average effects across the wider case universe (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 109).

Secondly, neoclassical realism can be described as theorizing in "stages". Neoclassical realists begin with the assumptions of structural realist theories, which inform their conception of the system, its structural rules and actors. Based on shortcomings of structural realism as identified in theory as well

as with regards to explaining specific foreign policy choice and behavior, additional factors are added to gain explanatory value. This takes the analysis “one step away from the general theory [...] and one step closer to the specific foreign policy explanations” (Wivel, 2005, p. 363). Quantitative methods are not able to determine “whether hypothesized independent variables actually had any causal impact on the policy choices of any individual state” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 131). Instead, only a close look at decision-making dynamics within states can assess any intervening variable’s impact on foreign policy choice. While the focus on particular variables inevitably flattens the historical record in each of these cases, it also allows a bridging of empirical complexity and theoretical parsimony (Jervis, 2001, p. 394; Wivel, 2005, p. 365). The conceptual devolution from grand theory to detailed investigation thus finds its logical continuance (but not its end point) in case analysis and the study of specific processes (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 131). If empirical insights are appropriately re-integrated into theoretical frameworks, case study analysis may lead not only to a better understanding of causal mechanisms within each case, but also (if desired) set the groundwork for larger-n studies of sequencing and average effects.

3.2.2. Case Selection, Generalizability and Validity

Despite the limitations inherent to social sciences when it comes to theory testing, the detailed study of carefully selected cases can provide confirming or disconfirming evidence and thereby evaluate the performance of theory and suggested causal mechanisms (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 107). Neoclassical realism’s roots in “soft positivism” already imply that theoretical claims cannot simply be proven or disproven (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 137). Instead, any case analysis and historical narrative is at best subject to different degrees of strength of confirming or disconfirming evidence. Therefore, qualitative case studies probe *plausibility*: they reach conclusions that aim at consistency with the accessed evidence (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 137) through thick description and a broad evidence base. The three cases under detailed interrogation in subsequent chapters can thus be understood as plausibility probes into the suggested theoretical framework, specifically to investigate the causal linkage between permissive systemic conditions, intervening ideas in the decision-making process, and the choice of the no-fly zone (cf. Eckstein, 1992). Briefer deviant cases also under investigation make for “hard cases” which are more plausibly connected to alternative theoretical approaches (specifically structural realist theories).

The case studies seek to establish a thick historical narrative (employing the method of process tracing, see below) to investigate causal mechanisms in US foreign policy decision-making. The case chapters here, however, do not *test* (narrowly understood as in: hypothesis testing) these mechanisms: they are sampled on the outcome variable (namely: that a no-fly zone was indeed initiated) to tease out

procedural dynamics that were similar in the decision-making processes across the cases, more specifically to identify patterns in the use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy. In this sense, the case chapters have a dual task as well as a dual benefit: they empirically analyze specific scenarios, namely foreign policy decision-making processes in response to crises in Iraq, Bosnia and Libya, with a focus on no-fly zone use. More importantly, however, they establish empirically the causal mechanism that links independent, intervening and dependent variables.



Figure 5: Cases of No-Fly Zone Initiation under Investigation (No-Fly Zone Areas in Light Grey)

The case selection follows purposeful sampling based on both informativeness (Creswell, 2012, p. 75) as well as typicality (Mabry, 2008, p. 217). This results in “most likely” cases which benefit theory building, especially as regards the tracing of ideational processes (Jacobs, 2014, p. 73; C. Parsons, 2002). Purposeful sampling is appropriate if different cases show different perspectives on the same problem, particularly since random selection might fail to yield the most informative samples (Creswell, 2012, p. 75). Sampling no-fly zone cases on the dependent variable is intuitive, then, because the tool’s use 1) aligns poorly with structural realist predictions (which makes it atypical), and 2) occurs during a period of permissive systemic conditions when ideas are theorized to have greater room to operate (and are thus easier to trace). Indeed, no-fly zone use may be suggestive of patterns of intervening ideas in decision-making processes under loose systemic conditions (Mabry, 2008, p. 217). Establishing such patterns beyond individual events requires the selection of comparable cases to control for potentially confounding variables (Levy, 2008a, p. 10), which works most effectively with a small number of cases (Lijphart, 1975, p. 163). The cases of Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya fit the condition of general comparability for two main reasons.

Firstly, despite historical precursors, the three cases represent the only instances in which no-fly zones (as tools of limited intervention) have been employed – they are sampled on the dependent variable (see below). While the cases are dissimilar in some regards (e.g. duration, intensity, geographic region), they also share essential common features (e.g. military intervention into a lesser power, institutional actors). Secondly, all three no-fly zones have been introduced within a period of twenty years. The Libyan case stands out in this regard as the 2011 no-fly zone was initiated almost two decades after Bosnia, but this period is bridged by two deviant cases (see below). The common time horizon is likely a consequence of systemic conditions, namely the permissiveness of the international environment after the Cold War from a US perspective. Also, evolution in military capabilities enabled low-risk air operations, which may have favored the spread of air operations more generally. For each case, I specify the start and end of the decision-making process under scrutiny (which is a criterion for good process tracing; Bennett & Checkel, 2014, p. 26): the starting point lies at the point in time that the specific scenario is recognized as a policy problem within the foreign policy executive (usually when the scenario is mentioned in policy meetings or briefings as urgent and ideationally connected to no-fly zone use). This can be understood as a critical juncture at which decision-making was contingent, and events within the scenario pushed towards the specific outcome of the no-fly zone (Bennett & Checkel, 2014, p. 26). The decision-making process under investigation ends with the implementation of the no-fly zone in the respective scenario; subsequent processes relating to the implemented no-fly zone are covered in less detail. While broadly comparable in terms of dependent and independent variables, the cases are not strictly independent of each other: earlier cases inform later cases in chronological sequence, as decision-makers might update their beliefs based on historical precedent. This calls for a chronological approach to case study analysis rather than a thematic or other ordering principle.

That the three cases are similar does not make them unique outliers in the sense that the causal mechanism only holds for no-fly zones and not for other tools. The subsequent case studies on northern Iraq, Bosnia and Libya cover no-fly zone initiation in “sufficient descriptive narrative” to allow the reader to form their own interpretation and thus could stand on their own as “intrinsic” case studies (Stake, 2000, p. 439). Such case studies may serve as a typification of other cases, an exploration leading up to generalization-producing studies, or an early step in theory building (Stake, 2000, p. 439). However, cases are useful for explanation and prescription only if there is an expectation of generalizability. Generalizability refers to the capacity of the case to be “informative about a general phenomenon, to be broadly applicable beyond the specific site, population, time and circumstances described” (Mabry, 2008, p. 222; Stake, 2000, p. 439). This thesis is generalizable both in that it generates lessons applicable not only to future cases of US foreign policy decision-making and potential no-fly zones, but also in that the selected cases show sufficient similarities to other cases of



intervention so that results could be compared to e.g. the use of sanctions, other “hybrid tools” (such as buffer zones or naval blockades), strategic air campaigns, or cases of inaction (see below). As will be picked up in the conclusion below, this thesis illuminates a universe of potentially comparable cases which represent a subset of processes of US foreign policy decision-making.

Purposeful case selection is frequently criticized for its sampling on the dependent variable: the no-fly zone is the outcome of the decision-making process under scrutiny. Firstly, though, random sampling has disadvantages in small-n research which necessitate the “guided selection of nonrandom cases” (King et al., 1994, pp. 124–128; Levy, 2008a, p. 8). Secondly, within-case process tracing is not invalidated by a selection on the dependent variable (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 22–25; Levy, 2008a, p. 8). In fact, the selection of positive cases is standard practice for qualitative research (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 109). Thirdly, dependent variable sampling may lead to the overrepresentation of cases with a particular distribution of systemic and ideational variables. While this might limit generalizability across other cases of intervention, it would be an exciting result for the study of airpower, and have clear policy implications. In fact, sampling on the outcome is what makes the framework useful in the first place: the suggestion is, after all, that similarities in the decision-making process lead to similarities in outcome. If the cases suggested fundamental differences between the respective decision-making processes, a thorough re-evaluation of the framework and its hypothesized causal mechanisms would be necessary. Fourthly, to avoid overstating the importance of the intervening variable (Jacobs, 2014, p. 73), I incorporate three deviant cases (Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, Syria). Deviant cases are those that “focus on observed empirical anomalies in existing theoretical propositions, with the aim of explaining why the case deviates from theoretical expectations and in the process refining the existing theory and generating additional hypotheses” (Levy, 2008, p.13). The three cases are in themselves purposely selected: they represent cases which are sampled on the no-fly zone being *debated* rather than implemented as a policy option despite my framework’s expectation of the no-fly zone’s utility to intra-administrative political processes. This provides possible variation in the independent and/or intervening variables, and thus helps clarify and refine causal mechanisms at play between systemic conditions, ideas and state behavior, or, alternatively, in developing contingent theoretical explanations that identify conditions under which alternative outcomes occur. The possibility of uncovering evidence of causes and mechanisms not previously theorized is also a key advantage of the process tracing method (see below; Jacobs, 2014, p. 56). The three deviant cases are covered in a single chapter after the more detailed case studies on Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya.



3.3. Data Collection

Data collection for the case study method is usually extensive, drawing from multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, primary documents, and other textual or audiovisual material). The following section focuses on the rationale for primary historical data gathered through archival research, the process of archival research undertaken, and the need to triangulate primary data through additional secondary sources. It also touches upon issues of data availability, specifically for more recent cases.

3.3.1. Archival Research

This thesis posits that decision-makers use ideas diagnostically as well as argumentatively to deduce and debate the stimuli ambiguous systemic conditions provide. The focus on ideas' diagnostic and discursive functions during decision-making processes in turn implies a focus on the actual deliberations happening during a specific timeframe. The fine-grained reconstruction of decision-making processes, including decision-makers' perceptions and arguments at the time, necessitates the analysis of primary historical sources, e.g. speeches, meeting minutes, reports, memoranda, emails and so forth (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 339; Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 133). Such sources have advantages over interviews with the involved decision-makers for historical cases, e.g. the avoidance of post-facto retrospection (the tendency to re-imagine the past, and possibly try to "improve" it), hindsight bias (which may increase perceptions of causality, prior knowledge, and so forth) or memory loss. Their use also avoids reiterating, and instead opens opportunities for testing, interpretations made by other researchers (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 132–133): one may be better able to "discriminate between competing explanations of the same event" (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 343). Ideally, secondary accounts and other sources (such as media reports), which are often more readily accessible, can then be employed to triangulate the information gathered from primary historical sources. Should original documents not be available, e.g. in very recent cases (such as the Libya and Syria cases), secondary sources can provide "sufficient" insight into decision-making processes to formulate a plausible argument (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 133; 137), even though this decreases the evidentiary basis.

The sources here employed include legal acts and executive orders, meeting minutes from National Security Council (NSC) sessions, briefings and reports, different administrative documents from the White House and relevant US departments, telephone communication minutes and summaries, public speeches, letters and other recorded communication, particularly in the timeframe immediately prior to or after the respective no-fly zone was chosen. They were accessed in 2015 through the National Archives II (College Park, Maryland), and the Presidential Libraries of George H.W. Bush (College Station, Texas), William J. Clinton (Presidential Center and Archive, Little Rock, Arkansas), as well as

departmental archives of the State Department and the Department of Defense both online and in locale. With the help of archivists or by use of digital search masks, these archives have been carefully searched for relevant material within the timeframes of each case, with reference to case-specific relevant keywords,³³ regions (e.g. Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, North Africa), and key actors and institutions (e.g. individual advisers, involved NSC staff). This resulted in a selection of ca. 2,000 prima facie relevant items (ranging from single pages to book-length reports) on four of the cases under investigation (Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, South Sudan), which were photographed and added to an Excel database.³⁴ This database summarizes core information (where available), including: document number in the set, original document name and date, document type, degree of classification, case relevance, content keywords, and other notes (i.e. whether it is a duplicate, or how it links to other documents).

Several data impairments must be acknowledged: firstly, public access to primary documents with sensitive information (on e.g. political or military strategy or cost assessments) is usually very limited. Relevant materials especially on the Libya and Syria cases will remain classified for at least another quarter century. Similarly, although considerable amounts of information are available on Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and South Sudan, substantial parts remain classified at the time of writing. Several requests for declassification specifically of NSC meetings potentially relevant for this thesis were denied based on secrecy statutes. Secondly, every newly released document may alter the findings of this thesis, which is a problem for historical research more generally. While for the two earlier cases, the likelihood that new documents emerge which fundamentally change the plausibility of this thesis' interpretations may be lower, this may pose a problem for "ongoing" cases, such as Syria. Yet, as Chivvis observes, if historical writing "is to have any real value, it must draw some conclusions about the events it depicts. Hence, historians must always decide where to end the story and take a stand" (Chivvis, 2013, p. 14). This choice, although not arbitrary, entails a level of researcher subjectivity that must not be ignored. It will be the task of future researchers to verify the conclusions reached here once additional materials emerge (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 106). Thirdly, despite the relative richness of the primary dataset and the scope of other sources under investigation here, the relevant decision-makers' ideas and intentions can often only be inferred rather than observed. Where such limitations allow for multiple interpretations or are too prevalent to reach any conclusion at all, I attempt to identify them in the respective case.

³³ For the northern Iraq case study, keywords included: no-fly zone/no flying zone, flight ban; Operation Provide Comfort I, Operation Provide Comfort II, Operation Northern Watch; safe haven, enclave, border; helicopters, jet fighters; Kurds/Kurdistan, (northern) Iraq; UNSC Resolutions 678/687/688 etc.; as well as the names of various decision-makers and advisers (Scowcroft, Baker, Schwarzkopf etc.).

³⁴ Amongst other crucial information, I am confident that the dataset includes every unclassified document from the George H.W. Bush and William J. Clinton White Houses which mentions the term "no-fly zone" in the investigated periods.



3.3.2. Secondary Sources and Newspapers

By themselves, primary documents must not be viewed as true or “neutral”: as Larson explains, the author of a report or the speaker at a meeting or press conference “may be trying to ingratiate himself with superiors, create a favorable impression of himself, put himself on the record in case of leaks, or persuade others to adopt her preferred policy” (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 346). There is “no such thing as the definitive source” (Chadwick, 2000, p. 287). To infer discursive motive and establish generalizable causal patterns, it is necessary to probe the claims, arguments, and ways of communicating for plausibility and to contextualize the respective source (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 346). While there is a need for primary documents in case-based historical research, then, such documents should be carefully triangulated with other archival documents to potentially discover inconsistencies, but also with secondary sources, i.e. other researchers’ analyses, and different types of sources, e.g. newspapers and other media. Contemporary news reports provide the context for and chronology of events: they help to

“establish the atmosphere of the times, the purpose of speeches or statements, [...] the public reaction to a statement, [...], what information a policymaker had, [...] provide clues about what events they regarded as important [...] to recapture the perspective of officials at the time” (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 345).

Through these contextual cues, they provide a “codebook” which helps decipher the meaning, references, analogies or implications of a primary document (D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 348). I use print media as well as (where available) online and TV reporting, focusing on contemporary articles from newspapers of record and other leading US and global publications (e.g. The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Huffington Post, The Guardian). Again, however, news reports as well as any other edited material need not be theoretically or politically neutral (Levy, 2008a, p. 9; Lustick, 1996), which limits the degree of possible inference. Also, in contrast to many of the private and/or secret primary historical documents I access, such documents are public (and published), which has implications similar to the ones Larson identifies (see above) for their value especially in identifying and analyzing beliefs, ideas and motivations (see above; Chadwick, 2000, p. 290).

3.4. Data Analysis

The following section discusses the ways in which accessed archival material as well as secondary sources are analyzed in the subsequent case chapters, with a focus on process tracing and thick description as well as the qualitative textual analysis of primary documents. It also discusses several methodological limitations with regards to identifying and analyzing ideas in texts.

3.4.1. Process Tracing

The case studies employ process tracing to investigate the suggested causal mechanism for no-fly zone initiation. Process tracing has a good match with historical explanation (Bennett & Checkel, 2014, pp. 8–9; D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 329; George & Bennett, 2005) and ideally grounds theoretical framing in empirical application “where both agents and structures matter” (Checkel, 2008, p. 114). Per George and Bennett,

“process-tracing provides a common middle ground for historians interested in historical explanation and political scientists who are sensitive to the complexities of historical events but are more interested in theorizing about categories of cases as well as explaining individual cases” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 223).

Process tracing is therefore frequently identified as the appropriate strategy to be used when investigating and explaining “the decision process by which various initial conditions are translated into outcomes, which means uncovering the setting and reconstructing the mechanisms” through which individuals make choices at different levels of analysis (Checkel & Moravcsik, 2001, p. 223; Levy, 2008a, p. 11; Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 136). Through a mapping of process and actors, process tracing provides evidence on whether the hypothesized variables were present, whether they had the predicted impact, whether they were temporally and/or causally linked to outcomes, and whether the hypothesized causal mechanism (and not another) is most likely to have occurred (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 6; Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 132). This necessitates the description of patterns and causal stories, or narratives of cause-effect relations in the data, which can then be generalized beyond the specific case in order to conceptualize the causal mechanism that leads to specific outcomes (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 205; 209; D. W. Larson, 2001, p. 334). Disconfirming evidence may be used for further refinement of theoretical explanations (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 209; Levy, 2008a, p. 11).

The method is consistent with Humean causality, although it adds to its understanding of causal process elements of contiguity and sequencing (Bennett & Checkel, 2014, p. 10). It allows for complex connections between independent, intervening and dependent variables (George & Bennett, 2005; Levy, 2008a, p. 206) and for variance across the sequence of steps within the decision-making process. This may make up for the limitations of comparing cases sampled on the dependent variable (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 214). Careful sequencing of events can (if the causal path is uninterrupted) lead to the identification of crucial turning points or pivotal moments, in which ideas dominate or fade, or relevant alternatives (such as the use of ground troops) are taken off the table (Jacobs, 2014, p. 61). Tracing decision-making processes that led to the initiation of no-fly zones over Iraq, Bosnia and Libya allows for the identification and analysis of specific, contextualized systemic conditions, and of the intervening effect of different ideas in the decision-making process and on the resulting choice of no-fly zones. However, due to limitations of space as well as in data availability, this narrative will

inevitably be selective, as it cannot involve a tracing of *all* events and alternative paths (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 211). Therefore, process tracing is at times limited in the case chapters (and more so in the deviant cases) to outlining decision-making paths and processes in lesser detail.

Effective process tracing necessitates the identification and measurement of the independent variable (here: systemic conditions) which is assumed to be exogenous (see above), the identification of the intervening variable, as well as the careful specification of the hypothesized causal mechanism and the reduction (if possible) of multicollinearity, indeterminacy, and equifinality (Jacobs, 2014, p. 55; George & Bennett, 2005; Collier, Brady, & Seawright, 2004; P. A. Hall, 2003). These four “evidentiary tasks” provide an approximate outline for the case studies below: firstly, I contextualize systemic conditions (the independent variable) for the specific scenario. I then suggest the existence and content of the intervening variable, and attempt to provide evidence for the suggested causal mechanism. Note that my theoretical framework does not only posit that ideas intervene in decisions otherwise caused by systemic conditions: it supplies specific predictions about 1) the ways in which ideas intervene in the process of decision-making, 2) the ways in which diverging ideas compete in deliberations, 3) the ways in which decision-makers extricate themselves from this competition by endorsing “doing something” solutions, and 4) the ways in which the outcome (no-fly zones) relates back to systemic and intervening ideational input. This specified causal connection between independent, intervening, and dependent variables in the decision-making process contributes to reducing the problems of indeterminacy as well as equifinality (Bennett & Checkel, 2014, p. 5; George & Bennett, 2005, p. 207; 211).

Finally, while alternative explanations can rarely be excluded completely, it may still be possible to judge the plausibility of the causal path suggested by my framework, and thereby draw inferences that are useful for further theory-building (cf. George & Bennett, 2005, p.222). Ideally, the reader may also draw their own conclusions on the plausibility of the suggested causal mechanism, e.g. in contrast to a mechanism purely reliant on systemic conditions. As Jacobs points out, for example, deviations from a purely interest-based logic need not reflect its absence, but could hint at its “comingling” with diverging preferences of involved actors. Raising awareness in the reader for such alternative explanations, as well as their parallel examination in the cases where possible, may go some way towards reducing multicollinearity (Jacobs, 2014, p. 71). It also increases investigative objectivity, which is hampered, for example, by “the temptation to see what one seeks” (Gaddis, 2001, p. 322; Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1995, p. 271ff.), or by proximity to events (e.g. topicality), which is problematic particularly if access to primary data is already limited. However, closeness (in space, time, or “mentality”) can also make the events under investigation more accessible (Chivvis, 2013, pp. 14–15). Making methodological choices that increase “objectivity” in qualitative research clearly strengthens the theoretical framework.



3.4.2. Communication, Texts, and Ideas

Process tracing is not necessarily predisposed to one type of data source. However, in practice, many analyses (including my own) that employ process tracing within case study research tend to order and analyze different textual sources, which are produced for the most part by various bureaucrats, advisors, analysts, politicians, journalists and so forth. This necessitates elaborating on the data source in relation to the variables under investigation. Process tracing is, in this thesis, interwoven with research into the intervening causal impact of ideas; the extraction of ideas from texts, however, is not a straightforward task (Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004, p. 205). What individuals write or say need not automatically also be what they believe (see above): the political nature of decision-making deliberations may create pressures for individuals to strategically rather than genuinely communicate their ideas, and misrepresent the reasoning underlying their argumentation (Jacobs, 2014, p. 45; Goldstein, 1993). They may have incentives to exaggerate the relevance of “good” motives (Jacobs, 2014, p. 45), to conform with majority opinion or with those who hold power, or to say whatever is in their short-term interest to say. I have therefore argued that while ideas are properly understood to originate in individual beliefs, they have explanatory power when employed in social interaction and foreign policy deliberation: to intervene in the decision-making process, ideas need to be externalized in *communication*. Then, their observable effects can be studied (King et al., 1994, p. 41). As Jacobs points out, an explanation concerning the impact of ideas on decision-making would hardly be believable if it “failed to find significant verbal references to the ideational constructs hypothesized to have been influential” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 54). To provide evidence consistent with such theorizing, then, it is crucial to discuss how ideas (as deliberative tools) can be extracted from the wide variety of texts.

Firstly, as deliberative tools, ideas are employed in communication between different individuals, a sender and a (receptive) audience, who carry at times divergent, at times similar ideas (Chadwick, 2000, p. 288; Jacobs, 2014, p. 48). This relates to Lakoff’s “conduit” metaphor: ideas are “objects that you can put into words, so that language is a container for ideas, and you send ideas in words over a conduit, a channel of communication to someone else who then extracts the ideas from the words” (Lakoff, 1995, p. 116; quoted in: Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 208). For the most part, communication here under investigation exists in digital or written form and is thus in the public domain: it can be “analyzed, reanalyzed, and reanalyzed without becoming jaded or uncooperative”, and anyone can replicate, modify, improve on, or produce analysis and interpretation on their basis (Laver, Benoit, & Garry, 2003, p. 311). However, the study of ideas is complicated by the problem of triple mediation: specifically texts are reconstructions of “real” thought or speech; they are fragmentary and partial due to the politics and processes of documentation as well as the luck of researchers in finding them; and they are processed through the interpretive, “meaning-making gaze” of the analyst (Chadwick, 2000,



p. 287). This makes any explanation based on textual interpretation contingent and limited. Awareness of these limitations is, as Chadwick argues, not about “getting the story straight”, but instead about “alerting the reader to the contingency and unavoidable assumptions which are a part of all intellectual inquiry” (Chadwick, 2000, p. 287).

Secondly, in these texts relating to the decision-making process, then, communication should be observable which is congruent with specific ideas, namely those loosely grouped above as concerning systemic conditions and the scenario at hand, US interests in it, as well as ways to mobilize state power in response. Note that this provides a structure to the deliberations under investigation. It could be theorized that these ideas in fact respond to an implicit “question under discussion (QUD)” (Beaver & Clark, 2008; Hobbs, 1985; C. Roberts, 2012), which would present a possible pathway into formalizing and hierarchically ordering deliberative patterns.³⁵ This type of formalized analysis, as well as more extensive quantitative approaches (e.g. Laver et al., 2003), are beyond the purview of this thesis. Instead, patterns of ideational communication and competition are here established by in-depth analysis, careful triangulation, and the consideration of context and motivation in deliberative scenarios (Schmidt, 2008, 2010; Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004; Van Esch, 2014).

Finally, then, the ideas under investigation are embedded within specific contextual and historical conditions (Chadwick, 2000, p. 289). Indeed, a wide variety of studies investigate the ways in which discursive conditions and linguistic structures influence the impact of ideas on decision-making (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 32; Alexander & Smith, 1993; Gofas & Hay, 2010; Hay, 1996; Khong, 1993; Schmidt, 2008, 2010). Discursive conditions are hypothesized to co-determine the likelihood of ideational persistence and change (J. L. Campbell, 2002, p. 32). While this thesis does not explicitly adopt the method of discourse analysis, subsequent case chapters clarify the decision-making setting within which decision processes and the intervening variable of ideas are traced. Conveniently, the overall institutional set-up does not change: decision-making processes here under investigation play out within the US foreign policy executive, mostly limited geographically to several locations in and around Washington, DC. Within the cases, I clarify different decision-making styles, relevant individuals and their institutional and power relations to broadly identify discursive conditions. It will also be clarified (where possible) who carries which ideas: this matters because in situations where actors with similar ideas deliberate, it is more likely “that they will understand themselves to be engaged in the collective pursuit of optimal (from their shared perspective) choices”, which also implies that they are more likely to communicate their ideas freely (Jacobs, 2014, p. 52). Similarly, contexts within which

³⁵ This type of analysis assumes that any discursive assertion refers to an (implied) question under discussion, which then determines which parts of the assertion are focused, backgrounded, or not-at-issue. Information is thus pre-structured. This presents a possible way of identifying meaning in texts.



communication occurs differ in their *privacy*. As outlined, public (published) opinions are produced for public consumption, in the hopes of “consolidating or reconstituting” audience beliefs (Chadwick, 2000, p. 290). In contrast, private or semi-private deliberations (e.g. in closed-off meetings or in texts that underlie security and classification protocols) are expected to be less strategically motivated, so that ideas are more openly communicated. Clearly, even deliberations in such internal deliberations are still affected by strategic dynamics, e.g. coalition-building, maximization of persuasive effort, or the desire to impress a superior (Jacobs, 2014, p. 55). This means communicative evidence alone may not be sufficient to establish the causal mechanism under investigation, and again necessitates triangulation and careful description of contextual factors.

3.5. Conclusion and Outlook on the Case Studies

In the preceding paragraphs, I outlined epistemological commitments of neoclassical realism, and explained how they link to small-n, qualitative studying of the suggested phenomenon and causal mechanism. I detailed the rationale for choosing the case study method, as well as case selection criteria. I then explained the process of data collection through archival and other primary research as well as the analysis of secondary sources such as newspapers, biographies, and relevant publications. This data is analyzed by process tracing and textual analysis, to arrive at a “thick description” of US foreign policy decision-making prior to no-fly zone initiation. The cases following this chapter proceed in a structured manner as suggested by the above discussion. In chronological order (starting with the case on northern Iraq), they contextualize the cases by outlining systemic conditions, as well as historical facets of the scenario, e.g. preceding events, the domestic situation, or other relevant case information. They specify the hypothesized causal mechanism within the case, and provide a brief pre-history for the process under investigation, e.g. by outlining the scenario. They provide (dis)confirming evidence for the existence and influence of ideas in policy deliberations, and trace the decision-making process leading up to the choice of the no-fly zone to test for the hypothesized causal mechanism, i.e. the intervening influence of ideas and ideational competition in the transmission belt between systemic conditions and state behavior. The subsequent case chapters (in order: Bosnia and Libya) may point out similarities and dissimilarities to preceding chapters where appropriate, although the focus is on drawing inferences on patterns of decision-making behavior from within the cases. Particularities of the cases (e.g. data availability) may necessitate minor changes in methodological approach, which are highlighted where appropriate. Finally, the chapter on deviant cases (Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, and Syria) proceeds in a similar, more condensed fashion, and allows drawing conclusions on the framework’s strength and limitations.



Chapter IV: Iraq

4.1. Introduction: Interests, Ideas, and the No-Fly Zone in Northern Iraq

Systemic conditions and corresponding US interests are not sufficient to explain why a no-fly zone was used to protect the Kurds of northern Iraq in 1991 (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 105). Instead, I argue that specific ideas present in the Bush administration's decision-making process about the scenario and about US capabilities, specifically the capacities of airpower and military technology, intervened in the transmission belt from systemic conditions to foreign policy choice, and led decision-makers to embrace the tool. Lack of a clear administrative policy was not purely a function of crisis-type decision-making. It was also the result of a fundamental ideational divide between those in the administration that favored assertive US engagement and pegged their hope on airpower, and those that feared any such mission would lead straight to "Vietnam". In literature on US policy in Iraq, the 1991 no-fly zone is often seen as an auxiliary element of what was post-facto judged an uncontroversial and largely successful humanitarian mission (Cavanaugh, 1992; Goff, 1992; Walker, 1998), essentially an afterthought to the more important Gulf War. This may be surprising considering that, at least per President George H.W. Bush and his National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, the foreign policy executive's entire "planning focus" at the time had been put on the "problems and opportunities which emerged in the aftermath of Desert Storm" (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 493). Some authors mention the no-fly zone within the broader sanctions regime against Iraq (Alterman, 2003; Graham-Brown, 1999) or in relation to various air operations (Clary, 1994) and its later stages (Benard, 2004; Cockayne & Malone, 2006; Gibbons, 2002; Hiltermann, 1997; Kramlinger, 2001).³⁶ The focus on military-strategic and tactical aspects obfuscates insights to be gained from an analysis of the political decision-making process leading up to the tool's use. The case should take a more prominent place in academic discussion not only because it was the chronologically first application of this peculiar tool, but also because it showcased a type of post-Cold War intervention that served as a blueprint for subsequent administrations (DiPrizio, 2002; Farkas, 2003; Goff, 1992; R. Gordon, 1994; Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 70; Sorensen, 1997, p. 3).

In the early 1990s, systemic conditions changed to an extent that made the "new world order" prescribed by Bush seem a distinct possibility. The disintegrating Soviet Union was unable to challenge

³⁶ Once installed, the no-fly zone continued to monitor Iraqi territory until 2002 with an unclear purpose. By the mid-90s, it is usually considered a failure.

US power any longer: in 1991, Krauthammer labeled this the “unipolar moment” and suggested there was

“but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it [...] [It] is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself” (Krauthammer, 1991, p. 24).

The end of the Cold War also brought uncertainty, however. A Soviet Union wrought with inner turmoil was an enigma to US decision-makers, and old wisdoms and strategies fell away as the situation changed from one day to the next. It also posed a new challenge at home: what should be the role of the US in the world? Throughout the Cold War, America had seen itself as the leading nation of the free world, and a shining example to other peoples. The demise of the Soviet Union as well as its new restraint in the international community and its institutions³⁷ created a more permissive international environment, which meant that a seemingly golden window of opportunity opened to translate these ideals into state action.

From the view of offensive realism, these shifts in systemic conditions should lead to a more assertive US foreign policy: helping those in need of protection from the world’s autocrats and furthering US interests abroad by intervention into intra-state conflict became a potentially global option undeterred by a rival bloc. The 1991 Gulf War can be interpreted as both indicator and proof of this globalist and expansionist stance. Using a no-fly zone as the initial tool of intervention in northern Iraq, however, remains underdetermined through this lens: if the “new world order” created new opportunities and freed capabilities to intervene, why did the US not move to assert its hegemonic status, help the Kurds, and depose Saddam Hussein? Why were the Kurds not protected by a tool that could achieve its objective? Why was there no air campaign, or a forceful ground intervention right away beyond protecting refugee camps at a later stage? Such restraint seems more aligned with defensive realist predictions. The threat to regional and international order through Saddam Hussein’s violation of Kuwait’s sovereignty affected vital US interests (as per the “Carter doctrine”), and led to the Gulf War. But that same case cannot easily be made for a regime crackdown in northern Iraq. And indeed, US policy was directly constrained by the regional international environment, specifically the concerns of two major allies (Saudi-Arabia and Turkey) that heavily lobbied against renewed intervention for fear of Iraq’s territorial integrity and/or a Kurdish proto-state. Correspondingly, some observers argue that the US “took on a decidedly isolationist tinge” regarding post-War Iraq (Greene, 2000, p. 139). If, however, the Kurdish plight did not matter all that much to US national interests, why get involved at all? Systemic conditions set parameters (limiting or enabling) for foreign policy decision-making, and

³⁷ The Soviet Union/Russia did not veto a single resolution in the UNSC between June 1990 and May 1993 (Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 61).

put a probability distribution over possible alternatives. The decision to employ the no-fly zone, however, resulted from additional intervening factors not evident in structural realist explanations.

Existing explanations (predominantly) on media reporting and public opinion are useful for interrogating the moment of action. Media reporting analysis points to a growing momentum for increased US involvement (subsequently coined the “CNN-effect”), and may also help explain the (overt) focus on helicopters in policy debates on northern Iraq (see below). Public opinion polls (conducted by both the administration and news agencies) paint a chaotic picture, with large majorities of those asked not identifying Iraq or the Kurdish struggle as a pressing or interesting problem, and changing majorities for and against specific tools of intervention (ranging from sanctions to regime change) depending on how questions were phrased (J. Mueller, 1994). While a focus on media reporting and public opinion may offer useful information as to the broader domestic context and rising pressures to act, it falls short of elucidating the causal mechanism involved in executive decision-making. To understand why the Bush administration initially limited itself to humanitarian airdrops and a no-fly zone, it is necessary to delve into the intricacies of the administration’s (at times haphazard and inconsequential) decision-making process.

With the end of bloc competition, the risks of counter-intervention were considerably lower. However, it also became less clear which of the world’s conflicts touched on US interests, what those were, and how exactly to address them (Kanter, 1996). This ambiguity led decision-makers to increasingly resort to decision heuristics: To appraise the new situation and deduce US interests, they carried a variety of diverging ideas into deliberations. These ideas intervened in the creation and choice of foreign policy and created a decision-making environment in which a specific foreign policy tool unlikely to be supported from a military-strategic viewpoint may become desirable. I argue that within this cacophony of contradicting ideational outlooks, the no-fly zone could play a unique role: an awkward arbiter of faux compromise, doing just enough to be presented as a satisfactory policy solution to both proponents and critics of a more assertive US policy.

Why, however, would the no-fly zone (rather than a different tool) play this role? I argue that the “invention” of the tool itself influenced the decision-making process vis-à-vis northern Iraq. As outlined above, inherent characteristics (e.g. flexibility, speed of implementation, low-cost nature) of the no-fly zone serve to accommodate carriers of fundamentally diverging ideas about the scenario at hand, corresponding US interests, and ways to mobilize state power in response. Decision-makers rely on the no-fly zone despite suspecting it is not an optimal tool for the military-strategic problem at hand. Rather, it is a *doable* tool: it satisfies a need to “do something” while patching up ideational divides in the foreign policy executive. In the following case study, I probe the plausibility of this framework and argument with regards to the first no-fly zone over northern Iraq. I introduce the scenario and outline

the diverging ideas which were prominently present in the Bush administration. I then trace US foreign policy decision-making on the issue, and detail the ways in which contradicting ideas created a complicated ideational competition which decision-makers attempted to solve, in April 1991, by implementing a no-fly zone in northern Iraq.

4.2. The Bush Administration and Ideational Competition over Northern Iraq

In 1991, the Bush administration had just experienced a major foreign policy victory (although the demise of the Soviet Union cannot directly be credited to its policies), when relations with Iraq deteriorated further. Earlier administrations had been conciliatory vis-à-vis Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq,³⁸ and this stance continued into the Bush (vice-) presidency. In 1988, Iraq's "explosive combination" of a disastrous economic situation, an oversized military and an aggressive autocratic regime culminated in the regime's genocidal "Anfal campaign" against Kurdish populations in northern Iraq (Marr, 2011, p. 20). At the time, "reports that Iraq was engaging in massive destruction, killings, use of chemical weapons and forcible deportation of the Kurdish population in the north of the country did arouse shock and public protest in the West" (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 5). The newly elected Bush administration denounced calls for sanctions as "terribly premature" and opposed them for "reasons of national interest" (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 6). The disastrous human rights situation only provoked a "surge of concern" when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 6). Saddam Hussein's brutalities were now woven into a broader narrative of justification for war. This "volte face" was "most clearly evident in the US", where Bush "became vocal over these abuses" (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 6). After a prelude of diplomatic and economic pressure, UNSC Resolution 678 authorized a US-led multinational coalition to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. After a six-week mission, including an air campaign and a short ground invasion, Bush declared an end to Operation Desert Storm on February 27, 1991 (Braybrook, 1991; Marr, 2011; Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 70).

Many authors conclude that in this and other matters "[t]he Bush administration conducted its foreign policy very successfully" (Barilleaux & Stuckey, 1992; Burke, 2009; Daalder & Destler, 2011; Greene, 2000; Rothkopf, 2006; Sparrow, 2014, p. 82), not least because it was more interested in foreign policy compared both to previous administrations and to other issue areas (Sparrow, 2014, p. 87). Others criticize Bush's tendency to not "think through, articulate and act on a coherent vision" in foreign policy (Snow & Brown, 1997, p. 122). However, he did carry strong ideas about "honor, duty, country" (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999), and reacted "viscerally, even emotionally" to what he thought challenged them (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 78). Bush had made a career in foreign policy-related posts, enjoyed working on

³⁸ E.g. by delisting Iraq from the terrorist-supporting states in 1982, restoring diplomatic relations in 1984, and fostering economic and even military ties (Graham-Brown, 1999, pp. 2–4).



foreign policy issues, knew many experts and foreign leaders well, and used this experience to insert himself into foreign policy (O'Sullivan, 2009; Sparrow, 2014, p. 87). He also insisted on his role as final arbiter of foreign policy decisions (Bakich, 2014, p. 160). Otherwise, he relied on the expertise of his advisers: he liked to reach "reasonable agreements" both within his team and with international actors (Snow & Brown, 1997, p. 120; Sparrow, 2014, p. 87). In retrospect, Bush writes:

"I intended to be a "hands-on" president. I wanted the key foreign policy players to know that I was going to involve myself in many of the details of [...] foreign affairs policies, yet I would not try to master all the details and complexities of policy matters. I planned to learn enough so I could make informed decisions without micro-managing. I would rely heavily on department experts and, in the final analysis, on my cabinet secretaries and the national security advisor" (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 17).

In the Bush White House, questions of intervention were initially addressed at "relatively senior levels" (Kanter, 1996), starting with the NSC Principals and Deputies Committees with department heads or high-ranking bureaucrats from involved departments and agencies (Haass, 2010; Kanter, 1996). From there, issues would be brought before the president for decision (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 25; Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 36; Haass, 2010, p. 81; Sparrow, 2014, p. 86; Yetiv, 2004, p. 120). Rather than in more formal groupings such as the NSC, Bush preferred to make decisions after cabinet-level small group discussions with trusted advisers. His decision-making team became known as the "big eight" (Daalder & Destler, 2011; Kanter, 1996); consisting of Bush, Scowcroft, Vice-President Dan Quayle, Chief of Staff John Sununu, Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, Secretary of State James Baker, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell.³⁹ Sometimes other senior advisors such as Richard Haass or William Webster would provide specialist expertise (Sparrow, 2014, p. 95). All in all, Bush selected a qualified but also ideationally diverse team, which certainly contributed to the depth of ideational competition in 1991 (Sparrow, 2014, p. 95).⁴⁰

4.2.1. The Aftermath of Operation Desert Storm and the "Kurdish Plight"

Immediately after Operation Desert Storm, with coalition troops pulling back from the theater, the unstable situation in Iraq escalated to the brink of civil war. Kuwait had been liberated, but the coalition forces had not pursued regime change in Baghdad: Saddam Hussein, previously depicted as "evil" by

³⁹ Bush's most influential foreign policy advisors were Scowcroft and Baker, whom he knew well. Next in importance came Gates, who because of his leadership of the Deputies Committee had an excellent agenda overview, and Cheney (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 40; Schmitz, 2011; Sparrow, 2014, p. 93). Quayle and Sununu were experienced and outspoken, but usually left foreign policy to the others (Popadiuk, 2013, p. 61). While Bush respected Powell's efficiency, their relation is often characterized as "awkward": Powell disliked Bush's style, and Bush was suspicious of Powell's political aptitude (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 23).

⁴⁰ However, the more managerial inclination of Bush's team means that ideas and ideational competition are at times more difficult to extract compared to Clinton's and Obama's staff.

the Bush administration, remained in office. Bush personally believed that the autocrat should be toppled (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 463), but claimed the objective was never pursued because it was not officially mandated, would have therefore been overly politically costly, and would have led to additional instability. Instead, the Bush administration hoped for a coup by Iraq's military leadership, i.e. that "the Iraqi people will do it themselves" (from Bush's Diary entry, January 31, 1991, quoted in: Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 464; also: Quayle, 1994, p. 241). This led the administration to publicly support Saddam Hussein's subjects to "take matters into their own hands" and "force the dictator to step aside" (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 464; Kramlinger, 2001, p. 19; Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 70). This vague statement arguably encouraged first the Shi'ites in the south, then the Kurds in the north to rebel against the Iraqi regime. Initially the regime was unable, after its defeat and fallback to central Iraq, to effectively scotch the uprisings. In northern Iraq, by March 20, 1991, the Kurds had taken control of most of Iraqi Kurdistan, including Kirkuk (Kramlinger, 2001, p. 20), which prompted a violent counter-attack, as Saddam Hussein's military moved units from the south (where they had suppressed the Shi'ite rebellion).

Ceasefire rules after the Gulf War were unclear: on March 2, the UNSC had passed Resolution 686, which amongst other conditions imposed on Iraq to cede hostile activity against allied forces (Prados, 2002). Details were specified in a meeting between the coalition and Iraqi military commands on March 3 ("Safwan Accords"). There, the US warned Iraq against using fixed-wing jets (as those were a potential threat to coalition forces, but allowed the use of helicopters as allegedly necessary for communication purposes (US Central Command, 1991, p. 3). General Norman Schwarzkopf (leading the coalition delegation) actually had no instructions on the matter (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 490; Schwarzkopf, 1993), but the administration subsequently felt that rescinding his improvised authorization of rotary-wing aircraft would undermine his authority. Immediately, the Iraqi regime began using helicopters as well as other heavy weapons in its counter-offensive against the Kurds (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 18). This quickly led to a humanitarian disaster at the borders with Iran and Turkey, as around 500,000 Kurds fled northwards pursued by Iraqi forces, and Kurdish leaders appealed for help (Benard, 2004, p. 467; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 206).⁴¹ However, Turkey was unwilling to let large numbers of Kurds cross into its territory and closed its border (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 24; Haberman, 1991, p. 489). The flight of the Kurds towards Turkey occurred at the end of a severe winter, and in an inhospitable region with high mountains, freezing temperatures, the constant danger of anti-personnel mines, and a thin local population able to provide

⁴¹ Also, by mid-May, an estimated 1.5 million people had fled to Iran (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 23); the focus of media reporting and public opinion stayed on northern Iraq, however, not least because Iran, in contrast to Turkey, for the most part allowed refugees into the country. The extent of this mass exodus may be understood with reference to the "Anfal campaign": Reports of what happened in recaptured areas indicated to many Kurds a similar outcome was to come.

help and shelter. Kurdish refugees amassed in make-shift camps, “huddling against the mountains” and being attacked by Iraqi forces (Cowell, 1991; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 24).

4.2.2. Interests, Slippery Slopes and Humanitarian Responsibility

In some ways, northern Iraq in early 1991 posed a different scenario compared to the following case studies of Bosnia and Libya: the situation occurred after a conventional inter-state conflict, and US combat troops were still present at or near the conflict theater. This raised the level of attention the regime’s counter-offensive in the north received in the White House. With largely permissive systemic conditions and unclear US interests, the scenario quickly brought to the fore ideational divides within the administration. On the one hand, those that believed that regime change in Baghdad would have been and still was in America’s interest, those that argued the US bore a special responsibility as leader of the free world to defend people from autocratic regimes, and those that felt the US should intervene to prevent an even worse humanitarian catastrophe favored renewed and forceful engagement. On the other hand, those that believed regime change or renewed involvement would lead to chaos, and entail too many risks for the US in terms of broader regional interests, political standing domestically and abroad, and soldiers’ lives cautioned against an interventionist policy in northern Iraq.

While not prone to grandiose rhetoric and famously having problems with the “vision thing” (Ajemian, 1987), Bush outlined his interpretation of systemic conditions in the post-Cold War “new world order” in a speech prior to the Gulf War. He envisioned an international system united against aggression, “freed from Cold War stalemate”, and with a UN “poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders”. The world order would be freer, more just and more secure – “a historic period of cooperation” moving towards “freedom and respect for human rights” (Bush, 1990). The ideas behind this speech were steeped in American exceptionalism and prevalent political rhetoric – the US had a special mission, responsibility and moral obligation to promote its values, especially democracy, and protect the vulnerable, by force if necessary. With the fall of the Soviet Union, these ideas could guide the formulation of US interests in an increasingly permissive environment. And the new environment freed the capabilities necessary to potentially put these ideas into practice. Bush said: “We do have principles, and it is time we stood up for them” (quoted in: Engel, 2014, p. 101). The core principle would be “freedom”, however loosely defined. Bush and many of his advisers believed this new world order required American presence and leadership to remake it in the image of the “city upon a hill”, rather than retrenchment and isolationism (Engel, 2014, p. 105): there is “no substitute for American leadership in the face of tyranny [...] Let no one doubt our staying power” (Bush, 1990). This suggests an assertive stance in the post-Cold War environment. Baker recalls: “We had the best foreign policy situation that this country’s seen in a long, long time [...] Everybody was ours” (quoted in: Engel, 2014,

p. 100). State Department staffer Francis Fukuyama had in 1989 famously declared the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1989). This struck a chord with those in the administration who had climbed the ranks during the Cold War and whose principle goals had been to manage it and prevail. The question was not whether this moment of victory actually existed or not, but rather how to employ US power to actively “transform” the global order (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999). Bush believed that the West had prevailed over the Soviet Union because of its democratic foundations. For the diplomat in him, this meant that the US had an obligation of leading, but also of acting within the Western alliance and in solidarity: “We will stand by our friends” (Bush, 1990). Iraq provided multiple opportunities to apply this new ideational framework. For one, the Gulf War demonstrated the resolve of the free world to stand up to aggression. Saddam Hussein was seen as detrimental to the “new world order” (J. Mueller, 1994, p. 269). He was compared to Adolf Hitler, “evil”, and unamenable to rational diplomacy or deterrence (Frontline/PBS, 1997; Yetiv, 2004).

And yet, Bush declared victory before the dictator was toppled. The aftermath of the Gulf War made clear that beyond general ideas surrounding leadership, responsibility and the victory of democracy and freedom, the “new world order” was never programmatic in any policy sense, and would not provide any of the desired clarity about increasingly ambiguous systemic stimuli. As spokesman Marlin Fitzwater retrospectively explained: “I don’t think it ever really got defined [...] [Bush] never tried to lay it out. The problem with that, of course, is that it leaves a vacuum of definitions and that others can jump in and fill” (Engel, 2014, p. 120). And indeed, faced with the “Kurdish plight”, increasingly vocal essays were published demanding US leadership and intervention to support the Kurds and protect refugees against Saddam Hussein’s regime:

“U.S. troops in Iraq should not be forced to stand idly by as anti-Saddam forces are slaughtered by tanks and gunships [...] We should send a message to the Iraqi high command in Baghdad: Depose Saddam Hussein in 48 hours and begin negotiations with the Kurdish rebels – or else” (Safire, 1991).

In Congress, Democrats had opposed the administration’s Iraq policy prior to Operation Desert Storm, but failed to offer a clear alternative as they similarly struggled with appraising this new international environment (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 429; 445; J. Mueller, 1994, p. 125). Despite only small minorities, Congress’ passivity and the Democratic Party’s unclear position (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 429) meant that “Bush simply started the war while Congress [...] watched” (J. Mueller, 1994, p. 125). The foreign policy agenda was left to Bush not least because his expertise meant that a partisan attack carried the risk of backlash, and heavy post-facto criticism could be perceived as both hypocritical as well as tainting the military. When the “Kurdish Plight” moved onto the agenda, Democrats pressed for action. However, their prior passivity meant that the new-found vigor could be rebuked, at least initially: Quayle mockingly refers to “newly hatched hawks who now said [Bush] was

too timid in deploying the American military might they hadn't wanted him to use against Saddam to begin with" (Kramlinger, 2001, p. 20; J. Mueller, 1994, p. 128; Quayle, 1994, p. 242). If allowed to linger, though, the crisis threatened to taint the administration's "success story" as well as Bush's re-election campaign (Quayle, 1994, p. 242). As argued above, the administration's professed ideas did not in fact provide clear strategic roadmaps, though: instead, within the administration, ideational competition emerged over "the new world order's meaning and its wisdom" (Engel, 2014, p. 105).

After all, systemic conditions were ambiguous in a newly permissive environment: the moment of triumph also brought with it the possibility of failure and chaos in a world freed from the constraints of the Cold War. Instead of assertive US leadership, Bush felt that "we have an obligation to temper optimism [...] with prudence" (Engel, 2014, p. 102). Scowcroft explained that "[t]he world could be a better place – but don't get carried away" (Engel, 2010, p. 34) and that "there may be [...] light at the end of the tunnel. But I think it depends partly on how we behave whether the light is the sun or an oncoming train" (Hoffman, 1989). Bush and many of his core advisers saw this caution as prudent pragmatism in the face of systemic change (Barilleaux & Rozell, 2004; Barilleaux & Stuckey, 1992; Maynard, 2008). However, not only did the insistence on prudence and the search for a "safe middle passage between hegemony and chaos" contrast with ideas on leadership and responsibility and lead to ideational deadlock when faced with a humanitarian catastrophe, it also could not satisfy those isolationist critics that saw in the "new world order" opportunities to finally reap the "peace dividend" (Engel, 2014, p. 104). The hesitancy prevalent in the Bush administration with regards to post-war Iraq was rooted in the fear of "another situation like Vietnam" (J. Mueller, 1994, p. 304; O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 72), where incrementalism, unclear and shifting policy objectives, and ill-advised strategic decisions had led to disaster. The images of people scrambling onto the last helicopters lifting off the American embassy had become ingrained in decision-maker's minds, and instilled a deep worry about US casualties and fear of the political backlash inherent in any foreign policy adventurism in far off lands. Decision-makers held the idea that even "modest" casualties as well as dragged-out fighting would be punished by an electorate wary of US engagement abroad. These worries had been present before even Operation Desert Storm, when the Bush administration could make a case for American world-order interests affected by blatant aggression.⁴² Even then, Senator Barbara Boxer had quoted from predictions that there would be 15,000 American casualties, and the senatorial margin in favor of the Gulf War had been slim (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 445). At the time, Bush wrote in his diary that "[w]hat worries [...] the American people and other members of congress and indeed all of us, is a ground war where get bogged down. [Congressman Bob Byrd] talks about "mounting casualties",

⁴² During Operation Desert Storm, Bush also heeded another lesson from "Vietnam": "I have not second-guessed; I have not told [the military] what targets to hit; I have not told them how much ordinance to use or how much not to use [...]" (Bush, 2014, p. 511).

others call them “body bags [...]” (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 428). He said: “I don’t think that support would last if it were a long, drawn-out conflagration. I think support would erode, as it did in the Vietnam conflict” (quoted in: Idelson, 1991, p. 16).⁴³ However, repelling Iraqi aggression in Kuwait might have benefits. Bush noted the likely “prestige that would go to the United States for being willing to stand up and support the United Nations resolutions fully [...]” (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 428).

Such a case could not as easily be made for post-war northern Iraq. Instead, it was imperative to “bring the boys back home” as quickly as possible, even if Saddam Hussein remained in power (J. Mueller, 1994, p. 128). Systemic conditions may have been permissive, but with the clear-cut world of bloc competition gone, who governed Iraq and how had unclear relevance to core US interests. Certainly, the Bush administration had hoped for a “Battleship Missouri surrender” (recalling the Pacific theater in WWII) in which Saddam Hussein would yield in the face of overwhelming US force (Greene, 2000, p. 138). Bush believed it was prudent to end the engagement as soon as US forces had expelled Iraq from Kuwait (Barilleaux & Rozell, 2004, p. 130). Scowcroft retrospectively explains that deposing Saddam Hussein was “never a goal – only a hopeful byproduct” (Greene, 2000, p. 138). Greene argues that the “Panama Syndrome” may have played a role in deciding to leave the dictator in power: “How could an army that could not catch one Panamanian dictator dislodge Saddam Hussein?” (Greene, 2000, p. 138). More importantly, in the administration’s view, regime change would have broken the coalition, weakened international law, and cost the US heavily in international prestige – systemic conditions were favorable, but neither certain nor clearly permanent at the time (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 489). Also, assertive intervention would have juxtaposed the “delicate balance” the administration wished to strike between its ideas on leadership and international cooperation (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 357). Toppling Saddam Hussein could have led to guerilla warfare, the breakup of the Iraqi state, and wider instability (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 464; New York Times, 1991). This must be avoided, as Bush had declared: “The enemy is unpredictability, the enemy is instability” (New York Times, 1990).

Instead, Saddam Hussein remained in power, and his crackdown in northern Iraq meant that unclear interests, little opportunity for leadership or prestige, and a chaotic situation on the ground recalled “Vietnam” again: Bush declared repeatedly that “[we] won’t get sucked into a Vietnam-like quagmire” (The White House/National Security Council, 1991; Woodward, 2002, p. 347). Any additional involvement could lead to “mission creep” and the much-feared “slippery slope” to protracted engagement with “marines fighting in the streets of Baghdad” and “incalculable human and political costs” (Bush & Scowcroft, 1999, p. 489; Greene, 2000, p. 138). Regarding intervention into Iraq, Gates summarized: “Therein lay Vietnam, as far as we were concerned” (Frontline/PBS, 1997). The desire to

⁴³ The feared “body-bags effect” may have led to an overcautious approach: polls at the time indicated that the public may have been willing to countenance greater costs than expected by the Bush administration (Mueller, 1994, p.122).

harvest the fruits of victory in the “new world order” and the intense fear of assertive policy in any situation that did not directly and evidently affect vital American interests was mirrored in the ideational debate over how state power could be mobilized in answer to Saddam Hussein’s crackdown.

4.2.3. The “Revolution in Military Affairs” and the Promise of Airpower

The swift victory against a technologically weaker adversary in the Persian Gulf War had showcased to many observers America’s astonishing military dominance, only heightened in the post-Cold War era through the Soviet Union’s collapse (Hillen, 1998; Shultz Jr. & Pfaltzgraff Jr., 1992). The advent of high-technology military capabilities (particularly stealth technology and precise, laser-guided munitions) promised to many the advent of “zero-cost operations”, which the rapid and overwhelming success against technologically inferior Iraqi forces seemed to prove. Operation Desert Storm brought to the public eye a new kind of warfare: a combination of small Special Forces units and airpower, and swift, highly technologized operations with “overwhelming force” (Braybrook, 1991), during which key weapons systems performed extraordinarily well (Shimko, 2010, p. 91). The new international environment freed capabilities, and their use proved US military dominance based on technological advancements. Ideas around this development and the power of technology quickly became ingrained in parts of the Bush administration and the US public, not least because of a sustained stream of imagery documenting technological advancement (Shimko, 2010, p. 1). The way in which Operation Desert Storm was fought and presented to decision-makers and the American public massively impacted US military thought (Biddle, 2006, p. 132). It was dubbed the “Nintendo War”, and the term “unbeatable” was a staple of press reporting (Greene, 2000, p. 132). Indeed, a “smitten” media identified airpower in particular as “the star of the Gulf War” (Greene, 2000, p. 135; Kramlinger, 2001, p. 1). Planned mostly by Air Staff Deputy Director John Warden, Operation Desert Storm’s air campaign derived from the idea that aerial superiority could win wars on its own. Already before the campaign, Air Force Chief of Staff Michael Dugan had outlined how “airpower is the only answer that’s available to our country” to avoid a dragged-out ground war, which contributed to his firing shortly thereafter (Woodward, 2002, p. 291). While Warden’s initial plans were mediated by criticism from senior military staff, the air campaign assured US dominance in the theater quickly and at surprisingly few losses (Shimko, 2010, pp. 60–73). This surgical nature impressed on domestic audiences and politicians the idea of a bloodless war and the advent of “zero-cost warfare” (Braybrook, 1991; Shimko, 2010). Guided munitions in particular proved promising to decision-makers in their capacity to not only hit targets precisely, but also immensely increase the range of possible targets, even though, as was pointed out but largely ignored at the time, only a small percentage of the overall munitions used in the war were actually guided (Perry, 1991, p. 79; Shimko, 2010, p. 81). Bush called airpower “fantastically accurate” (Greene, 2000, p. 133). Warden outlined how technology had revolutionized airpower to the point



where Iraq could be occupied solely from the air without much risk (F. Kagan, 2007, p. 161; Shimko, 2010, p. 79). Others agreed that airpower had “won” the war, and that it had been assisted by ground and naval forces rather than the other way around (Shimko, 2010, p. 80; Shultz Jr. & Pfaltzgraff Jr., 1992).

After Operation Desert Storm, Department of Defense documents simply assumed the existence of a “Revolution in Military Affairs” (Shimko, 2010, p. 89). The hope for operational dominance through technological superiority was not new: it can be traced back decades (arguably ever since guided munitions were employed in Vietnam) and had similarly fascinated decision-makers in earlier administrations (Shimko, 2010, p. 2; 28). The “fog of war” and the target acquisition problem were thought reducible through a focus on information and intelligence technology. Operation Desert Storm simply demonstrated to many analysts the manifestation of, variously, the “guided-munitions battle network” or “reconnaissance-strike complex”, resulting in a new way of warfare that promised to finally overcome the risks of intervention through a “quantum leap” and “radical” re-thinking of strategic, operational and tactical means of warfare (Shimko, 2010, p. 93). Dugan’s successor Merrill McPeak commented that Operation Desert Storm was “the first time in history that a fielded army had been defeated by air power” (Lambeth, 2000, p. 4). Subsequent no-fly zone operations can thus be understood as resulting out of an ideational competition in decision-making circles over whether airpower can operate and should be used independently of ground or naval forces, especially to defend lesser US interests in a permissive international environment (Biddle, 1996, 2006; Lambeth, 2000; Mahnken & Watts, 1997; Press, 2001).

Although some scholars and analysts criticized this overwhelmingly positive assessment of aerial primacy (Shimko, 2010, p. 82), the many technological shortfalls especially with regards to target acquisition and precision tended to be overlooked at the time (Biddle, 1996, 2006; Greene, 2000, p. 133; Press, 2001; Shimko, 2010, p. 94). In addition, the prominent position aerial warfare took on in the public narrative obscured that airpower in Operation Desert Storm had been tightly embedded in a wider military strategy to make it a potent force multiplier, and that it was employed in a conventional inter-state war rather than a limited intervention. Indeed, ideas surrounding the rising dominance of airpower did not remain completely unchallenged. Some critics feared that the promise of risk-free warfare would have adverse effects: once carried into foreign policy deliberations, the idea could increase pressures to avoid own casualties and slippery-slope missions, and feed expectations that would limit foreign policy options further (Hillen, 1998). Others, particularly military leadership personally familiar with the Vietnam experience (and from different branches of the military), such as Powell and Schwarzkopf, did not think overly highly of the “flyboys” (Shimko, 2010, p. 31; Woodward, 2002, p. 234) and technology enthusiasts (Woodward, 2002, p. 208), and feared that promises of



airpower opportunities would increase the willingness to engage US forces in conflicts which did not affect the national interest. In the 1980s, the Vietnam syndrome had found its expression in the “Weinberger doctrine”, which severely restricted the use of force (Woodward, 2002, p. 117). Powell amended these ideas with his own relating to integrated use of overwhelming force (Clark, 2002, p. 7). He believed intervention based on other than vital national interests to be inherently flawed and dangerous, and later spelled out a “precise military case against” intervention to protect the Kurds (Greene, 2000, p. 138). While Scowcroft held the idea that limited intervention should remain an instrument of US foreign policy, he similarly did not agree that airpower alone could be decisive in intervention or war (Woodward, 2002, p. 230; 293). After all, despite the public’s focus on the role of airpower and the relative length of the air campaign compared to the ground campaign, the Gulf War had been fought as a conventional inter-state conflict. In its aftermath, US ground troops were still in the vicinity when the Kurdish rebellion was crushed and so available for quick re-deployment should the Bush administration belatedly decide on intervention (and/or regime change).

4.2.4. Towards Engagement: The March NSC Meetings

In March 1991, the Bush administration seemed overwhelmed and struggled to formulate any response to early reports of the failing Kurdish rebellion and atrocities in northern Iraq. The administration’s foreign policy process may have been complicated by exhaustion after months of crisis operations as well as lack of preparedness and information (Haass, 2010, p. 136). Throughout early and mid-March, the White House tried to stick to and clarify its position of non-interference. Privately, Bush told his aides that he still hoped “some kind of Ceaucescu scenario” would befall Saddam Hussein (Greene, 2000, p. 138). However, the administration believed US engagement had to be scaled down and soldiers returned. Decision-makers also worried that interference might be overly politically costly and have adverse effects on regional stability (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 438). Ideational divides emerged between wanting to remove the dictator, asserting American leadership and spreading its values, and showing restraint in the face of potentially costly intervention. The ambiguity in the administration’s position with regards to the uprisings was noted even from within: An unnamed official noted how “we’ve talked a lot about getting Saddam out, but the clear priority is to get the troops home. It seems to be a contradiction [...]” (quoted in: Thyne, 2009, p. 165). Faced with increasingly harrowing imagery from northern Iraq and the Turkish border, the administration had to backtrack only days later: This was particularly evident with regards to the helicopter issue (Sciolino, 1991). On March 14, Bush as well as Schwarzkopf warned against the use of rotary-wing aircraft as a potential infringement of ceasefire terms (Balz, 1991; Goff, 1992, p. 3; US Central Command & Schwarzkopf, 1991). On March 17, in military-to-military talks, US Major-General Johnson expressed US “concern” over the offensive use of helicopters, and suggested again that where

this would represent a threat to coalition forces, helicopters would “fall into the same categories” as fighter and bomber aircraft, i.e. under the Safwan agreement (US Central Command, 1991, p. 3). Saddam Hussein seemed undeterred and said that helicopters would continue to be used alongside fighter jets to crush the rebellions (Goff, 1992, p. 4; Hockstader, 1991).

At a March 26 meeting at the Oval Office, various options of additional involvement were discussed: What was in America’s national interest in Iraq, and what should be done? The principals carried very different ideas into the deliberation. Quayle remembers speaking out for “more aggressive aid to the Kurds” and intervention, but he was resisted by military advisers, Cheney, and Baker (Quayle, 1994, p. 241). Both potential military support for the rebels (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 438) as well as covert operations were discussed (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 441; Naftali, 2007, p. 129). Gates, characterized as a “hawk among hawks” (Engel, 2014, p. 113), and Haass suggested humanitarian airdrops and protection of refugees through a ban on Iraqi military movement in northern Iraq (Haass, 2010, p. 140). Powell instead argued against involvement. In retrospect, he assesses: “Neither revolt had a chance. Nor, frankly, was their success a goal of our policy” (Powell & Persico, 2003, p. 531). For now, the Bush administration would stick to its restrained position, as it assessed that US interests did not merit intervention. At a press conference, spokesman Fitzwater said: “We don’t intend to involve ourselves in the internal conflicts in Iraq”. The US would not use its forces to protect civilians or support the rebels, and would not shoot down helicopters unless they posed a threat to US forces (Devroy & Smith, 1991; Goff, 1992, p. 4; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 18). Within days, this policy would shift step-by-step based on changing ideational lines.

By March 30, the Kurds were unable to withstand the Iraqi armed forces’ firepower from artillery, tanks and helicopters (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 23). Supporters of intervention (including demonstrators, relief workers, and US senators) criticized the Bush administration on-air. Kurdish leaders appealed for help,⁴⁴ and analysts called the US position “unconscionable” as details of the brutal suppression were covered and US jets reported patrolling the area but not intervening (ABC News, 1991; CBS News, 1991). Reports were shown of Iraqi forces using helicopters, heavy artillery and even chemical weapons against the Kurds (Tyler, 1991a), and the contradictory US position on the use of helicopters was scrutinized (ABC News, 1991; Tyler, 1991b). The administration’s inaction threatened to offer domestic critics a way to spin the entire Gulf War in a different light (one commentator called the situation “Bush’s Bay of Pigs”; Bush & Kaifu, 1991). Simply doing nothing in response to the Kurdish plight threatened “to taint the ‘moral crusade’ of the Gulf War” (Kramlinger,

⁴⁴ Historically developed ties may have allowed Kurdish exiles and northern Iraqi local elites to directly lobby for support (Boucher & United States/State Department, 1991). However, insofar as Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq are concerned, the administration’s lack of information on the situation on the ground contradicts this argument (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 48).

2001, p. 20), as well as diminish “the political dividends that Western governments had secured from the conduct of the war itself” (Mayall, 1991, p. 426). A first crack in the official line had appeared when Schwarzkopf, in an interview on March 27, claimed that he had wanted to continue the ground war until Iraqi forces had been destroyed, but that he was overruled by Bush. Now, to save face, a low-risk alternative to all-out intervention would have to be found that could be implemented quickly, “freeze” the status quo, and bridge ideational divides in the White House. Bush explained this dilemma: “[W]e don’t want the US tarnished by failing to do anything, but I would be very wary of committing US ground troops for military operations” (The White House/National Security Council & Hutchings, 1991).

By early April, only a narrow region along the northern and eastern borders remained in Kurdish hands (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 23). An NGO director said: “What is of the most grievous concern to us is that so far, the U.S. Government has failed to come forward with any significant assistance [...] People need food and tents now if they are to survive in the next few days” (Sciolino, 1991). Reports intensified on the “plight of the Kurdish refugees”, with scenes of Kurds “fighting for food in their no-man’s land camp” (NBC, 1991); and “digging snow for water and mourning at graves” (CBS News, 1991). Quayle elaborates on the decision-making dilemma:

“There were great pressures on the President not to intervene further than he did. For one thing, the Turks had given us loyal support during the war, and they would now feel betrayed if we intervened on behalf of the Kurds [...] To do anything that might lead to the creation of an independent Kurdish state would risk alienating not only the government in Ankara but also the region’s Arab countries. These countries had gone along with [the Gulf War] precisely because the limited objectives were so clearly defined. So even while I felt there was more we could manage to do, I was sympathetic to the President’s dilemma [...]” (Quayle, 1994, p. 241).

Ideas about US interests in the region and in multilateral support, about humanitarian responsibility amidst Kurdish suffering, and about the risks of intervention combined to create a deep ideational divide which “[shaped] the discussion of every option” (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 25). Rather than by long-term strategy, decisions were subsequently defined by attempts to circumvent ideational competition, which resulted in short-termism and reactivity (Brilliant & Tanner, 1992, p. 62). The nature of the crisis with many rapid new developments on the ground, unclear information,⁴⁵ the nature of the Iraqi regime as well as the generally limited understanding of Iraq and Kurdistan added to a muddled and at times contradictory decision-making process (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 43).

The administration began to consider different ways to best mobilize state power in response to the situation. One early idea were “zones of protection” (possibly on a French suggestion)⁴⁶ for the Kurds (Bearg Dyke, 1991), which would “straddle [the] borders” and offer “mil[itarily] assured protection”

⁴⁵ Bush’s limited factual knowledge of the situation on the ground shown in telephone conversations with other world leaders might be indicative, even though the US was flying reconnaissance missions over the region (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 48).

⁴⁶ For additional information on French, British and Turkish positions, cf. Graham-Brown, 1999, pp. 25–27.

(Berg Dyke, 1991). This grew out of humanitarian concern and the wish to better control trans-border refugee flows (not least at Turkey's behest), but would also clash with ideas surrounding restraint and prudence, and with Bush's declared policy of returning troops home as zones would have to be protected effectively (Haass, 1991a), hence the necessity to potentially "get [the] UN to protect" the zones (Berg Dyke, 1991). In the meantime, domestic opposition had latched onto the issue: US policy should not be "mortgaged to the success of tyranny", but instead embrace alternative options and do "certain things [...], not only because they are right, but especially because they are feasible", specifically to enforce a ban on helicopter flights in Iraq (Gore, 1991). Bush publicly responded to this criticism on April 3 and 4 by reiterating ideas surrounding a "slippery slope" into protracted conflict: "It was never a stated objective of the coalition to intervene in the internal affairs of Iraq [...] But I do not want to see United States forces, who have performed with such skill and dedication, sucked into a civil war in Iraq" (Bush & Kaifu, 1991). He explained: "We've done the heavy lifting. Our kids performed with superior courage and they don't need to be thrust into a war that's been going on for years" (Frontline/PBS, 1997). Internally, however, the administration was divided: the "zone of protection" concept had intrigued those favoring a more assertive US stance vis-à-vis the unfolding humanitarian disaster. The administration also considered military actions, including zones of protection, demilitarized areas, and the enforcement of a ban on the use of helicopters (Berg Dyke, 1991, 1991, 1991). However, for "humanitarian and political reasons alike", Haass in a draft memorandum suggested settling for emergency airdrops into northern Iraq. The US should lobby for coalitional and UN support, but not postpone the effort any further. Iraq would be warned not to interfere (in which case the US would be willing to respond with airpower), but also assured that the effort was "not an attempt [...] to inject ourselves into the internal politics of Iraq" (Haass, 1991a). However, aid delivery from the air proved complicated (airdrops led to several Kurdish deaths when heavy packages fell from the air, because the drop sites could not be secured) and in any case insufficient to the problem at hand (Sciolino, 1991). The deputies tried to square the circle, but came up short: the airdrops would soon prove wholly inadequate to address either the humanitarian issue or the political divide.

On April 5, the UNSC passed Resolution 688 based on a draft provided by France, with the support of the US and UK (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 25). The final version stressed the crisis' international dimension (i.e. cross-border refugee flows and Iraqi incursions into neighboring territory), anticipating worries by the Soviet Union and China repeatedly put to the drafting parties that the matter was a purely internal affair (Zieck, 1997, p. 195). It was demanded that Iraq "end its internal repression of the Kurdish minority and allow immediate access to its territory for the purpose of humanitarian relief" (United Nations Security Council, 1991). The resolution was "watered down" to guarantee its passage (Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 77): most importantly, the resolution did not mention an

enforcement mechanism, reference Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, authorize a ban on military flights or declare a “safe zone”⁴⁷, all of which would have led to a Russian and/or Chinese veto (Johnstone, 1994, p. 38). This led UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, amongst others, to argue that the resolution was not enforceable through coercive means (Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1996, p. 77). While many states, including India and China, expressed their fear of a dangerous precedent, the deliberately vague resolution passed by a narrow margin (The White House/National Security Council, Frasure, & Grahl, 1991; United Nations Security Council, 1991, p. 28–30; 55). Promptly, US ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering in the UNSC and Bush publicly announced the humanitarian initiative, framing it both in terms of the immediate humanitarian and refugee concerns, but also relating it to the “peace and security” of the entire region. While Bush expressed hope that coalition partners would similarly step up and the UN would involve its agencies, the airdrops and initially promised \$10 million already at this point did not match the problem at hand (The White House & Office of the Press Secretary, 1991). The mission, hashed out within days, led to frantic planning sessions in the White House: beyond general aims of helping refugees and protecting civilians all the while not re-engaging US troops or intervening forcefully into Iraq, the mission’s goals were completely under-defined.

On April 6, the deputies met again to update on what was to be done in northern Iraq. One day before the first scheduled flights, there was no response from Iraq, no rules of engagement in case of interference, and no operational plans for the airdrops available to the deputies (The White House/National Security Council, 1991; The White House/National Security Council & Bearg Dyke, 1991). A memorandum for Gates at least noted: “Public announcement: done” (The White House/National Security Council & Bearg Dyke, 1991). And the deputies agreed: “36 degrees north marks the no flying zone for Iraqi rotary or fixed wing aircraft” (The White House/National Security Council, 1991, p. 2).⁴⁸ This warning was subsequently transmitted to the Iraqi government via its UN representation and US embassy (Fitzwater, 1991). However, widely diverging ideas about US interests and appropriate strategies to mobilize state power continued to clash. The deputies knew initial airdrops with air-borne protection would likely be insignificant: in addition to the lack of droppable materials, the airlift would be costly, could likely only be sustained for a week, and had to be replaced by trucks and a massive effort on the ground (The White House/National Security Council, 1991, pp. 3–4). But absent tangible national interests, the specter of “Vietnam” loomed. The deputies’ primary policy goal was to avoid large-scale US engagement and push the mission onto the UN (“internationalize”): once a new resolution would be passed, “we should go ahead to pull out US forces

⁴⁷A “safe zone”, while definitionally flexible, usually entails the protection through *ground forces* of civilians and/or refugees from violence perpetrated by conflict parties (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016).

⁴⁸ This marks the earliest date in my primary records that the term “no-fly(ing) zone” is employed.

as UN forces arrive” (The White House/National Security Council, 1991, p. 4). For that, however, the deputies realized that “we need a plan” (The White House/National Security Council, 1991, p. 3).

4.2.5. Airdrops and More: The April NSC Meetings

The first humanitarian airdrops were flown on April 7. Bar Iraqi consent, patrol aircraft accompanied each sortie (Goff, 1992, p. 7; Haulman, 2000, p. 180; Shalikashvili, 1991, p. 6; Zieck, 1997, p. 195) and administration officials warned the Iraqi government not to fly any military missions north of the 36th parallel (Devroy & Goshko, 1991; Goff, 1992, p. 5). Reporting before a congressional committee, overall mission commander General John Shalikashvili later outlined that the purpose was “to provide immediate relief to displaced Iraqi civilians until international relief agencies and private voluntary organizations can assume overall supervision” (Shalikashvili, 1991, sec. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, Defense Policy Panel 5). To that effect, short-term objectives included “stop the dying and suffering; stabilize the population”, mid-term, “resettle the population at temporary sites; establish sustainable, secure environment”, and long-term, “return population to their homes” (Shalikashvili, 1991, sec. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, Defense Policy Panel 6; Sorensen, 1997, p. 5). Airdrops would always be inadequate to these goals. The mission was subsequently criticized for its “haphazard” implementation and because it did not address the refugees’ security concerns (Sciolino, 1991). While the administration expected further engagement, mid- to long-term strategy had not been agreed at this point and the planning horizon was at 5-10 days into the future (The White House & Bearg Dyke, 1991). Cheney publicly voiced his support for “safe zones”, but did not have administrative backing at the time (Devroy & Goshko, 1991; Goff, 1992, p. 5).

Lack of a clear administrative policy was not purely a function of crisis-type decision-making. It was also the result of a fundamental ideational divide between those in the administration that favored assertive US engagement, and those that feared any such mission would lead straight to “Vietnam”. The hope of the former lay with the “internationalization” strategy. Indeed, on April 8, UK Prime Minister John Major reiterated the safe zone proposal, which was also supported by Turkish President Turgut Ozal, and suggested it could be implemented under UNSC Resolution 688 (Drozdiak & Ottaway, 1991; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 26). Pickering commented that the US would “wait and see whether it can be done”, while Bush seemed to give his “tacit endorsement” when he spoke about broadening UN activities in northern Iraq (Drozdiak & Ottaway, 1991). Internally, however, the Bush administration was not convinced. Baker outlines:

“We did not want to take on the responsibility for having to create a safe haven there. And if it was going to be enforced, it wasn't going to be enforced by others. It was going to have to be enforced by- by Uncle Whiskers. And we really didn't want to do it” (Frontline/PBS, 1997).

Military advisors, including Shalikashvili, worried about carving out a “Gaza strip” of lawless, ungoverned (and ungovernable) territory in northern Iraq (Goff, 1992, p. 5; Pelletiere, 1996).

On April 8, the deputies met again. After a substantial portion of the meeting was spent discussing details of the humanitarian delivery, they came to discuss further strategy in northern Iraq. Gates reminded everyone based on the airdrops and on public announcements “now we're committed [to the] refugees” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 3). He predicted that “we won't be out in two weeks” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 10). There was potential in US engagement in Iraq, but also the danger of a protracted mission. Gates summarized: “We can be seen to exercise [a] leadership role by helping [but] need to organize longer term [and have] others picking up their share” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 9). Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Robert Kimmitt summarized “internationalization” policy: “1) get UNIKOM [the UN Observer Mission] in, 2) get UN relief in, 3) get US forces out” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 3) and Gates contributed that after a “US front load” they would “rely on Jap[an] + other[s] for mid-[and] longer term” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 7). However, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs David Jeremiah reminded him: “[The] Blue Helmets [...] won't do protection” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 4), which was also Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz' concern (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 20). Either the US wanted to help, in which case it would have to engage or get other states to take on the mission. Alternatively, the US could show restraint and risk continuing violence. An unnamed participant, likely from the Office of Management and Budget,⁴⁹ warned about congressional opposition to “doing more”, and Gates suggested a middle path between “too much” and “too little” would have to be found (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 9). Kimmitt urged that a clearer decision be made to overcome this ideational divide: “[the] political decision [should] not seem to be dragged [out]” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 8). Deputy CIA director Richard Kerr brought up the “enclaves” in the north, but warned that the border zone was “extremely complicated” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 12). Gates similarly felt “no enthusiasm” for a buffer zone, but would be on board if the other UNSC veto members agreed (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 13). However, Kimmitt warned that a buffer zone would be “difficult to do in the UNSC” (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 20), as other states pledged money, but not troops for northern Iraq. An immediate solution was not in sight. Only towards the end of the meeting was CAP

⁴⁹ Abbreviation in the document: OMB, deputy director position unfilled at that point in time.

(Combat Air Patrol) brought up: Jeremiah suggested its aim was to protect US forces, and Gates said it was best continued until all troops had left Iraq (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 21). Kerr commented: "Tell [the] Iraqis or they'll be up in [the] air" (Bearg Dyke & National Security Council, 1991, p. 22). Not yet had anybody in the administration suggested that broadening CAP to protection of civilians (rather than US forces) could provide an ideational compromise between involvement and disengagement.⁵⁰

On the same day, Baker visited a Kurdish refugee camp for a total of seven minutes (Frontline/PBS, 1997). His visit was covered extensively and provided for prose about "the dazed, deer-caught-in-the-headlights look that seems locked in the eyes of every Kurd there, particularly the barefoot children too gun-shy to even reach for a free stick of chewing gum" (Friedman, 1991). But it also reiterated the need to do something more than airdrops:

"Mr. Baker's visit [...] is part of the Bush Administration's effort to blunt criticism of its failure to help the Kurds militarily by focusing attention on American aid. But the visit has inadvertently underscored that the Kurdish problem, because of its scope, is a political issue that cannot be solved with tents and relief supplies alone" (Friedman, 1991; Krauss, 1991).

Home from his visit, Baker became supportive of additional action and declared: "Today we have witnessed the suffering and despair of the Iraqi people [...] Our relief efforts, including airdrops of supplies, have begun, but they alone are not going to be enough" (Friedman, 1991). However, Bush believed that further engagement would be punished by an unwilling electorate. Also, larger-scale re-involvement to protect the Kurds would mean that he would have to backtrack on his policy vis-à-vis Saddam Hussein.

In a meeting with Congressional leadership on April 9, the administration summarized its considerations up to this point: intervention would have burdened the military, fractured the coalition, and led to protracted engagement with an unclear likelihood of success. These were the ideas of prudence and restraint the administration had embraced in the immediate post-war period, and they still dominated its position even now. Clearly, "there were steps that potentially could have been taken that would have been gestures of support and perhaps slowed somewhat Iraqi operations against the rebellions, such as grounding the helicopters" (The White House & Gates, 1991). To affect the situation on the ground, however, would have required unilateral full-blown intervention including ground troops and probably the removal of Saddam Hussein (The White House & Gates, 1991, p. 2). Instead, the US showed restraint and managed the refugee situation with "de facto safe havens" in northern Iraq: not intervening was "painful", but sometimes "restraint is more difficult than action". The US

⁵⁰ Gates had in fact received a letter from a military scholar to this effect in February, although he did not seem to make use of the idea in this or any preceding meetings (Sleeper, 1991).

would show leadership in caring for the refugees (The White House & Gates, 1991, p. 5). Even in this gesture, decision-making was based on the premise that engagement would be as limited as possible to avoid “another Vietnam”: A UNHCR officer commented that “exit was the strategy” (Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 44). A senior US official remarked:

“The desire to disengage eventually drove the decision-making process [...] As a result, the United States never developed a comprehensive, long-term plan for responding to the crisis. Most decisions were ad hoc, and policy guidance was often contradictory and unrealistic. At the field level, decisions were made in response to the situation and the needs of the Kurds. Inevitably, their needs came into conflict with the desire to withdraw as soon as possible” (Brilliant & Tanner, 1992, p. 62; Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 44).

This was the hour of the no-fly zone. Ever since late March, the use of helicopters had become to symbolize a particularly cruel and somehow “unfair” weapon, despite their relatively minor role in Saddam Hussein’s crackdown. Bush intimates how he had been “criticized on the right and the left for not shooting down the helicopters” (The White House/National Security Council, 1991). If Kurdish refugees needed protection, and ground troops should not and could not be used, airpower offered itself to fill the gap. Based on the Safwan arrangements, the US jets already patrolled Iraqi airspace, engaged fixed-wing aircraft that transgressed the ban, and airdrops were accompanied by patrols. This meant that a ban on all military flights had de facto been implemented already, at least since the warning on April 6 (which came too late to affect Saddam Hussein’s crackdown). However, the purpose of this ban had been the protection of US forces from Iraqi interference. By April 10, the Bush administration diluted and rebranded the ban: while the administration had acknowledged multiple times that there was no military purpose to the ban, it could potentially bridge the ideational divide between those favoring US engagement and those worried about its possible costs if extended to the protection of civilians. Clearly, it was not strategically optimal for this purpose: it “took some pressure off the [...] Kurds, but it did not get them from under [...] [Saddam Hussein’s] tyranny” (Quayle, 1994, p. 242). Powell incredulously remembers:

“The only issue that came up is, ‘Should we do something about the Iraqi helicopters?’ It had never been one of our objectives to get involved in this kind of civil uprising between factions within Iraq and the Iraqi government. And so it was not clear what purpose would have been achieved by getting ourselves mixed up in the middle of that” (Frontline/PBS, 1997).

However, selling the ban as a new policy came with little extra cost, bought some time, and eased ideational competition in both administration and public debate.

Hence, on April 10, Fitzwater, in a press briefing that surprisingly allowed cameras for the first 15 minutes, publicly (re-)announced the ban on all military flights north of the 36th parallel which had

already de facto existed for days (Fitzwater, 1991; Sciolino, 1991).⁵¹ After summarizing at length the “Kurdish plight” and the humanitarian efforts so far, Fitzwater explained the warning that had been transmitted to the Iraqi government, and outlined that it applied to all military forces that threatened the humanitarian effort in the region (Fitzwater, 1991). The ban’s actual rules of engagement specified that patrolling jets were to engage Iraqi aircraft north of the 36th parallel, but ground targets only in self-defense (Elflein, 1998, p. 35; Schmitt, 1998). Iraqi ground forces were not targeted proactively (Elflein, 1998; Prados, 2002, p. 5). Baker retrospectively explains: “There was certainly never any commitment to keep Iraqi ground troops out of the much larger area covered by the no-fly zone” (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 111; Graham-Brown, 1999). In his briefing, Fitzwater admitted that the US government did not expect military interference, and that indeed Iraqi forces had stopped operations in the affected area (US officials acknowledged that they were unlikely to start again; Fitzwater, 1991; Sciolino, 1991). Indeed, that may have been the point: when asked, Fitzwater denied that the ban meant “US involvement in the civil war in Iraq” (Fitzwater, 1991).

Importantly, the ban (not yet officially labelled a “no-fly zone”) was the result not of any longer-term strategy or careful military optimization, but rather of short-term ideational compromise within the foreign policy executive (Graham-Brown, 2001). In early April 1991, it was the most forceful policy the Bush administration could agree on: it allowed the continuous withdrawal of troops and disengagement from Iraq all the while, by air, exerting a degree of influence strong enough to reasonably claim responsibility and involvement. From April 11 onwards, jetfighters continued to fly CAP missions aimed at protecting humanitarian airdrops – the objectives of the mission had shifted, but the practical implementation did not change (Goff, 1992, p. 9; Kramlinger, 2001, p. 21; Ripley, 1991a, p. 29). The ban and the patrol flights now also protected civilians and refugees from Iraqi attack (Frelick, 1992; Goff, 1992; P. Jackson, 1993; Kramlinger, 2001; Miles, 1991). Although not yet officially labelled a “no-fly zone”, this slow dilution marked the “birth” of the tool. Its roots in political compromise rather than military-strategic optimization became evident almost immediately, as the Bush administration was forced to increase US commitment when the “new” policy, predictably, failed to have an effect.

4.2.6. Operation Provide Comfort and Aftermath

By mid-April, it had slowly become clear that airdrops were not good enough (Bearn Dyke, 1991) and the ban on military flights came weeks too late to address an actual problem. The primary issue was,

⁵¹ There is considerable confusion in the literature on the decision-making process in the days between April 5 and April 11. April 10 is often given as a date for “no-fly zone implementation” in northern Iraq, although the exact same ban had already existed since April 6. April 10 was the date on which the purpose of the ban shifted in administration rhetoric from CAP to also include protection of civilians.

as the administration noted, that the refugees could not return because the “Iraqis won’t let them” (Natsios & National Security Council, 1991). To that end, a larger protective force would be necessary (Bearg Dyke, 1991; Goff, 1992, p. 10; Haass, 2010, pp. 140–150), but the Bush administration remained hesitant to explore further options. In a telephone conference, Bush explained to French President Francois Mitterand, who supported more extensive safe zones, that since the Iraqis honored the ban, “for all intents and purposes, [...] areas north of the 36th parallel [...] have already become safe havens. It is our feeling that we should accept them de facto and not try to formalize them further” (The White House/National Security Council & Basora, 1991, p. 2). One concern was UNSC approval, but more crucial was further US engagement: “I am going increasingly public with my policy that we will not use US forces to settle a civil war” (The White House/National Security Council & Basora, 1991, p. 2). Mitterand subsequently managed to convince Bush that they were in fact in agreement, and that by simply “extending protection” the coalition would “keep doing what we’re doing”, even though Mitterand seemed to favor a stronger mission to live up to their “moral obligation” to protect civilians from being “strafed with machine guns” (The White House/National Security Council & Basora, 1991, p. 3).

And indeed, after a meeting with European leaders on April 12, Bush tacitly agreed to a safe zone in a six-point humanitarian plan for northern Iraq, consisting of (1) assisting the survival of the Kurdish displaced civilians, (2) providing protection and shelter to the Kurds, (3) establishing a safe haven inside Iraq, (4) assimilating the Kurds back into their home areas, (5) transferring relief operations to civilian agencies, and (6) withdrawing coalition military forces (Goff, 1992, pp. 6–9; Yang, 1991). At the same time as Bush embraced a more forceful approach, two documents brought out the ongoing fundamental ideational divide in the administration. Quayle defended the initial policy not to support the Kurdish rebellion: there were no vital interests at stake, and intervention would have lacked a clearly defined military purpose as well as domestic support. He explained: “We must draw the line [...] We must act responsibly [...] It would be unwise to intervene militarily now and to get US forces bogged down in a civil war in Iraq” (Yang, 1991). An internal memo instead described America’s “public diplomacy problem” with regards to northern Iraq: “We are seen as walking away from a human tragedy we helped to create” (Rugh & United States Information Agency, 1991). It could taint US foreign policy that “we lost the peace by neglecting the common people after a great military victory”. The memo assesses the policy of restraint as the correct one, but cautions that its perception falls short: “We should continue to withdraw our military forces from the war zone but at the same time we should stake out an aggressive and positive position of activism” (Rugh & United States Information Agency, 1991). This compromise between ideationally driven policy alternatives, at least in rhetoric, sets the blueprint for future uses of no-fly zones.



Based on guidance issued on April 16, the humanitarian airdrops were replaced and the ban on military flights complemented in subsequent weeks by a large-scale protection force including thousands of US and coalition ground forces (Haass, 1991b). In the words of Haass, the US had moved towards “a zonal approach of creating a mini-Kurdistan in northern Iraq” (Haass, 1991b, p. 1). The no-fly zone, ineffective at addressing the problem at hand, had to be replaced after all by a more extensive “safe zone”: exactly what the administration had wanted to avoid, and what entailed the risk of “being drawn ever more deeply into Iraq with no clear way out” (Haass, 1991b). Iraqi armed forces were made to withdraw from an area that eventually covered several thousand square miles (Haulman, 2000, p. 181), allowing for the bulk of the Kurdish refugees to return home. By the end of May 1991, “only” 41,000 Kurds still remained in the camps. Perhaps surprisingly given the inherent short-termism, this bolstered humanitarian effort was successful at easing the refugee crisis and thus pushing the problem from the agenda, and the US could pull back the ground forces it had to re-commit relatively quickly. However, as several departments and agencies subsequently complained about a lack of guidance from the White House, policy towards the Kurdish issue remained ambiguous (Haass, 1991b). Intra-administrative ideational divides persisted, and led to the peculiar problem of “perpetual patrol”: Operation Provide Comfort ended in July 1991, but the no-fly zone continued first as Operation Provide Comfort II and then as Operation Northern Watch (Kramlinger, 2001, p. 22; Ripley, 1991b). The no-fly zone was tested repeatedly by Iraqi forces without punishment and therefore considered obsolete relatively soon (Haulman, 2000, p. 184). After March 1999, the situation cooled down to low-intensity levels until Northern Watch ceased with the 2003 invasion.

4.3. Conclusion

The end of the Cold War created a very permissive international environment (certainly compared to the following case studies on Bosnia and Libya). Contradicting systemic stimuli conditioned rather than determined US foreign policy in northern Iraq: intervention and “belated” regime change constituted an option given military capabilities, but were constrained by considerations of regional order, territorial integrity and the interests of important allies. In such an environment, using the no-fly zone as the initial tool of intervention in northern Iraq remains underdetermined through a structural realist lens. Instead, I have argued that intervening and contradictory ideas about the scenario at hand in 1991, i.e. about US interests and appropriate strategies to mobilize US capabilities and resources in response, created ideational deadlock in the Bush administration. With regards to the Kurdish refugee crisis, some decision-makers in the Bush administration carried ideas of quick action and wished to demonstrate leadership and humanitarian responsibility, but they were opposed by others fearing a dragged-out intervention’s political and material costs. This limited the wiggle-room at both ends of the spectrum: neither “doing nothing” nor “doing everything” were realistic alternatives.



Conveniently, a way out presented itself: Media coverage honed in on Iraq's use of helicopters in the regime's repression, which may be surprising considering the helicopters' comparatively small overall importance. The way in which ideational competition about ambiguous systemic conditions intervened in the causal path to foreign policy choice vis-à-vis northern Iraq provides confirming evidence for the neoclassical realist framework used in this thesis. Contextual factors (e.g. intense media coverage) may make a "doing something" scenario more or less likely (e.g. by providing "trigger moments"), but they do not determine the means of intervention.

Finally, the step towards a full no-fly zone may look small in retrospect: the US already had a (de-facto) ban on fixed-wing aircraft in place, although enforcement was haphazard. Indeed, adding the helicopters seemed a small cost to bridge ideational divides between those favoring intervention and those fearful of a slippery slope and a dangerous precedent. This was particularly the case as by the time the ban was announced, the Iraqi regime had stopped using helicopters for offensive operations in northern Iraq. Regardless, the no-fly symbolized the middle-ground between not intervening and intervening, assertiveness and restraint – and the Bush administration grasped this opportunity to "do something". It could be implemented immediately, held little risk, and signaled commitment to the Kurdish refugees without either actually supporting the rebellion or overly antagonizing the Iraqi regime, international partners or domestic opposition. The ban on military flights did not in fact affect the situation much (if at all). The Bush administration reluctantly realized that the tool had to be complemented by a larger mission on the ground after all. Regardless, the no-fly zone had proved to be a supposedly riskless, "zero-casualty" mission and became connected in the minds of decision-makers with successful conflict management (Benard, 2004; Cavanaugh, 1992), as will become apparent in subsequent cases. That is not because it was particularly effective at protecting civilians, or contributed much to US policy in northern Iraq – but because for a brief moment, it turned out to be a good political maneuver to overcome intra-administrative ideational deadlock given ambiguous systemic stimuli.

5.1. Introduction: Interests, Ideas and the No-Fly Zone in Bosnia

The use of the no-fly zone at an early stage in the Bosnian civil war remains both underexplored and puzzling on several different levels – for one, many otherwise comprehensive accounts reserve but passing mention for what appears to many an unimportant by-product of US foreign policy (or lack thereof) vis-à-vis the conflict (Burg & Shoup, 1999; Chang, 2011; Drew, 1994; Holbrooke, 1999; Owen, 1997). Trenta similarly observes that biographies as well as historians' accounts tend to focus on only a select few policies of the early Clinton presidency, and then “jump” to 1995 (Trenta, 2014, p. 63; 84). Other accounts focusing on the different diplomatic, economic and military tools used in the early stages of the conflict discuss the no-fly zone as one of the many steps in a strategy of coercive diplomacy (Owen, 1997, p. 151), with scarce mention of the intricate political processes surrounding this specific tool.⁵² And yet, as this chapter argues, a focus on the no-fly zone offers both a theoretical perspective on White House decision-making processes, as well as a richer empirical account of deeply flawed American foreign policy towards Bosnia, as it moves beyond broad narratives of “containment” and “circumvention” (David, 1995) to look at the details of foreign policy creation in 1992 and 1993. To this end, I amend the structural realist frameworks which largely fail to account for the imposition of a (first monitored, then enforced) no-fly zone in Bosnia.

From an offensive realist perspective, the extremely hesitant position of the Bush administration vis-à-vis Bosnia may appear puzzling. The dominance of the US in the international system arguably reached its peak in the early 1990s, as the Soviet Union had crumbled and left the US unrivalled economically or militarily. The US was the only power with the ability to project and the willingness to identify interests globally (Trubowitz, 2011, p. 120). The idea of a “new world order” with the US as unequivocal leader not only of the free world but of the entire world was yet to be seriously challenged, although the Bush administration remained vague about the details of this order, and its implications for specific state behavior. Even though the glow of the Persian Gulf War began to wear off as the US became embroiled in regional and local conflicts flaring up all around the world, both the Bush and Clinton administrations still enjoyed considerable systemic leeway to direct US capabilities as they saw fit. On this basis, a confident policy of assuring US interests around the globe, of an expansionist policy of world-wide power projection and hegemony may not only have been expected, but was predicted

⁵² For example, Chang, otherwise with detailed information, does not even mention the no-fly zone, even though she examines “how and under what circumstances the Clinton administration eventually decided to intervene in the Bosnian conflict” (Chang, 2011, p. 89).

by many theoretical and empirical accounts (Drew, 1994, p. 150; Papayoanou, 1997, p. 92). Instead, the US under Bush and Clinton was very reluctant to engage in Bosnia (Papayoanou, 1997, p. 92), perhaps more in line with defensive realist predictions: were permissive systemic conditions interpreted to guarantee security, upholding the status quo and otherwise disengaging from situations not directly affecting national interests would amount to very appropriate policies. Indeed, the Bush administration seemed extremely cautious to not get involved in anything more than what diplomatic conflict management might dictate (Trenta, 2014, p. 65). Evidently, both administrations faced systemic constraints in the opposition of allies and adversaries to the use of force. The UK and France worried that their soldiers in Bosnia would be threatened by more active US engagement. Importantly, Russia had reemerged on the international stage with major interests at stake in Bosnia. Evidently, while the US still enjoyed considerable leeway, then, the international environment was actually less permissive than in 1991. And yet, towards the latter months of his term, Bush began pushing for no-fly zone enforcement. The Bosnian no-fly zone is unusual in that it was, because of the Bush administration's strong support, mandated in late 1992 and subsequently monitored, but not enforced for the first months of its existence.

When the Clinton administration came into power in 1993, the war in Bosnia had already spiraled into a complex inter-ethnic conflict spanning an ever-changing theater encompassing cities as well as open country, involving regular and irregular units, and international conflict management attempts occurred on multiple levels and in multiple fora at the same time. Any US involvement with ground troops would come at considerable costs and risk, while air strikes were opposed by the allies. Imposing a decision would have made Bosnia an American responsibility, and strained America's European relations (Trenta, 2014, p. 71). Protecting the trans-Atlantic alliance and great power harmony was clearly more important to the US than Bosnia (Peceny & Sanchez-Terry, 1998, p. 4; Trenta, 2014, p. 73). Alliance management becomes a major policy constraint. And yet, the Clinton administration decided it would push for no-fly zone enforcement even though the tool was explicitly considered by several top military and political advisers a useless exercise in military expenditure, with unclear aims and a likely insignificant impact both on the conflict parties as well as for the protection of civilians (or UN peacekeepers). Why was the no-fly zone used regardless?

Beyond systemic explanation, three main approaches to the Clinton administration's "flapping around" with regards to Bosnia can be identified: lack of focus, domestic opinion, and bureaucratic rivalry (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 86; Trenta, 2014, p. 62). While Clinton was elected primarily on a domestic platform, and focused on domestic issues in his first months in office, Bosnia was the one major foreign policy issue at the same time, the first one directly tackled, and Clinton actively participated in decision-making throughout January-April 1993 (Bert, 1997, p. 82; Trenta, 2014, p. 62). In late 1992 and early

1993, decision-makers were faced with an overall tight fiscal situation, a divided legislative, and public opinion at best uninterested in Bosnia, at worst strictly opposed to US involvement (Chang, 2011, p. 97). Clinton's pollster, Stan Greenberg, commented that "polling on foreign policy questions wasn't very useful because it could give no guide to public reaction after a President called for action" (Drew, 150).⁵³ Domestically, pressures to act only arose in response to particularly tragic incidents (such as the Srebrenica massacres), which the no-fly zone in turn was unsuited to address: The "CNN effect" remains an unconvincing explanation for Clinton's willingness to push through no-fly zone enforcement despite the tool's likely disutility to conflict management and resolution (Jakobsen, 2000).

Finally, institutional dynamics and partisan politics may have played a role: The "lame duck" phase may constrain outgoing administrations from making tough decisions that would pre-determine the new administration's playground, so that enforcement was held off in the final months of 1992. Conversely, the opportunity to act differently from its predecessor may prove too attractive to be ignored. However, no-fly zone enforcement was in many ways a continuation of Bush policy, and electoral benefits would likely be minimal (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 270). Also, partisan preferences for a strategy of restraint may have limited available foreign policy options (Trubowitz, 2011, p. 121). This approach does not offer a detailed explanation of which options would still be available, and why exactly the ones chosen are preferred. Finally, intra-administrative deliberations have frequently been analyzed through partisan or ideological bargaining between "realists" and "idealists" (Trenta, 2014, p. 62). While potentially promising, this oversimplification glosses over inconsistencies not easily explained by focusing on only two "sides".

Instead, an explanation rooted in the analysis of specific ideas intervening in the foreign policy executive's decision-making between systemic conditions and state behavior therefore holds considerable explanatory power. Precisely the fact that the initial stages of the Bosnian conflict were used as a canvas to outline in broad brushes basic foreign policy stances by both presidential contenders in the 1992 election underline the importance of *ideas* about US interests and appropriate strategies vis-à-vis foreign conflicts in shaping decision-makers' interpretations of systemic conditions. That the incumbent Bush administration thought a careful and hesitant use of tools such as the no-fly zone was appropriate underlines a specific set of ideas about America's position in the world in 1992.

⁵³ Notably, even the horrendous imagery coming from Bosnia "did not generate popular enthusiasm for involvement" (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 163; Drew, 1994, p. 150; Holbrooke, 1999, p. 54). Public opinion in the US, while generally concerned about Bosnia and supportive of ending ethnic cleansing and the war, tended not to support direct involvement of US ground forces. Surveys showed that majorities did not think the USA had a responsibility to intervene or end the fighting, even when questions were worded provocatively anti-Serbian (Eichenberg, 2005). Stronger support existed for the protection of UN peacekeepers. Also, Bosnia was less important than other issues, such as drug trafficking, illegal immigration, economic policies and global environment (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 164).



Conversely, that the Clinton administration thought enforcing the no-fly zone against all calculations of expected utility and effectiveness was appropriate shows the relevance in foreign policy decision-making processes of ideas around US leadership, responsibility, and the utility of technology that permeate the translation from systemic conditions to state behavior. I argue, then, that what puzzles structural realist accounts when it comes to Bosnia's no-fly zone, namely the tool's complete lack of utility for the problem identified by the US administrations themselves, can in fact be explained by the tool's role in "fixing", for a while, processes of ideational competition in the foreign policy executive. In both administrations, fundamentally contrasting and competing sets of ideas about US interests, strategy and means riddled a decision-making process on if, how, and when to act under systemic conditions difficult to interpret and deduce.

In this chapter, by tracing carefully the decision-making dynamics around the initiation of first a monitored, then an enforced no-fly zone over Bosnia, I tease out the influence of ideas as an intervening variable in White House foreign policy decision-making processes. I show where these ideas are located, what they center on, and when and how they compete to result in the use of a no-fly zone.⁵⁴ In a first part, I introduce the scenario and US policies vis-à-vis Bosnia. I then delve more deeply into how the decision to employ the no-fly zone came about in the first place: specifically, I focus on the competing ideas about the scenario and US interests in it, as well as about appropriate response strategies. I then show how these ideas are carried into the White House decision-making processes, how they compete to produce intense ideational competition, and how they skew the transmission belt between systemic conditions and state behavior to result in the use of the no-fly zone in a conflict the tool was ill-suited to address.

5.2. Bush, Clinton, and Ideational Competition over Bosnia

Despite the partisan differences on paper, the ideas intervening in the foreign policy decision-making processes are largely the same across both the Bush and Clinton executives. These intervening ideas and ideational competition help explain the choice of the no-fly zone otherwise puzzling to accounts focusing solely on systemic conditions. They are categorized around two tightly interrelated concerns, namely those on the nature of systemic conditions and accompanying US interests, as well as those on appropriate ways of mobilizing US power in response. The answers coming from within the administration's core decision-making team were so diverse and systemic conditions as well as the specific scenario so ambiguous and unclear that both administrations faced protracted ideational

⁵⁴ Such analysis inevitably focuses on the specific tool under investigation. Where necessary, linkages to the wider response to the conflicts in former Yugoslavia are highlighted. Different forces coordinated by UN, NATO, and WEU carried out six different missions mandated by the UNSC, in addition to non-military sanctions as well as numerous diplomatic tracks (Gow, 1997, p. 129).

competition. In early 1993, the no-fly zone seemed to suggest a way out: a compromise between Clinton's promised tougher stance on Bosnia, ideas of humanitarian responsibility, and the unwillingness to engage in what could become "another Vietnam"; a way to employ risk-free, casualty-free means derived from superior US military capabilities in a limited yet seemingly decisive show of force. In so deciding on the tools of intervention, the no-fly zone's lack of actual utility in the scenario was ignored.

5.2.1. Beginnings of Conflict in Bosnia and Operation Sky Monitor

Already in October 1990 and with renewed precision in March 1991, US intelligence predicted complex intra-state and inter-ethnic warfare as the most likely outcome of a breakup of Yugoslavia (Director of Central Intelligence, 1990; Office of European Analysis, 1991b). Indeed, in March 1992, the Bosnian declaration of independence and the subsequent recognition by European states and the US prompted Bosnian Serb forces and what remained of the Yugoslav National Army (YNA) in Bosnia to attack Muslims and Croats, while the two latter groups were fighting each other as well (Office of European Analysis, 1992; Kalyvas & Sambanis, 2005, p. 194; Chang, 2011, p. 87).⁵⁵ Subsequently, "a heavily armed civilian populace and profusion of paramilitary groups [ensured] that conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina would be characterized by widespread and chaotic skirmishing" (Office of European Analysis, 1991a, p. 4). The UNSC set up a sanctions regime in response, which included compliance monitoring by naval and aerial forces (United Nations Security Council, 1991, 1992a). By mid-1992, US intelligence concluded that only a large-scale ground intervention could end the fighting "in the near term" (Director of Central Intelligence, 1992, pp. 3–4). In the meantime, European Community president Jacques Poos declared that this was the hour of Europe: the US should take a backseat (Power, 2002, pp. 258–259; Chang, 2011, p. 89). By the summer of 1992, the UN extended the mandate of the 14,000-men peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR) to Bosnia (Kalyvas & Sambanis, 2005, p. 194; Gow, 1997, p. 110).⁵⁶ The peacekeepers proved ineffective in preventing hostilities and securing humanitarian access as they were underequipped and understaffed, and the mandate proved far too ambitious (Benard, 2004, p. 469). Instead, the peacekeepers themselves had their depots plundered, their material robbed, and their lives threatened as hostages (Ripley, 1999, p. 28).

In June 1992, the Bush administration established the Directorate of Central Intelligence (DCI) Interagency Balkan Task Force, which would become very influential in US foreign policy decision-making on Bosnia (Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, 1992). By mid-1992, after reports of

⁵⁵ For comprehensive and detailed description and analyses of the Yugoslavian wars and the Bosnian civil war, cf. Bert, 1997; Burg & Shoup, 1999; Zimmerman, 1996, 1999.

⁵⁶ For an overview on UNPROFOR's history, functioning and tasks in the wider region, (Gow, 1997, pp. 102–126). UNPROFOR was later also tasked with protecting what in May 1993 were declared "safe havens" (Sarajevo and five other Muslim enclaves).

indiscriminate violence against civilians in Bosnia, including YNA airstrikes, and with additional urgency when humanitarian flights into Sarajevo came under fire (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 214), the Bush administration re-considered its policy towards intervention in Bosnia. One of the options on the table included the imposition of a no-fly zone similar to the northern Iraqi one.⁵⁷ In May, the UNSC had already laid out restrictions on aircraft (private or military) operating from or in Yugoslavian territory (United Nations Security Council, 1992a). At the London Conference in Summer 1992, the involved parties, including the newly independent former Yugoslav Republics as well as Serbia, agreed on the imposition of a “ban on flights” in the conflict theater and free humanitarian access (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 212). The latter element was backed up by UNSC resolutions empowering states to use “any measures necessary” to deliver humanitarian aid (which neither excluded nor explicitly mandated military force; United Nations Security Council, 1992b; Gow, 1997, p. 111). However, the conflict parties did not abide by the London Conference agreement, with frequent infractions against the self-imposed no-fly restrictions over the next months (White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992).

The Bush administration grew increasingly frustrated with Bosnian-Serb and Serbian recalcitrance, especially regarding the previously agreed flight ban and started to push for external enforcement (see below; The White House, 1992; White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992). These efforts were resisted by Vance and Owen, as well as the Europeans (who feared for their ill-protected peacekeepers on the ground) and Russians (who opposed intervention against their Serbian allies; The White House/National Security Council, 1992; White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992). The result was the implementation of Resolution 781, which prohibited the use of Bosnian airspace by the combatants, but provided only for a monitoring mission (United Nations Security Council, 1992c; Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 250; White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992d).⁵⁸ This resulted in NATO Operation Sky Monitor. The YNA and Bosnian Serb forces rejected the resolutions and failed to comply with the ban (UN Secretary General, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992; Gow, 1997, p. 132) by carrying out limited aerial attacks throughout Bosnia particularly with rotary-wing, but also fixed-wing aircraft in the next months (White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992).⁵⁹ Parallel efforts at a

⁵⁷ At the same time, a no-fly zone over southern Iraq was debated and then implemented in August 1992, so there might have been a sense of synergy involved in the decision-making process (The White House/National Security Council, 1992).

⁵⁸ UNSC Resolution 781 called for a ban on military flights, which it referred to as an “essential element for the safety of the delivery of humanitarian assistance and a decisive step for the cessation of hostilities” (United Nations Security Council, 1992c) and tasked UNPROFOR with monitoring compliance (Gow, 1997, p. 132). To that end, 75 military observers were deployed based on UNSC Resolution 786 (United Nations Security Council, 1992d). Resolution 786 also closed a loophole for rotary-wing aircraft left by Resolution 781 (United Nations Security Council, 1992d).

⁵⁹ Under the impression that the US would push for enforcement, Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panic offered to transfer all Bosnian Serb aircraft to Serbia. The Bosnian Serb leadership agreed, but was overruled by the leader of the Bosnian Serb air force who refused to give up the aircraft. Even though this agreement was not implemented, the Bosnian Serbs largely

humanitarian airlift into Bosnia were heavily criticized as, unsurprisingly, they were inadequate at addressing the catastrophic humanitarian situation throughout Bosnia (Gow, 1997, p. 109). Subsequently, the US repeatedly threatened to enforce the no-fly zone, but never actually answered continued Bosnian-Serb intransigence with military force.

5.2.2. Interests, Ideas, and the 1992 Election

The Bush administration up until mid-1992 viewed the Yugoslavian conflict as a limited regional and particularly a European problem (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, pp. 636, 645–648; Halberstam, 2002, pp. 42–46; Recchia, 2015, p. 109). Escalating violence and spillover in the Balkans would threaten the “[promotion of] democracy, economic reform, and regional cooperation” and possibly “complicate US bilateral ties to Balkan countries and entangle Washington in competition among allies backing competing ethnic groups” (Director of Central Intelligence, 1992, pp. 3–4). However, it took place in a remote place of Europe with historically little US presence, and only a few people in the foreign policy executive knew a lot about Bosnia. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations shared the deduction that the conflict did not affect vital national interests (Halberstam, 2002, pp. 42–46; Recchia, 2015, p. 109). Bush’s Secretary of State Baker famously quipped that the US “had no dog in this fight” (Farkas, 2003, p. 76). In contrast to the Persian Gulf War, the Bosnian crisis did not meet what the Bush administration saw as necessary preconditions for military intervention, most notably per the “Powell doctrine”: the notion that the use of force should be based on predetermined and specific policy goals, and “restricted to occasions where it can do some good and where the good will outweigh the loss of lives and other costs” (Powell, 1992, p. 40; Chang, 2011, p. 88). The worries surrounding a Vietnam-style quagmire, even though just triumphantly declared an idea of the past, forcefully reappeared when the Bush administration discussed Bosnia (Chang, 2011, p. 88; Recchia, 2015, p. 119). Baker’s successor under Bush, Lawrence Eagleburger, was influenced by his memories of the Vietnam War (Chang, 2011, p. 88). Just as in the Iraq case, “Vietnam” stood for the idea that initial military engagement, however limited, leads to irreversible escalation and intractable conflict (Bert, 1997, p. 121). This idea had been present in foreign policy decision-making long before the Bush administration, and it easily spilled over to the Clinton administration, carried into deliberations by Clinton’s senior foreign policy advisers, the military leadership as well as congressmen and -women (Krauss, 1993). The idea of a “Vietnam” far from home and lacking any actual US interests was powerfully combined with ideas surrounding the specific “Balkan nature” of the Bosnian conflict: The intricacies of ethnic and religious conflict as well as misinformed ideas about histories of violent tribal conflict in the region became enmeshed in stereotypes of “ancient hatreds” and “Balkan-style” warfare that informed

refrained from using fixed-wing aircraft thereafter (UN Secretary General, 1992b; Watson & Ware, 1993, p. 3; Gow, 1997, pp. 132–133).

policy-making in the highest echelons of the executive (Bert, 1997, p. 108; Christopher, 1998, p. 347). Eagleburger commented that the conflict was “not rational [...] it’s not for any common set of values or purposes; it just goes on. And that kind of warfare is most difficult to bring to a halt” (quoted in: Western, 2005, p. 164). In the end, the Bush administration’s “traditional realists” concluded that Bosnia was comparable to Vietnam rather than Iraq. There were little to no US interests at play in Bosnia, and the US military should not be employed to do “humanitarian social work” (Chang, 2011, p. 88): There would not be an operation “Balkan Storm” (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 83; Kenney & Dugan, 1992). However, beginning in June 1992 when reports of so-called “death camps” in Bosnia appeared (Western, 2005, p. 157ff.), and increasingly as the humanitarian situation in Bosnia worsened with the approaching winter (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force & Office of European Analysis, 1992), the Bush administration came under criticism: State Department officials resigned in protest (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 28; Power, 2002, p. 280). Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci as well as several influential critics outside of the administration (including retired General Odom, former UN ambassador Kirkpatrick, and Richard Holbrooke; Chang, 2011, p. 93) argued for a more forceful stance (Recchia, 2015, p. 109). They derived their arguments from different diagnoses of what the Bosnian conflict signified and why it touched on core US interests, which then reappear more prominently in the Clinton campaign and presidency.

Although Bush was strong on foreign policy issues, the Democratic Party candidate Clinton felt he should not leave his opponent’s record unchallenged. Advised by Holbrooke, Anthony Lake and Samuel Berger, he began to criticize the Bush administration through two different but related sets of ideas from July onwards: firstly, by employing discursively ideas of humanitarianism, human rights, and moral obligations, and secondly through a focus on presidential “leadership” and America’s role in the international community, both of which relate to US interests in the world (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 42). As the press reported on Bosnian Serb atrocities, Clinton pushed for air strikes to deter ethnic cleansing (Clinton, 1992; Daalder, 1998, p. 6). He called on Bush to “do whatever it takes to stop the slaughter of civilians” and suggested “we may have to use military force” (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 210; Horvitz, 1992): “We cannot afford to ignore what appears to be a deliberate and systematic extermination of human beings based on their ethnic origin [...] I would begin with airpower against the Serbs to try to restore the basic conditions of humanity” (Horvitz, 1992). In other campaign speeches, Clinton suggested tougher sanctions, a lifting of the weapons embargo against Croats and the Bosnian state, and airstrikes against YNA and Bosnian Serb positions to enforce humanitarian access, particularly to Sarajevo, and protect civilians on the ground (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 41; Kelly, 1994). Bush answered with tough rhetoric, but no indication of means (Power, 2002, pp. 274–275; Trenta, 2014, p. 65). Derived from the administration’s narrower perception of US interests and responsibilities, ideas of humanitarian intervention were rejected.

All the while, the Clinton campaign made use of a second, closely related idea to attack Bush's record on Bosnia. Not only did the US, per Clinton's ideas and rhetoric, have a moral obligation to intervene on behalf of threatened civilians, it was also necessary to uphold American leadership in the international community, as the sole remaining superpower's responsibility to the "free world" (Trenta, 2014, p. 65). Clinton began to attack the Bush administration not only for "turning its back on violations of basic human rights", but also for "being slow on the uptake" (Holbrooke, 1999, pp. 40–41; Dueck, 2008, p. 128; D. Kagan & Kagan, 2014, p. 323). Clinton called on Bush to show "real leadership" on Bosnia – a criticism that cut to the core of the Bush administration's previous rhetoric on Iraq (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 41). Clinton promised he would "make the United States the catalyst for a collective stand against aggression", because "in a world of change, security flows from initiative, not inertia" (Ifill, 1992). Ideas surrounding US interests in the world and great power responsibility clashed with what the Bush administration, burdened with the realities of office, perceived as prudent foreign policy. In turn, Clinton's more assertive ideas about US responsibility would come to haunt his administration, as they proved irreconcilable with contrasting ideas about America's interests in the world. Despite the mounting political costs of continued inaction, Bush answered with pragmatist rhetoric, criticizing Clinton's inexperience and recklessness (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 42): "We are not the world's policeman" (Kelly, 1994) and "we are not going to get bogged down in some guerrilla warfare" (Hoagland, 1992; Western, 2005, p. 164). Clinton should "better do some homework" on Bosnia and the lack of US interests in the region (A. Rosenthal, 1992). While in principle, the Bush administration agreed on US leadership in the "new world order", their ideas entailed a much more restrained interpretation of what consequences for state behavior this leadership entailed. Faced with increasingly dramatic reports from Bosnia and Clinton's campaign attacks, however, it became difficult to stick to this position – and the Bush administration found itself scrambling for a way out.

Although systemic conditions and US interests did not indicate a necessity for all-out intervention, and correspondingly the Bush administration showed little interest in such a stance, by September 1992 it slowly started to advocate amongst its allies for a more forceful response (The White House, 1992; Papayoanou, 1997, p. 106). Faced with both a deteriorating situation in Bosnia as well as Clinton's aggressive rhetoric and the growing influence of ideas about the necessity of humanitarian action and US leadership, the Bush administration became more active in its attempts to manage the conflict and curb Serb aggression. However, despite increasingly alarming intelligence reports on how the conflict might affect longer-term US interests, the Bush administration remained hesitant to view Bosnia as more than a regional conflict of little interest to the US. Increased ideational competition did not lead to a re-assessment of US policy in Bosnia as systemic conditions were left unchanged. Eagleburger retrospectively explained: "We had largely made a decision we were not going to get militarily

involved. And nothing [...] pushed us into it. I hated it. Because this was condoning [...] a hell of a lot of murder. It made us damn uncomfortable” (quoted in: Strobel, 1997, p. 148; Western, 2005, p. 160). Hence, the Bush administration became involved in not “appearing indifferent to the suffering” all the while still minimizing own exposure (Recchia, 2015, p. 109). This interpretation of Bosnia also directly influenced the Bush administration’s interactions with allies and partners, particularly the European states and Russia, but also with the conflict parties, as the administration tried to shift responsibility to NATO and the UN (White House Situation Room/National Security Council, 1992). International cooperation was used instrumentally and without much ideational underpinning, which constitutes a major difference to the Clinton administration. Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs John Bolton explained before Congress: “Our domestic problems are myriad and cry out for attention. We want somebody – anybody – to take over the load overseas” (Bolton, 1992; Farkas, 2003, p. 80). Based on their diagnosis of US interests in the region, the Bush administration gave the European allies a large role in conflict management: “Having rejected the use of U.S. (and NATO) military muscle for any purpose in Bosnia, the Bush administration had effectively deferred the design and implementation of Western policy to the Europeans” (Daalder, 1999, p. 6). Repeatedly, when important allies or Russia expressed reservations over what was proposed US policy on Bosnia, the US did not push further: the toothless no-fly zone of late 1992 was a token gesture of ideational compromise between one part of the administration pushing for preventive bombardment of Bosnian Serb positions, and another part as well as the European allies expressing deep-seated reservations about intervention in general (Papayoanou, 1997, p. 106).

Although the Clinton campaign and then the Clinton administration offered different interpretations of the nature of the Bosnian conflict, they ended up with a similar role for America’s international partners. However, the reason for this similarity lies not in deferral, but in principle: the Clinton administration championed a different idea of multilateralism in US foreign policy. While the US had to lead, per Clinton’s rhetoric, its leadership in the post-Cold War world would be limited by international law, institutions, and principled multilateralism. Clinton tried to square the circle: “The United States, even as the last remaining superpower, has to act consistent with international law under some mandate of the United Nations [...] We do have to lead the world [...]” (Chang, 2011, p. 93; Clinton, 1993b). Bosnia was a test of how to amalgamate these ideas, which originate, firstly, in Clinton’s interpretation of the Gulf War: “If we operate with the support of the United Nations and with the support of Europe and with the support of allies, we can do a lot of things at an acceptable low cost of life, and get something done. If we go off on our own and everybody else is over here, we can’t get it done” (Clinton, 1993a; Christopher, 1993; Chang, 2011, pp. 92–93). Secondly, Lake (retrospectively) explained that the Europeans’ opposition to stronger US involvement was



“a source of some frustration to us, but I would occasionally remind myself that if there were US troops on the ground somewhere, and the Europeans took unilateral military action and put our troops at risk, all hell would break loose in Washington. We struggled with that for the first few years” (A. Lake, 2004a).

Thirdly, similarly to the Bush administration’s attempts to deflect responsibility, Clinton’s multilateralism also derived from a domestic focus, which left persuasion of allies as the only pathway to more forceful military action (Daalder, 1999, p. 8). Increasingly, the new administration regressed to its predecessor’s viewpoint and began to interpret Bosnia differently – “less as a tragedy that would have rendered American inaction immoral and more as a factional conflict about which little could be done” (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 188; Dumbrell, 2009, p. 270; Gow, 1997, p. 156). Clinton publicly suggested that all considered options

“have supporters and opponents within the administration [...] If you take action, if the United States takes action, we must have a clearly defined objective that can be met. We must be able to understand it, and its limitations must be clear. The United States is not, should not, become involved as a partisan in a war” (Clinton, 1994, p. 487).

America’s allies and international partners did not share the same ideas on leadership and humanitarian responsibilities in Bosnia. Instead, they would only endorse enforcement of the no-fly zone if the United States shared in the risk of ground troops (Daalder, 1999, p. 8). This the Clinton administration could not do, as it clashed with ideas surrounding “Vietnam” and the risk of military involvement still powerfully present in decision-making deliberations. Just as in Iraq, managing reticent international partners thus became a major constraint on US foreign policy. What was post-facto labelled Clinton’s strategy of “aggressive multilateralism” presented itself as a sequence of ideational competitions during the foreign policy decision-making process. A fundamental contradiction seemed to arise between ideas of US leadership and principled multilateralism. The US had to lead, but (as then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher realized in mid-1993) “if the US got out too far ahead of the Europeans and then couldn’t persuade them to come along” that would amount to unilateralism, and would likely hurt the administration (Daalder, 1999, p. 8). The no-fly zone should be interpreted not as a solution to, but in fact as an expression of this dilemma. It could only be solved, and actual US policy formulated on Bosnia, when systemic conditions changed again in 1995 (especially after the Srebrenica massacre) and catalyzed the administration into action (A. Lake, 2004a).

5.2.3. Military Strategy, Technology, and Airpower

Finally, ideas surrounding military technology and strategy competed in the decision-making process. These ideas concern appropriate strategies to mobilize state power, and how best to *enact* decisions over military intervention and American engagement. The decision-making process pits conflicting ideas about technology and appropriate military strategy in the case of intervention against one



another in deliberative competition. Ever since the Persian Gulf War, increased “technologization” and digitization of the military apparatus enabled ever closer civilian and political control, e.g. through direct battlefield communications and real-time updates. Increasingly, decision-makers in the White House situation room could directly perceive, and also play an active role in, operational and tactical decision-making of military engagements (Clark, 2002, p. 10). With the “nastiness” of ground combat now in audiovisual range, political decision-makers became increasingly aware of the risks of military intervention. At the same time, the design of military operations, e.g. the choice of tools, became a political concern in the highest decision-making echelons, as they carry the risk of potential backlash (Clark, 2002, p. 11). These factors increased the influence of ideas about at times very detailed, tactical ways and means to project state power in Bosnia, and thereby also increased the complexity of ideational competition within the respective administrations.

Proponents of US intervention quickly settled on airpower and bombing campaigns as the appropriate military tool. Airpower enthusiasts like McPeak or analysts Richard Hallion and Roy Braybrook proposed that a new “Revolution in Military Affairs” was under way, as the newest technologies (namely stealth and precision munitions) could win wars on their own (Hallion, 1997, pp. 241-244-254): “[The Iraq War] is the first time in history that a field army has been defeated by airpower” (Sibbald, 1992, pp. 122–123). The swift victory against a technologically outdistanced adversary showcased military dominance (Hillen, 1998; Shultz Jr. & Pfaltzgraff Jr., 1992), and seemed to prove the advent of low-risk warfare. As previously outlined, ideas around this new role and power of technology, and airpower in particular, quickly became ingrained in the foreign policy executive and the broader public (Shimko, 2010, p. 93). In retrospect, airpower seemed to have won the Iraq war almost on its own, and proved US superiority in subsequent engagements (F. Kagan, 2007, p. 161; Shimko, 2010, p. 79). When the Gulf War Air Power Survey found that many such claims were exaggerated (e.g. far fewer precision munitions employed than regular munitions), the US Air Force decided to restrict the report’s publication (Crane, 2013, p. 8). A possible operation in Bosnia in 1992 and 1993 again “elicited a combination of triumphalist claims for modern technology” (Crane, 2013, p. 8). The use of no-fly zones in Iraq established this tool in the minds of decision-makers, and the Bush administration liked to compare Bosnia with southern Iraq, where a no-fly zone had been introduced in mid-1992. At Joint Chiefs meetings, McPeak gave “very optimistic” estimates of “what could be done with minimal risk”: the Serbian air defenses posed “virtually no risk” to US fighters (Biden & Committee on Foreign Relations, 1993, pp. 2–8; Peceny & Sanchez-Terry, 1998, p. 4). Powell considered these predictions “excessive” (Drew, 1994, p. 154; Sciolino, 1993b), but the idea that airpower technology could make possible a “clean” entry into military intervention all the while limiting US commitments and minimizing risk was deeply embedded in both administrations (Clark, 2002, pp. 9–10; Forage, 2002; Gentile, 2000; Office of Russian and European Analysis & Central Intelligence Agency, 2002).

Specifically, bombing Serbia proper in addition to the Bosnian Serbs became a favored policy position of US airpower supporters. Ideas surrounding technology then became enmeshed with the idea that Serbian leader Milosevic “responds only to force” (Jeanne Kirkpatrick, ambassador to the UN under Reagan; quoted in Bert, 1997, p. 172). Threats of airpower were seen as an ideal overture into stronger coercive diplomacy strategies, including even by individuals not usually associated with military action, such as UN negotiator David Owen (Bert, 1997, p. 172). It also caught on in Clinton’s decision-making circles (e.g. with Madeleine Albright, Holbrooke, CIA director James Woolsey and even Lake, see below). Risk-free attacks from the air could bring the Bosnian Serbs and their supporters in Belgrade to stop their atrocities and bring about a settlement (Clark, 2002, p. 42). Such an approach promised to overcome the long-rooted fear, present throughout the US military and political establishment, of “Vietnam”, and replace it with the idea of “Iraq”: a new type of clean and risk-free intervention supported by highly technologized military force (Office of European Analysis, 1993).

However, a strong counter-argument emerged against especially the proposal of “independent decisiveness” (Crane, 2013, p. 9), carried by military and political advisers who viewed the role airpower could play in military interventions more critically, and followed the “Powell doctrine”’s concept of decisive force. Already in 1992, the military leadership had been very reluctant to become involved in Bosnia (Situation in Bosnia and Appropriate US and Western Responses, 1992, sec. Senate Committee on Armed Services). Baker comments that “[the military’s] model for using force was, understandably, the Gulf War – and Bosnia had more characteristics of Vietnam than Iraq” (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, p. 649; Chang, 2011, p. 89). This diagnosis emphasized not the opportunities of technological advancement, but the clear and limited mandate that allowed a conventional military campaign with clear and limited objectives. At its core was the idea that using force in Bosnia, no matter how limited at the onset, would escalate and “inevitably lead to ground combat” (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 200; Gompert, 1996, p. 129; Hutchings, 1997, p. 308). These ideas “had been key during the Vietnam conflict” (Bert, 1997, p. 173). Airpower had inherent limitations: amongst them difficulties to accurately strike targets on the ground, dependency on weather conditions and daylight, and lack of “centers of gravity” to strike in Bosnia, as the Pentagon and military leadership explained (Clark, 2002, p. 42). Any use of airpower would begin a slippery slope into full-blown military intervention. It would require ground personnel as target spotters, and likely still be ineffective, with only ground troops truly able to control the conflict theater. Air Force General Michael Ryan explained that “if you can find the artillery pieces and get the pilots’ eyeballs on them, you can probably take them out. But after the first time, they’ll go into hiding, camouflage them or move them around [...] Without the threat of follow-up ground forces, they’ll just ride out a bombing strike” (Sciolino, 1993b). Tactical concerns, such as the geographical outlay of Bosnia and the Yugoslav terrain, also played a

role: Pentagon sources are quoted with explaining that they “do not do forests, but do do deserts”, referring to the Persian Gulf War (Bert, 1997, p. 172). Powell followed up with a landscape metaphor of his own: “The U.S. military were not that anxious to get into what looked like a real swamp” (J. A. I. Baker & DeFrank, 1995, pp. 648–649; Halberstam, 2002, pp. 34–38; Recchia, 2015, p. 110). Critics pointed out that this showed the military’s unwillingness to adapt to changed technological circumstances: per this narrative, the Armed Forces clung to the Gulf War as a model of operations, as well as to a strategic outlook that focused on the Middle East and South Korea rather than Eastern Europe (Clark, 2002, p. 7–10; 42).

The ideational competition over means was visible when on October 1, Bush met with Cheney, Eagleburger, Scowcroft and Powell to consider Scowcroft and Eagleburger’s plan for no-fly zone enforcement (M. R. Gordon, 1992; Western, 2005, p. 167). Powell and Gates dissented, reflecting the Department of Defense and military’s position. Jeremiah (then Vice-Chair of the Joint Chiefs) retrospectively complained:

“They [the White House] were supposed to be making policy and telling us what they wanted to do, but they could never make up their minds. They wanted the military to bail them out from their policy failures – they wanted us to volunteer military solutions to very complex political problems and they wanted us to do it in a way where nobody would get hurt. It was just unreasonable” (quoted in: Western, 2005, p. 166).

Per Robert Hutchings, director of European Affairs at the NSC, “[t]he Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs were at pains to exclude the military option a priori, and, fresh from the military triumph in the Gulf, their opinions carried even more weight in administration councils than usual” (Bert, 1997, p. 173). Scowcroft retrospectively claimed: “It was a narrow range on which we disagreed. But they [Powell and Gates] were adamant about not getting involved. But on the no-fly we thought we could make a difference on the ground and temper some of the criticism we were getting in Washington” (quoted in: Western, 2005, p. 167). After the meeting on October 1, Department of Defense officials explained that “the proposed zone in Bosnia probably would have little effect on the course of the fighting there. But [...] it would help ensure the safety of humanitarian flights being resumed [...] and could give some momentum to the search for peace” (Goshko, 1992). Embracing this logic of ideational compromise and “doing something”, the Bush administration started to lobby for no-fly zone enforcement towards the end of 1992.

In parallel, the Clinton transitional team put several questions on Bosnia to the outgoing administration to test the feasibility of its campaign proposals. Asked whether intelligence was sufficient to enforce a no-fly zone, the intelligence estimate report answered: “Yes, but aircraft are elusive targets, and how [underlined in original] we chose to enforce the no-fly ban would determine what intelligence is



required". The report distinguished between air-only enforcement (i.e. shooting down attacking aircraft) and larger-scale enforcement, including against anti-aircraft weaponry and airfields. For the latter as well as for more pronounced "bombing runs", military intelligence was assessed as insufficient (National Intelligence Council, Cohen, & Emarth, 1992, pp. 20–21). In the same report, an estimate of up to 400,000 ground troops was given as necessary for all-out intervention (National Intelligence Council et al., 1992, p. 38).⁶⁰ While the report did not explicitly comment on political sensibilities, it implied that anything but air-only enforcement would be if not impossible then inadvisable given the diagnosis of limited interests in Bosnia (Drew, 1994, p. 149).

5.3. The Clinton Administration, Ideational Competition, and the No-Fly Zone

In the first months of the Clinton administration, ideational competition around US engagement in Bosnia and the no-fly zone culminated. Given unclear and permissive systemic conditions, contrasting ideas about interests, responsibility and leadership, as well as about appropriate responses, intervened in the foreign policy decision-making process to produce seemingly intractable ideational competition in the White House. Despite its disutility to the scenario at hand, no-fly zone enforcement (re-)appeared an opportune extraction strategy and was subsequently implemented. Already in November 1992, President-elect Clinton had met with Powell on Bosnia. Powell recalls that Clinton asked whether there was "some way [...] that we could influence the situation through air power, something not too punitive" (Powell & Persico, 2003, p. 562; Western, 2005, p. 171).⁶¹ Correspondingly, Clinton's first foreign policy decision on January 22 was to issue a Presidential Review Directive (PRD-1) which asked departments and agencies about foreign policy issues in Bosnia to stimulate a more active response (The White House, 1993; Daalder, 1999, p. 8). Among the options entertained in PRD-1 was no-fly zone enforcement, which the outgoing Bush administration had not managed to attain (The White House, 1993).⁶² The widely diverse answers departments and agencies provided in response foreshadowed the ideational competition in Clinton's White House. The duration and intensity with which this competition played out especially in the Deputies and Principals Committees likely correlated with the administration's decision-making style.

Foreign policy was not Clinton's "first concern", although he showed personal interest in Bosnia (A. Lake, 2004b; Dumbrell, 2009, p. 30; Gow, 1997, p. 214; Chang, 2011, p. 90; Halberstam, 2002, pp. 195–

⁶⁰ This mirrored the cautious stance of the outgoing Bush administration, but also specific persuasive strategies. Per Ambassador Zimmerman: "They [the military] would never say that they couldn't do it; they just used such inflated figures [...] and no one could challenge it" (quoted in: Western, 2005, p. 166).

⁶¹ Powell then comments: "There it was again, the ever-popular solution from the skies, with a good humanist twist; let's not hurt anybody" (Powell & Persico, 2003, p. 562).

⁶² Others include changes to the arms embargo ("lift"), air strikes ("strike"), UN Peacekeeping operations in the Balkan, and an international war crimes commission (The White House, 1993).

196). With regards to foreign policy, Clinton is criticized for his tendency to “to pronounce on principle, prevaricate in practice and preempt the policies and plans of others” (Hyland, 2000, p. 35; Chang, 2011, pp. 94–98; Gow, 1997, p. 208). He preferred an informal and cooperative decision-making style, relying on advisers to prepare decisions, and on face-to-face briefings for the most pressing matters. In contrast to Bush, Clinton often chose not to partake in meetings until a decision was imminent (A. Lake, 2004b). He would arrive some time into the meeting, request a summary, and then take necessary decisions, on which he preferred his advisers to have already arrived at a consensus. This frequently resulted in “a group of advisors divided on what should be done [...] and by a President who could not make up his mind” (Bert, 1997, p. 197). Vice President Al Gore, National Security Advisor Lake (described as a “moralist” and “true Wilsonian”) as well as his deputy Berger, UN Ambassador Albright, CIA director Woolsey and Holbrooke carried ideas which connote a more assertive US foreign policy into deliberations (Albright & Woodward, 2003, pp. 165–166; Daalder, 1999, p. 8). Secretary of State Christopher is often characterized as more “dovish” and in favor of US restraint, sharing with Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and his deputy Strobe Talbott a fear of dragged-out involvement in Bosnia (Albright & Woodward, 2003, p. 180; Drew, 1994, p. 140). Aspin, however, occasionally diverged from this position (Chang, 2011, pp. 90–91). Finally, the only leftover from the Bush administration and a “towering” figure of authority, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Powell advised restraint and warned against military involvement without clear policy objectives, over which he famously clashed with Albright at one of the first meetings (Albright & Woodward, 2003, p. 181; Trenta, 2014, p. 67). This newly assembled team had difficulties hitting its stride in early 1993. Initial meetings are described as “rambling and inconclusive”, with different positions debated more for the sake of debate rather than for a solution (Albright & Woodward, 2003, p. 180). Powell quipped that the “discussions tend to meander like graduate-student bull sessions or think tank seminars”, with many issues debated but few tangible decisions, as the team lacked a “captain” (Powell & Persico, 2003, p. 576; Daalder, 1999, p. 9; Daalder & Destler, 2011, p. 216). Another senior official is quoted with complaining that it was “group therapy – an existential debate over what was the role of America” (Drew, 1994, p. 150). Lake explained that this was because Clinton “wanted always to know that everybody had had a say and that he knew their opinion” (A. Lake, 2004b). This laid the groundwork for intense ideational competition in foreign policy deliberations.

In answer to PRD-1, the Office of European Analysis came to a drastic conclusion. Analyzing Serbian policy in Bosnia and drawing explicit comparisons with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, its report stated:

“Belgrade is not likely to stop providing active support for the creation of an ethnically pure greater Serbia by force unless the international community: [...] – conducts air strikes against Serb military targets in Bosnia, – enforces a no-fly zone in the FRY and threatens, perhaps

carries out, air strikes against military targets in Serbia” (Office of European Analysis, 1993, pp. 1–2).

This policy recommendation, which included a no-fly zone not only over Bosnian territory, but over the entire Former Yugoslavia (including Serbia) as well as a proactive air campaign, moved far beyond any policy the Bush administration had been willing to entertain. By drawing comparisons to Operation Desert Storm and subsequent policy in Iraq, the report outlined the Bosnian conflict as one of unwarranted aggression from the Bosnian Serbs and their Serbian supporters akin to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait (Office of European Analysis, 1993, p. 7). Interpreting the Bosnian case as an act of inter-state aggression, as Clinton had done during the campaign, suggested fundamentally different ideas about appropriate US policy in Bosnia (Trenta, 2014, p. 68): While trying to police a Vietnam-esque “swamp” was not in America’s interest, upholding international order was higher on the agenda. However, in one of the first NIC memoranda for National Security Staff, Eurasian experts warned of antagonizing Russia over Bosnian and anti-Serbian policy (National Intelligence Council, George, & Kolt, 1993). This report still mirrored in many aspects the outgoing administration’s ideas on involvement in Bosnia not being in the US interest, and not worth risking political capital internationally. Finally, a third report from the Office of Slavic and Eurasian Analysis foreshadowed a potential way out between all-out involvement and doing nothing: The solution would lie in a “non-active” enforcement of air-only targets, preferably concentrated on fixed-wing aircraft, as well as limited preventive attacks on ground-based anti-aircraft weaponry; the UN Secretary General was to have limiting authority (Office of Slavic and Eurasian Analysis, 1993, pp. 4–5), which laid the groundwork for the “dual-key” arrangement that was to hamper UN and NATO operations in Bosnia.

5.3.1. Figuring Out Policy: The January and February NSC Meetings

On January 28, the principals met on Bosnia for the first time to discuss the presidential review’s preliminary results (The White House, 1993). The session aimed to establish “baseline US government policy” based on the Bush administration’s positions, Clinton’s campaign rhetoric and the reports (quoted above). This included potential no-fly zone enforcement (The White House, 1993, p. 1). However, per Lake’s policy options framework introduced at the meeting, no-fly zone enforcement fell under the third of three (“somewhat vaguely defined”) categories ranked in terms of escalation and necessary investment of political capital (The White House, 1993). At the same meeting, a wide variety of sanctions as well as the use of “persuasive force” (as introduced at length by Powell) were also discussed, but all decisions were deferred “until spring”, with initial focus on humanitarian relief (The White House, 1993, pp. 2–3).

This non-decision proved obsolete only days later, when the principals met again on February 3 to discuss a report on policy options (“packages”) in Former Yugoslavia (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 1993e). The report indicated a shift in analytical categories: in contrast to the principals’ earlier assessment, no-fly zone enforcement was now included as a “minimal” option (together with humanitarian aid and tighter sanctions). London and Paris had repeatedly expressed their doubts that enforcement would have any impact in the conflict and continued to worry about possible Bosnian Serb retaliation. But now they agreed it would send a “strong political message” (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 1993e, p. 10). In contrast to more “activist” policy options, no-fly zone enforcement was thus assessed as a doable multilateral alternative (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 1993e, p. 10). This fell on eager ears, as in the meeting, the principals expressed their increasing frustration with both America’s isolation among the allies as well as the seeming inability to act more forcefully. They did not want to “back off” any longer and leave the conflict to the Europeans (The White House, 1993, p. 1). However, they also did not want to “impose anything”, the idea of prudent multilateralism supported by Powell’s explanation that “high-end military operations” came with high risks and costs (The White House, 1993, p. 2). Powell advised that “airpower “solutions” won’t work”, and that if it came to the use of force he would suggest going in “fast and heavy, intimidate the opposition, and hopefully scale back rapidly” (The White House, 1993, p. 2), which would mean at least 20,000 troops and \$1 billion over the first six months. This “Powell doctrine”-inspired, Iraq-type scenario was too costly for the principals given permissive systemic conditions and limited US interests in Bosnia. They decided to “shelve the high-end military options for now” and “deemphasize the military aspects of the remaining options” in favor of sanctions and humanitarian relief (The White House, 1993, p. 2). Outside of employing airpower, there would only be scarce mention of other military options discussed in the presidential campaign, as ideational competition in the White House became increasingly removed from the situation on the ground (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 181; Daalder, 1999, p. 10; Drew, 1994, p. 147). For now, the policy of restraint carried over from the Bush administration remained Clinton policy, but ideational competition had not been resolved.

The course of the Principals Committee meeting on February 5 demonstrated the deep ideational divides in Clinton’s White House, as well as the role the no-fly zone started to play in the eyes of key decision-makers. Core ideas surrounding the nature of the Bosnian conflict and the US role in the world were debated openly. At the start of the meeting, Albright raised a “basic question”:

“We are treating this area [the Balkans] as of peripheral interest. History suggests it is more central. This policy [outlined in the draft Presidential Decision Document; the author] legitimizes ethnic cleansing. It signals [...] that we will do nothing about it. The pieces in the draft PDD are “pretty pallid”. I understand that deciding to use American forces in Bosnia would be crossing the Rubicon. But we should think about whether sweeping the problem under the rug creates more problems” (The White House, 1993, p. 1).

Albright noted that this ran contrary to Clinton's earlier rhetoric. Woolsey agreed with her position (The White House, 1993, p. 1). The problem with Bosnia, Christopher suggested, was that it was a highly complex ethnic and religious conflict: "We are not talking about an agreement among three Church groups in California. This is the Balkans", thereby discursively expressing ideas about "ancient hatreds" and a specific Balkan-ness of the conflict which Powell also seemed to share (The White House, 1993, p. 6). In answer to a suggestion from Berger to "say this is a European problem and they should take responsibility", Clinton said: "We can't do that without giving up our whole position in the world" (The White House, 1993, p. 7).⁶³ Involvement in Bosnia would thus be an expression of ideas about American leadership and superpower responsibility, rather than (and despite) of limited US interests. The problem, Lake reminded everyone, had been "promising more than we can deliver" (The White House, 1993, p. 2). This is where ideas matter over how to appropriately mobilize US resources to signal leadership *without* risking what Gore said "the American people will not want", namely to "send our boys out there" (The White House, 1993, p. 6). Powell again cautioned that airpower must be accompanied by ground forces to be effective: "We can punish from the air but not enforce [a settlement] from the air" (The White House, 1993, p. 6; 7). Any commitment could be "open ended with no promise of getting out" (The White House, 1993, p. 7). By contrast, other principals seem to hold different ideas about appropriate ways to mobilize US capabilities and technology in response. Woolsey suggested using the no-fly zone more proactively to also cancel out heavy weapons in the form of a "no drive zone":

"It would be something useful if we could stop people from killing each other with heavy weapons [referring to artillery guns]. Even if small arms continue to be used, that is a game the Bosnians can play. We can take away from the Serbs the heavy stuff and frighten with some of the other" (The White House, 1993, pp. 2–3).

This would "square the circle" as it would not be directed against Serbia, but against the use of heavy weapons in general, and "in principle" neutral (The White House, 1993, p. 6). He argued "it would not be perfect but it would be useful and could be done from the air" (The White House, 1993, p. 7). This summarized the role the no-fly zone was to play not only in Bosnia, but similarly in Iraq and Libya: it squared circles between engagement and disengagement, and lent the appearance of active foreign policy without contributing effectively either to US interests or conflict management. As Powell pointed out,

"when the F-16s go home at night the shelling can begin again. Maybe we would luck out and get the same reaction we did by declaring the no-fly zone and getting pretty good compliance without enforcement. But to really end the siege [around Sarajevo] would take a full infantry division with air support" (The White House, 1993, p. 4).

⁶³ Drew has a different Clinton quote, to the same effect: "If the United States doesn't act in situations like this, nothing will happen [...] A failure to do so would be to give up American leadership" (Drew, 1994, p. 146).

Despite Powell's objections, the principals embraced Woolsey's halfway-in argumentation: the no-fly zone vaguely suggested American leadership and humanitarian responsibility at an acceptable price. The principals told themselves enforcement would at least "forestall further bloodshed" (The White House, 1993, p. 3). Christopher summarized: "So we are recommending a middle position, in which we would keep vague just what we will do but commit to some use of American forces" (The White House, 1993, p. 7). From then onwards, in the internal rhetoric of the administration the no-fly zone served to "contain" the conflict, prevent spillover, level the playing field (mirroring Woolsey's comments), and decrease the most atrocious and "unfair" violations (particularly by the Bosnian Serbs) to an acceptable level in order to keep Bosnia off the White House agenda (The White House, 1993, p. 2; Chang, 2011, p. 97).

This is contradicted by the rhetoric publicly employed. Christopher two days later heavily criticized the Bush administration's passiveness, to then claim: "Our conscience revolts at the idea of passively accepting such brutality [...] Bold tyrants and fearful minorities are watching to see whether "ethnic cleansing" is a policy the world will tolerate... [Our] answer must be a resounding no" (Christopher, 1993, 1998, p. 345; Daalder, 1999, p. 10; Drew, 1994, p. 147). He also reiterated the Iraq comparison: The attack on Bosnia "challenged the principle that internationally recognized borders should not be altered by force" (Christopher, 1993). In addition, the danger of massive refugee flows and the "concerns of ethnic and religious minorities" would pose a test to US leadership and strategic interests in the region (Christopher, 1993). While this public rhetoric was consistent with ideas Christopher, Albright and Lake carried in the administration's decision-making circles, as well as with Clinton's campaign rhetoric, it also stood in contrast to what was decided up until that point. The administration's "six points plan" consisted of a series of half-way measures primarily designed to shield Clinton from accusations of inaction (Trenta, 2014, p. 68). Domestically, this "plan" was immediately criticized, including from within the Democratic party: Senators Mitchell and Joe Biden, as well as Bob Dole, called for more forceful measures (Krauss, 1993; Peceny & Sanchez-Terry, 1998, p. 4; United States Congress, United States Senate, & Committee on Foreign Relations, 1993, sec. Subcommittee on European Affairs). Internationally, reception of this vaguely inconsistent foreign policy stance was mixed: most governments, including Russia and other Balkan states publicly welcomed greater US engagement as promised by White House rhetoric (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force & Wagner, 1993). However, allies remained reluctant to "take military steps, including enforcing the no-fly zone", which they had (correctly) assessed as ineffective and potentially dangerous for their peacekeepers on the ground (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force & Wagner, 1993). One month into the presidency and after considerable deliberation, ideational deadlock and resulting indecision left the Clinton administration in the same situation the Bush administration had found itself in four months earlier.

By mid-February, foreign policy deliberations in the White House increasingly shifted to a more aggressive “lift-and-strike” policy. A memorandum from Lake to Clinton openly acknowledged that the no-fly zone would likely have very little impact on the conflict, as fighter jets would be “ineffective” against irregular forces (The White House & Lake, 1993, p. 2). However, not only had Clinton and the principals decided a US-supported no-fly zone would be government policy, it also remained the only tool capable of bridging ideational divides within the administration. The Clinton administration’s foreign policy goals required solutions that were “neither very risky nor very expensive”, all the while active enough to signal US leadership and humanitarian responsibility (The White House & Lake, 1993, p. 2). However, they should also be acceptable to international partners. Hence, the principals decided to authorize Albright to “promote enforcement in New York” (The White House/National Security Council & Wagner, 1993). There, however, she met with resistance as negotiations became entangled with a discussion of humanitarian airdrops.

Humanitarian airdrops, comparable to those the Bush administration had ordered in northern Iraq immediately prior to no-fly zone enforcement in 1991, played an important part in the administration’s scramble for policy as well as the final volte towards enforcement. A preliminary decision on humanitarian airdrops to complement ground relief convoys had been made in early February in parallel to a push for no-fly zone enforcement. This reinstated airdrops that had been interrupted in the fall of 1992 when relief airplanes had come under attack (which had been an important factor in suggesting a no-fly zone in the first place). The administration’s policy on air relief was mired in confusion and chaos from the get-go. In the February 5 meeting, the assessment of airdrop utility had been disastrous. Powell said:

“Other things we are looking at [apart from more forceful humanitarian relief on the ground] are do-able but trivial and we would be seen as not entirely serious. Air drops, for instance, are gimmicky and would look like a gimmick. They are not a serious way of delivering supplies. We would not look good just dropping medicines out of a C-130 and not knowing what happens to them. They could turn up on the black market” (The White House, 1993, p. 3).

The principals ignored this assessment and on February 19 prepared to begin operations. They decided not to have fighter jets accompany airplanes, as this would dilute the “humanitarian relief only” message needed to gain tacit approval from all parties (The White House & Lake, 1993, p. 2). Therefore, the unprotected relief airplanes flew at high altitudes, which in turn led to considerable problems with delivery and precision, to the point that Aspin declared on March 2 that flights would be discontinued (Drew, 1994, p. 147). Aspin also claimed that airplanes were continuously harassed by ground-based anti-aircraft and airborne no-fly zone violators. Responding to these criticisms, Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Wisner “clarified that [the airdrops] were for political purposes: to catalyze others to take action, to work with the Russians, and to push the Allies to do more” (The White House & Wagner,

1993a, pp. 1–2). Clinton and Gore officially corrected Aspin’s announcement, however, and airdrops continued (Drew, 1994, p. 147). When Albright entered negotiations in the UN on no-fly zone enforcement resolutions, some US allies and Russia threatened to discontinue airdrops (The White House & Wagner, 1993a, p. 2, 1993b), presumably because they felt participation could be interpreted as endorsement of a simultaneous enforced no-fly zone. This further complicated the White House foreign policy decision-making process and led to a review of the February decision on no-fly zones, as ideational divides reopened again.

5.3.2. Enforcing the No-Fly Zone: The March NSC Meetings

In the Deputies Committee meetings on March 1 and March 4, no-fly zone enforcement came under renewed scrutiny. The deputies backtracked on the no-fly zone as soon as it turned out it was not the “silver bullet” to ideational compromise and risk-free multilateral conflict management the Clinton administration had hoped: ideas of US leadership and responsibility could not easily be combined with ideas of multilateralism if international partners did not play ball. In their own words, two months into suggesting no-fly zone enforcement, the deputies’ “thinking on the various issues” was still not “fully developed” (The White House, 1993, p. 1). They restarted discussing a full range of possible tools and policy options from tightening sanctions all the way to full-blown air campaigns, but decided that “any discussions with the Allies should be limited for now to beefing up the sanctions” (The White House & Wagner, 1993b, p. 1). The US “should focus on a few key initiatives, setting aside for now others like No-Fly enforcement” (The White House & Wagner, 1993b, p. 2). Another attendee meekly argued that “anything the UN commits itself to doing should be done, including No-Fly” (The White House & Wagner, 1993b, p. 2). The one thing international partners would readily agree to, namely the inclusion of US ground troops in UNPROFOR, had to be avoided for fear of a “slippery slope” (The White House & Wagner, 1993b, p. 2). This was reiterated during the March 13 Principals Committee meeting: any settlement agreement had to avoid “a self-defeating delay [...] because of failure to enforce it”, but also “building in fail-safe provisions to prevent the involvement of US ground forces” to impose it (A. Lake, 1993b). Basically, the US should try its very best not to get involved before the dust cleared – the idea of an intractable Vietnam-like scenario continued to linger in the minds of decision-makers.

In mid-March, however, worsening conditions in Bosnia provided renewed momentum. Not only did the Serbs continue to stonewall the Vance-Owen plan (then still officially US policy, although disliked in the Clinton White House; Daalder, 1999, pp. 10–11). On March 19, the Bosnian Serbs launched another offensive to encircle the Muslim enclave Srebrenica, which was covered extensively by television networks (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 140). State department officials expressed their dismay with ineffective Bosnian policy in an open letter (Daalder, 1999, p. 16). This put further pressure on



the White House to extract themselves from protracted ideational competition. To the decision-makers favoring a policy of assertiveness in Bosnia – especially Gore, Lake, and Albright – it proved that “something new was needed” (Daalder, 1999, p. 12). In response, Lake called another principals meeting for March 25 to “come up with new ideas”, and to discuss policy options (DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 1993d, 1993c, 1993b, 1993a; Daalder, 1999, p. 12; Drew, 1994, pp. 148–152). Again, just as it had two months earlier, ideational competition divided the principals (Daalder, 1999, p. 13; Drew, 1994, p. 150). Aspin favored a brokered ceasefire and the more active protection of civilians in enclaves, possibly through “safe areas”, but admitted problems with this approach. Lake and Christopher supported a lift-and-strike policy, and Gore and Albright favored more wide-ranging air strikes, again informed by ideas of risk-free intervention (Drew, 1994, pp. 149–155). Military and intelligence assessments, however, discouraged the latter two options. Powell cautioned that any opening provided by air strikes would have to be followed up by ground troops, as the air force would run out of targets quickly (Daalder, 1999, p. 13; Drew, 1994, p. 149; 154). Clinton excluded the unilateral option, as he held on to his ideas on the inherent values of multilateralism. However, pressure had markedly increased to finally bridge the ideational divides. Given the desire by core decision-makers to act forcefully and the pressure to more credibly commit to conflict solution, the administration’s core decision-makers were again drawn to no-fly zone enforcement, which now appeared as a comparatively restrained option compared with more aggressive air strikes. Decision-makers knew it would not have much impact on the Bosnian conflict (Recchia, 2015, p. 115). In Albright’s words, the no-fly zone was not actually a “genuine military component” of US policy, and would not test “the proposition that American military intervention might intimidate the Bosnian Serb militia and their patrons in Belgrade” (Albright, 1993, p. 3). Instead, the tool served to bridge ideational divides in the Clinton administration by presenting a way to “do something”: The principals decided that another UNSC resolution would be sought to authorize enforcement (A. Lake, 1993c, p. 25). In a meeting with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and Gore on the next day, Christopher explained:

“We will press for passage of the No Fly Zone within one week. The No Fly Zone is important symbolically; it may also help somewhat on the ground. We hope this series of steps [also including tighter sanctions; the author] will pay off. If not, we’ll see what other steps are required [...] We cannot act unilaterally [...], however” (Fuerth & Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 2).

Notions of long-term conflict resolution strategies or indeed utility had moved far into the background in favor of ideational compromise: to proponents of engagement, the no-fly zone signaled leadership and symbolic commitment reasonably well, and became a catalyst for *any* US action – to opponents it limited US involvement to a risk-free aerial intervention. If nothing else could be decided, the one tool everyone could project their ideas onto had to work. Once “doing something” was the agreed mode of operation, implementation became urgent. Izetbegovic, however, picking up on Christopher’s



rhetoric, suggested combining other gestures of support with the no-fly zone, which led to a back-and-forth:

“Secretary Christopher: I didn’t want to link the No Fly Zone with something else. That could cause delay. Would you still want it if it delays the No Fly Zone by a week?

[Bosnian] Foreign Minister Silajdzic: We can wait.

Secretary Christopher: The delay might give the Serbs a chance to sign [the UN Peace Plan]; to come to their senses.

Ambassador Bartholomew: I feel we should press for the No Fly Zone as soon as possible.

Secretary Christopher: I like the concept.

Vice President Gore: It is a very interesting concept.” (Fuerth & Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 2)

Thus pleased with their ideational compromise, on the next day, the principals authorized Albright to pursue a no-fly zone resolution detached from other sanctions (A. Lake, 1993d). “Doing something” was more important than the actual actions taken (Trenta, 2014, p. 71).

5.3.3. Operation Deny Flight and Aftermath

On March 31, the UNSC passed Resolution 816 authorizing the enforcement of the no-fly zone and enlarging it to encompass all flights by fixed-wing and rotary-wing in the airspace of Bosnia-Herzegovina (United Nations Security Council, 1993a; Benard, 2004, p. 470; Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 250; Gow, 1997, p. 133). Aerial surveillance and no-fly zone enforcement was implemented by NATO as Operation Deny Flight,⁶⁴ with aircraft provided by the US Air Force and Navy, as well as the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Turkey (Gow, 1997, p. 133).⁶⁵ Under the rules of engagement adopted after considerable discussion and internal disagreement, violating aircraft would first be warned, and ground forces could not be attacked (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 250; Gow, 1997, p. 133; Ripley, 1999, p. 63).⁶⁶ Overall, Operation Deny Flight succeeded in enforcing the no-fly zone (Benard, 2004, p. 470). In a 1994 report, UN Secretary General even declared the no-fly zone a success because fixed-wing aircraft remained grounded – but criticized frequent violations by rotary-wing aircraft (UN Secretary General, 1993). Indeed, immediately after enforcement the conflict parties went to considerable lengths to circumvent the ban with rotary-wing aircraft, e.g. by painting them white and fitting them

⁶⁴ That NATO would be the implementing organization of any initial use of force had been agreed in early March together with the allies and Russia. Sorties commenced on April 12, 1993, and continued until December 20, 1995, approximately one month after the Dayton Agreement.

⁶⁵ Operation Deny Flight was initially composed of twelve US Air Force F-15s and twelve US Navy FA-18 Aircraft, as well as eighteen F16s from the Netherlands, ten Mirage 2000 and four Mirage FICRs from France and twelve Tornado F3s from the UK. Later, 6 Dutch F16s, 6 British Tornados with 2 VC10 in-flight refuelling tankers, 18 Turkish F16s and 5 NATO supply aircraft were added. The operation had additional AWACS for support and headquarters in Vicenza, Italy (NATO 5 Allied Tactical Air Force HQ; Gow, 1997, p. 133).

⁶⁶ Later into the course of the mission, NATO declared its readiness to strike, in coordination with the UN (“dual key”), for close air support of (UNPROFOR) ground troops, as well as against violators of the six safe areas mandated in May 1993. These missions were separate on paper from the no-fly zone, while de facto all of them shared commands and assets (Gow, 1997, p. 136). They were then grouped together in UNSC Resolution 836 (United Nations Security Council, 1993b).

with the sign of the Red Cross (Gow, 1997, p. 134). Throughout Operation Deny Flight, there was reluctance to engage rotary-wing aircraft in case they carried injured civilians or were actually operated by the Red Cross. Not least because of this haphazard enforcement, but more importantly because of the complete failure to deter attacks on humanitarian convoys, prevent the harming of civilians, or coerce the Bosnian Serbs into compliance, indeed because the no-fly zone may have even created a false sense of security in the ostensibly UN-protected “safe areas”, the Bosnian no-fly zone is usually regarded as a failure (Burg & Shoup, 1999; Freedman, 1994; Jakobsen, 1998).

The Bosnian Serbs responded to no-fly zone enforcement in April 1993 with the shelling of civilians in Eastern Bosnia, particularly Sarajevo and Srebrenica, as well as a suspension of all cease-fire talks (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 140). However, the immediate sense of impending crisis of late March and early April eased in mid-April 1993, which “resulted in the drawing back from involvement on the part of the U.S. policymakers” (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 141): in that sense, the no-fly zone was successful, and was allowed to “linger” over Bosnia. The principals continued policy planning and drafting a set of contingency proposals for additional measures. Just as in all previous meetings, “the individuals in the room found themselves quite far apart from each other”, so that four of the principals were tasked with writing up four completely different policy proposals for future consideration (A. Lake, 1993a; Studeman & Directorate of Central Intelligence, 1993, p. 2). Logically, as the different proposals sprang from the same fundamentally different ideas surrounding the Bosnian conflict, the US role in it, and appropriate responses, “no decisions were taken on the future direction of Yugoslavia policy” (Studeman & Directorate of Central Intelligence, 1993, p. 2). The no-fly zone was used to buy time and find a way out of the ideational competition the Clinton administration found itself in (cf. Daalder, p.5-16). The growing pressure on the administration to act led to the commitment of considerable military assets for no-fly zone enforcement, although by everyone’s assessment at the time it would not actually have any impact on either the conflict or on future US policy in Bosnia (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 141; Drew, 1994, p. 151). In both regards, the no-fly zone was a “holding action” (Chang, 2011, p. 7), a token gesture of support installed purely to overcome, for some time, the dead-end the Clinton administration had maneuvered itself into. This worked for only a brief period of time as the situation in Bosnia improved. This dynamic was quickly grasped by the conflict parties, which realized that no-fly zone enforcement was a short-term measure and “the outside world was not going to take any military action that threatened their interests or physical control of territory” (Ripley, 1999, p. 29; Daalder, 1999, p. 16).

While retroactively, the no-fly zone was argued to fit the administration’s policy of conflict containment (Chang, 2011, pp. 88–93), at no point did it actually represent a longer-term solution to underlying ideational competition (Trenta, 2014, p. 63). On April 28, Christopher outlined the four

conditions for long-term conflict resolution and US foreign policy in Bosnia: a clearly stated goal, a strong likelihood of success, a clear exit strategy, and public support. Ironically, the no-fly zone met none of these criteria (Sciolino, 1993a). Not least based on heavy criticism of the no-fly zone (most famously, Elie Wiesel's dramatic appeal on April 25), the Clinton administration instead continued to deliberate other policy options vis-à-vis Bosnia. This included employing the no-fly zone to also protect UN safe areas, which again was known in the Clinton administration to be an "unworkable" plan and set up "shooting galleries", but became policy (Daalder, 1999, p. 106; Trenta, 2014, p. 71). The administration continued to encounter the same ideational divisions (The White House/National Security Council, 1993): parts of the administration believed that allies could be persuaded by a "raw power approach" (Christopher, 1998, pp. 346–347) to engage more forcefully in Bosnia. The administration repeatedly toyed with a unilateral solution (The White House/National Security Council, 1993; Kolt & George, 1993; Daalder, 1999, p. 16), but was also clearly unwilling to "take full responsibility for the conflict given that the costs of doing so would involve spending political capital" (Daalder, 1999, p. 18) both domestically and internationally. The no-fly zone committed US forces to conflict management without ever actually contributing much to conflict resolution in Bosnia. Interestingly and in differentiation from both Iraq and Libya, the evident failure of the no-fly zone to affect the problem at hand in Bosnia only led to more aggressive policies much later in 1995, when systemic conditions changed with the turning point of Srebrenica, a broader international willingness to engage forcefully, and concomitant military defeats of the Bosnian Serbs. Until then, ambiguous systemic stimuli, limited interests and intervening ideas combined to result in wavering and non-committal short-termism in US foreign policy vis-à-vis Bosnia which left "unbridgeable gaps between the ends proclaimed and the means adopted" (Freedman, 1994, p. 54).

5.4. Conclusion

I have argued previously that ideas are theorized to operate as intervening variables between systemic conditions and foreign policy choice, and that foreign policy decision-making processes can generally be modelled as sequences of ideational competition over the correct interpretation of systemic stimuli under conditions of permissiveness and uncertainty. Indeed, similarly to the previous case, the inaction of the final Bush and first Clinton months is primarily caused by ambiguous systemic conditions in 1992 and 1993. Unclear incentives and constraints from a largely permissive international environment facilitated an intervening process of intense ideational competition over how to accurately deduce US interests in Bosnia. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations faced complex predicaments – notably, a still largely permissive international environment and potentially risk-free intervention, but also reticent allies and regional partners, a burgeoning Russia with interests of its own, and limited US interests in Bosnia. To make sense of these conditions, to persuade other decision-makers and to

formulate appropriate US policy, decision-makers in both administrations relied on similar ideas that contradicted each other fundamentally and led to intra-administrative divides. These ideas can be subsumed into two broader sets: ideas focusing on the nature of the conflict, and on the corresponding existence and importance of US interests on the one hand, as well as the appropriate (degree) of mobilization of state power in the form of military strategy on the other. This chapter adds insights on the role that tools such as the no-fly zone can play in the intra-administrative process during which these ideas are deliberated. The no-fly zone, because of its inherent military-strategic characteristics (e.g. flexibility, low-cost/low-risk nature), may act as a pressure valve when outside pressures to act and internal deadlock combine to create seemingly incommensurable ideational divides. This chapter provided additional confirming evidence for such a causal mechanism. The Bosnian no-fly zone could not solve the deep ideational divisions over the right US policy and America's role in the world. Instead, it seemed attractive to decision-makers because it was interpreted to ease the immediate political problem at hand, namely the need to "do something" despite intra-administrative disagreement over the right course of action. The no-fly zone's implementation and enforcement signaled commitment without actual risk. It was chosen as a token gesture of support and US involvement regardless of its possible or actual utility to the problem at hand. In this, it foreshadowed the series of short-term measures the Clinton administration would continue to adopt as it was unwilling to fully commit to either actual conflict resolution or foreign policy restraint in Bosnia.



Chapter VI: Libya

6.1. Introduction: Interests, Ideas and the No-Fly Zone in Libya

In this chapter, I argue that the American use of the no-fly zone in the 2011 Libya intervention is best explained by viewing the tool as the outcome of the ideational competition faced by the Obama administration when confronted with ambiguous systemic conditions. Just as in the previous case studies, I outline this suggestion by conceptualizing ideas as an intervening variable between systemic conditions and state behavior, and carefully tracing the influence of diverging sets of ideas in the executive decision-making process ultimately prior to the no-fly zone's instalment. The 2011 intervention in Libya has since drawn academic attention for a broad variety of interesting facets. Discussions range from the relevance of the "Responsibility to Protect" norm (Hobson, 2016; Brockmeier, Stuenkel, & Tourinho, 2016; Beresford, 2015; Hehir & Murray, 2013; Bellamy & Williams, 2011; Chesterman, 2011; Dembinski & Reinold, 2011; Bruce D. Jones, 2011) to alliance management (Haesebrouck, 2016; Davidson, 2013; H. Campbell, 2013; Hanover & White, 2011) and UNSC decision-making and diplomacy (Meibauer, 2015; Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014; O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011), from comparisons with policy e.g. in Cote d'Ivoire (Bellamy & Williams, 2011) to frequent analogy with the subsequent Syrian civil war (Indyk, Lieberthal, & O'Hanlon, 2012; Kildron, 2012), and arguments about the foreign policies of the EU, UK, France, African and Arab states, as well as the US. It stands to reason that amongst these contributions, particularly those focusing purely on interest-based accounts of the intervention have a hard time explaining not only the intervention as such, but most particularly the way the US and its allies conducted it (Meibauer, 2015). In addition, contributions also vastly differ in their post-facto assessment of the intervention: from very positive (Daalder & Stavridis, 2011), to mixed-positive (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 166), to critical (Kuperman, 2015; H. Campbell, 2013; Singh, 2012) – the Libya intervention continues to divide the scholarly community.

The use of the no-fly zone in Libya is used as an example both of change as well as standstill in US grand strategy formulation, as either supporting or contrasting an ostensible "Obama doctrine" (Dueck, 2015). American support and indeed leadership with regards to the no-fly zone seems to be at odds with systemic changes perceived both by outside observers and the administration itself: another intervention in a predominantly Muslim country, seemingly in emulation of George W. Bush's ill-fated Middle East policies and in contrast to the declared "pivot to Asia". When Barack Obama entered office in 2008, he promised a foreign policy in sharp contrast to his predecessor, rooted in pragmatism, restraint, and the realization of relative US decline (Quinn, 2011, 2014). Specifically the debate around a perceived relative or absolute decline in power, influence and economic prowess has become a

staple of academic debate (for an overview: Quinn, 2014), especially after it gained traction in the US political landscape with Obama's ascension to the White House. This had to do partially with a perceived power shift on the international sphere towards East Asia and China in particular,⁶⁷ which for many translated into multi-polarity (or non-polarity) and thus a necessity to focus on cooperation and burden-sharing. Similarly, Russia had by 2011 reemerged as an antagonistic power that constrained US leeway. It also had to do with America's economic woes and the 2008 crisis, which constrained available resources and made the mobilization of state power more difficult in cases of ambiguous national interests. Lastly, the heritage of George W. Bush's aggressive unilateralism corresponded to "diplomatic confrontations, alliance fissures and public opposition" which depleted American power resources (Singh, 2012, p. 44). This held particularly for military interventions into Middle Eastern countries. Even though throughout Obama's presidency the US was still clearly the most powerful state in the world, the international environment proved less permissive than it had for Iraq and Bosnia. Correspondingly, the administration perceived both the necessity as well as the ideational impetus to restrain its foreign policies pragmatically, and align the US with a "global political awakening" (Singh, 2012, p. 44). The use of force would logically have to take a backseat to tools of diplomacy and cooperation.

In a speech in 2006 (immediately before announcing his bid for the presidency), Obama had spoken of a "strategy no longer driven by ideology and politics, but one that is based on a realistic assessment of the sobering facts on the ground and our interests in the region" (Lizza, 2011, p. 3). He seemed to see foreign policy from the standpoint of bureaucratic efficiency rather than political vision, in that sense mirroring quite consciously the approach George H.W. Bush had used successfully in his term (Lizza, 2011, p. 3). This approach, coupled with what the Obama administration saw as the vital "pivot to Asia", promised a grand strategy of restraint in the affairs particularly of Middle Eastern and North African countries, which was mirrored in the corresponding National Security Strategy white paper (The President of the United States/United States Government, 2010). There, notions of democracy promotion and human rights were "buried" and regime change rejected (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 159), and instead the "principled engagement" with autocratic regime promoted (Singh, 2012, p. 44). American exceptionalism and leadership were deemphasized, and replaced with notions of cooperation and burden-sharing among partners and allies – although they would continue to play a role in Obama's decision-making process. These broader principles were suddenly and surprisingly put to the test by the "Arab Spring" in 2011 (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 142). Libya had not featured at all in the Obama administration's foreign policy considerations up to that point (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 142).⁶⁸ But

⁶⁷ Accordingly, the 21st century has been predicted to become the "Asian/Pacific century" (Kitchen, 2014).

⁶⁸ For a history of US-Libya relations and the normalization process since 1988: Chorin, 2012; Singh, 2012, pp. 42–45.



then, the Obama administration, albeit hesitantly, endorsed and led the imposition of a no-fly zone in Libya, and ultimately pushed for regime change.

Using the no-fly zone in Libya was surprising from several different angles: firstly, intervening in Libya stood in contrast to declared US policy, both expressed in speeches and in policy documents. Secondly, this stance of restraint was based on a specific interpretation of systemic conditions, namely of relative US decline and a narrowing leeway. Based on this interpretation, a careful analysis of the Libyan situation should have resulted in non-intervention since no vital US interests were at stake, as indeed was highlighted both within the administration and from outside experts at the time. Thirdly, it may be argued that this interpretation disregarded factual relative capabilities, including in relation to America's key competitors. Then, the Libyan intervention could be interpreted as a re-assertion of permissive systemic conditions which pushed the US towards a more expansive policy. In that case, however, the haphazard and awkwardly restrained way in which the Libyan intervention was planned and conducted remains puzzling. From a strategic standpoint, choosing a no-fly zone to intervene in Libya was striking for two reasons: theoretical contributions suggest it is not a strategically optimal or even appropriate tool of intra-state conflict management or coercive diplomacy, and it has a doubtful record in the protection of civilians on the ground. As argued in earlier chapters, its previous uses in Iraq and Bosnia have supported this argument empirically, and analysis on the employment of airpower over Libya largely concurs (Gregory, 2015; Michaels, 2014; K. P. Mueller, 2015; for an opposing view: Daalder & Stavridis, 2011). Why then would the US again push the international community to endorse a no-fly zone over Libya for exactly that purpose, and in apparent contrast to declared policy?

I suggest in this chapter that US foreign policy towards Libya in 2011 cannot be explained purely based on either systemic conditions or on broader grand strategic paradigms. Instead, I hypothesize that systemic conditions were lax enough (although arguably more limited than in the previous cases) so that specific ideas carried by decision-makers into executive deliberations on (1) the appraisal of systemic stimuli, the nature of the conflict and corresponding US interests and responsibilities, as well as (2) the appropriate mobilization of state power (through military strategy and technology), distorted the transmission belt between systemic conditions and foreign policy choice. These contrasting ideas drove the Obama administration into protracted ideational competition, from which it perceived it could extricate itself by endorsing a no-fly zone. Per my hypothesized causal mechanism, ideas operate as an *intervening variable* between systemic conditions to actual state behavior. This ties ideas not only to the intervention decision as such, but to the exact means with which the intervention was to be conducted: as Chivvis observes, "in practice [...] the question is not so much whether or not to intervene as how" (Chivvis, 2013, p. 16). On the process of that determination, Ann-Marie Slaughter,

director of policy planning under Obama's Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, is quoted with having said: "On issues like whether to intervene in Libya there's really not a compromise or consensus [...] You can't be a little bit realist and a little bit democratic when deciding whether or not to stop a massacre" (Lizza, 2011, p. 17). In this chapter, I demonstrate that using the no-fly zone illustrates exactly this type of ideational compromise amongst diverging actors and their ideas in the administration's deliberations: because its malleability and strategic flexibility (seemingly) corresponded to contrasting ideas at the same time, it appeared as the perfect tool to do a little bit of everything. As with most such decisions, the resulting no-fly zone very quickly (in fact even before its implementation) appeared suboptimal and dissatisfactory. Note that in contrast to earlier chapters on Iraq and Bosnia, this chapter must rely to a considerably lesser degree on primary sources, as many documents remain classified for at least another decade at the time of writing. This limits the evidentiary basis for this chapter's argumentation. However, based on careful triangulation between secondary sources and the use of a broad variety of edited and unedited materials, it still allows an uninterrupted depiction of the administration's decision-making process. While this chapter thus cannot prove its interpretation of events, or definitively disprove alternative explanations, then, its thick and detailed narrative may still allow the reader to formulate an own conclusion as to the argument's plausibility.

6.2. The Obama Administration and Ideational Competition over Libya

The Obama administration played a crucial role in the introduction and implementation of the no-fly zone in Libya.⁶⁹ Obama is said to have run a relatively centralized foreign policy (Nasr, 2014, p. 2), and was "comfortable taking decisions" on his own (Phillips, 2016, p. 77). A small group of advisors is usually portrayed to have held the most influence in 2011, including: Vice-President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, UN Ambassador Susan Rice, National Security Staff Director and Special Assistant Samantha Power (the three formed the so-called "female hawks") as well as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Deputy-NSAs Dennis McDonough and Ben Rhodes, and Deputy Assistant Tony Blinken (Chivvis, 2013, p. 67; Phillips, 2016, p. 77).⁷⁰ In the following paragraphs, I illustrate the decision-making process in the White House and deliberations amongst these actors with a focus on the role of the no-fly zone. In doing so, I highlight the role of diverging ideas and ideational competition in choosing this tool given ambiguous systemic conditions and limited interests. Just as in preceding chapters, I suggest that these ideas revolved around two tightly interrelated core concerns, namely "what is Libya *like*, and what are American interests in this conflict?" as well as "how should American state power be mobilized vis-à-vis the conflict?". The answers to these questions coming both from

⁶⁹ Overviews over the administration, its goals, and important decision-makers can be found in: Aaronson, 2014; Bouchet, 2013; Lizza, 2011; T. J. Lynch, 2014; Mann, 2013; Parmar, Miller, & Ledwidge, 2014; Singh, 2012.

⁷⁰ National Security Advisor Tom Donilon is markedly absent in most accounts of the 2011 Libya intervention.

within the administration's core decision-making team (as well as from public debates) were so diverse, and systemic conditions and the scenario so ambiguous, that the Obama administration ran into intense ideational competition. In late March 2011, the no-fly zone seemed to suggest a way out: a compromise between Obama's promised pragmatism and prudence on the one hand, and American leadership and responsibility on the other. In so deciding on the tools of intervention, the no-fly zone's lack of actual usefulness for the conflict at hand was ignored.

6.2.1. The Libya Uprising

Only a few days after the fall of Mubarak in Egypt in February 2011, protesters in Libya, particularly in Benghazi, took to the streets (for excellent overviews: Pack, 2013; Pargeter, 2012). Unlike events in its neighbor states Tunisia and Egypt, where similar demonstrations against the respective regimes had begun earlier, the confrontation that began in mid-February in Libya between the protest movement and the Ghaddafi regime "followed the logic of civil war from a very early stage", with elements of civil, ethnic, and revolutionary strife between different factions, owed largely to the country's extremely weak institutionalization and its dependence on tribal loyalty (International Crisis Group, 2011, i). First confrontations between demonstrators and the police led to arrests and sporadic violence. Among the tens of thousands of protesters, at least 20 people were killed and 200 wounded (CNN World News, 2011). The oppression of the protests soon became more organized and violent, and regime sources threatened a civil war. In answer to its strategy, the regime suffered prominent defections (including Libya's UN representative). Libya's justice minister resigned to protest what he called a "bloody situation and use of excessive force" by the security forces (CNN World News, 2011). Soldiers (as well as mercenaries employed by the Ghaddafi regime) fired on demonstrators and mourners (International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 4). News coverage indicated attacks on hospitals, mass rapes, and executions of the injured (International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 4), although some of these allegations could not be proven conclusively (Amnesty International, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 4). Helicopters and fighter jets were also allegedly used against protesters in Tripoli (News Basic World, 2012): an Al-Jazeera story from February 21 which was quickly picked up by news outlets around the world claimed that the regime was using its air force against peaceful demonstrators all over the country, although no conclusive evidence could be found (Kuperman, 2015; Held & Ulrichsen, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2011; H. Roberts, 2011). These and other reports were later criticized by numerous authors as biased and exaggerated, but at the time convinced international public opinion as well as important decision-makers of the regime's brutal suppression strategy. By contrast, the initial protest movement was portrayed as mostly peaceful and unarmed, although this version probably ignored that it "exhibited a violent aspect from very early on" (International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 5): there were reports of violent infiltration, and in the later course of the conflict, of war

crimes against alleged or actual Ghaddafi supporters (Amnesty International, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 5). Clearly, the protesters began to answer violence with violence, and an armed insurrection (in which revolutionary, regional, and tribal characteristics were closely intertwined) spread from the far West and East towards the center Tripoli. By the end of February, the different and only loosely organized rebel forces were in control in most key cities, including Misrata, Ajdahbayeh, Sirte, Tobruk and Zawiya.

Newspaper reports in late February seemed to suggest a need for intervention to prevent the worst atrocities. It remains a matter of some debate where exactly the idea of a no-fly zone over Libya originated. There is a strong case to be made that the February 21 reports of Libyan helicopters and jets attacking demonstrators in Tripoli, disseminated by Al Jazeera and picked up the same day by most major international news networks as well as by commentators online (Kristof, 2011) and experienced diplomats such as Lord David Owen (Al Jazeera, 2011), played a crucial role. International audiences were horrified that the Ghaddafi regime allegedly used its air force to bomb peaceful demonstrators, which would amount to an egregious violation of international law in its complete lack of proportionality (or indeed humanity). In part, the story may have been based on allegations made by two Libyan pilots defecting to Malta in their jets who claimed they defied orders to bomb demonstrators (Black & Hooper, 2011). That these reports were dubiously sourced and of unclear accuracy could certainly be attributed to the confusing situation on the ground, and indeed until today it is unclear to what the extent the Libyan air force was involved in putting down demonstrations or rebellion. Regardless of the reports' factual accuracy, by end of February, the imposition of a no-fly zone dominated the discussion over means of a potential intervention, with both French President Nicolas Sarkozy and UK Prime Minister David Cameron laying claim to the idea. On February 27, American, European, and NATO officials held talks that included discussions about and planning for the implementation of a no-fly zone over Libya (O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 8). On February 28, Cameron said: "We must not tolerate this regime using military force against its own people [...] I have asked the Ministry of Defense and the Chief of the Defense Staff to work with our allies on plans for a military no-fly zone" (D. Cameron, 2011; O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 9). The defected Libyan deputy ambassador to the UN Ibrahim Dabbashi claimed a genocidal campaign was on foot and publicly put forward among other suggestions the imposition of a no-fly zone in a news conference on March 1 (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 50; Plett, 2011). On February 22, the UNSC held a first consultative meeting which produced a press statement expressing "grave concern" with the situation in Libya, "deploring" the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians, and reminding Libya of its "responsibility to protect" its own population (United Nations Security Council, 2011; Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 46; Chivvis, 2013, p. 29).



6.2.2. Interests, Ideas, and Responsibility in Libya

In Washington, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney condemned the violence against demonstrators (Carney, 2011a; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 160), and Libya was raised to the NSC's agenda for the first time on February 23. The administration's initial concern was the evacuation of US citizens from Libya, and the preparation of "the full range of options" available (Obama, 2011). It was on the next day that the ideational divide over Libya would first surface in the US, centering firstly on American interests and responsibilities, and secondly on the corresponding appropriate behavior the US should show internationally. Obama reminded Libya of its people's "universal rights", including peaceful assembly, free speech, and the "ability to determine their own destiny", which he said were "unnegotiable" (Obama, 2011; Chivvis, 2013, p. 29). Correspondingly, the Ghaddafi regime would have to live up to its responsibility to protect its own people and their rights, and refrain from violence; if it did not, it would be held accountable (Chivvis, 2013, p. 29). These remarks recall the burgeoning "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) norm developed in response to conceptual problems with humanitarian intervention and the failures of Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo in the mid- and late-1990s. While not formally endorsed in international law or indeed in US foreign policy, the language of R2P, specifically its conception of sovereignty as responsibility and responsibility as a hierarchical cascade between peoples, states, and the international community has become influential and provided a new vocabulary to express ideas on humanitarian responsibilities in the world. Combining the language of R2P with American leadership in democracy and human rights, even drawing a parallel to the US constitution and its promise of the pursuit of happiness, Obama recalls a Clintonesque stance on potential humanitarian intervention, corresponding to assertive and expansive US behavior. This is mirrored in other statements on the complete lack of legitimacy of the Ghaddafi regime, and in the frequent references to historical cases of mass atrocities, specifically Rwanda and Srebrenica, used to justify intervention and the prevention of genocide "largely independent from the empirical event" (Hobson, 2016, p. 447; Müller & Wolff, 2014, pp. 281–282).

The failed safe haven in Bosnia was frequently cited as a historic analogy to Benghazi, as both were cities under siege by supposedly genocidal adversaries. White House Middle East strategist Dennis Ross, talking to a group of foreign-policy experts in a closed-door meeting, explained: "We were looking at 'Srebrenica on steroids' – the real or imminent possibility that up to 100,000 people could be massacred, and everyone would blame us for it" (O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 11; Rozen, 2011). In addition to presenting a credible case for intervention in Libya, this framing also "contributed to the sense of haste that shaped deliberations" (Hobson, 2016, p. 447). Like in the previous cases of Iraq and Bosnia, "doing something" became more important than cautious consideration of possible routes of



action when it related to the prevention of quasi-genocidal mass atrocities. Hobson argues that with regards to Libya,

“the reflexive invocations of Srebrenica and Rwanda worked to shut down discussion and prevent a full consideration of the alternatives. [Instead], the fear of failing to act, and for being responsible for what might follow, helped to generate sufficient momentum to authorize the use of force” (Hobson, 2016, p. 447).

In a later closed-door meeting with donors and supporters, McDonough claimed: “This humanitarian intervention had to happen” (Rozen, 2011). For proponents of intervention, lessons learned specifically from Srebrenica seemed to encompass only that the US should act, not how. When Srebrenica occurred, a no-fly zone over Bosnia was in place, but did not prevent ethnic cleansing. This paradox was pointed out by Gates, who in retrospect complained that the proponents of intervention basically suggested “playing it by ear” (Hobson, 2016, p. 447; Youssef, 2015).

In contrast to Obama’s immediate predecessor, this stance was not grounded solely in ideas of unilateralism, democracy promotion, and aggressive American exceptionalism, but in ideas around benevolent US leadership, responsibility, and international law, even though the result may end up being the same: US-led intervention. However, firstly, Obama and his administration carefully refrained from defining American interests in Libya that would outright justify military intervention. Such cases were made by outside observers such as Princeton University Professor Ann-Marie Slaughter, who made the case for US involvement based not only on potentially saving lives, but also on US image and credibility in the region, specifically vis-à-vis the Arab Spring and democracy promotion (Slaughter, 2011). Secondly, the Obama administration framed their position in terms of multilateralism and burden-sharing in the international community in a continued effort to differentiate themselves from the preceding administration. While this set a high bar to US involvement, it also aided in persuading liberal critics when (perhaps surprisingly) multiple regional groupings, including the African Union (AU), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and League of Arab States (LAS), declared their support for a no-fly zone. Perhaps predictably, the focus on international law and collaboration with international partners was contrasted by the last neoconservative hawks from the preceding Bush administration, including former deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz and former Middle East adviser Elliot Abrams, who in an open letter combined humanitarian rhetoric with demands for more immediate and possibly unilateral military action (including the imposition of a no-fly zone) to support democracy and improve America’s reputation in the Middle East (Chivvis, 2013, p. 7; Lobe, 2011).⁷¹ It was also pointed out from various sides that the flaw in multilateralism lay in

⁷¹ This appropriation of supposedly “liberal” ideas surrounding humanitarian responsibility by circles often claimed to adhere to “neo-conservatism” or “aggressive unilateralism” may show the theoretical point that paradigms or ideologies may in fact be analytically weaker in analysing specific processes of foreign policy decision-making than the different ideas that constitute them.



depending on partners unwilling to actually commit their resources (Clark, 2011). Whether or not American leadership and responsibility required collaboration, the tone was thus set for supporting US-led intervention. In the “surprisingly public” debate among decision-making circles that followed (Chivvis, 2013, p. 6), different sets of ideas surrounding American leadership and responsibility on the one hand, and pragmatism and restraint on the other vied for public attention and presidential approval, and the no-fly zone should play both a symptomatic and symbolic role.

On February 25, Gates in a speech at West Point presented contrasting ideas on pragmatism and strategic restraint. He emphasized the painful experience of recent engagements in the Middle East, and argued that any president who decided to engage US troops in another war in the region should “have his head examined” (Gates, 2011). It would also inhibit the planned “pivot to Asia”. Other senior members of Obama’s national security team similarly expressed their incredulity at repeated intervention in the Middle East (Sanger, 2012, p. 338). This recalls a fundamental debate about analogies similarly seen in the Bosnian case: what was the conflict *like*? Depending on the ideas they held, different decision-makers and advisers came to different conclusions. Where proponents of intervention had in mind the catastrophic experiences of Rwanda and Bosnia (and could point to Ghaddafi’s threats and rhetoric), influential skeptics outside of the administration, such as Wesley Clark or Haass, suggested Libya could turn out as another Afghanistan or Iraq: a quagmire for unloved interveners with massive casualties and no end in sight, with huge diplomatic blowback, and a rallying call for jihadists everywhere in the Middle East. Clark declared that “we don’t need Libya to offer us a refresher course in past mistakes” (Chivvis, 2013, pp. 6–7; Clark, 2011; Gelb, 2011; Haass, 2011). Similarly, Gates suggested a careful examination of US interests, and Clark argued that Libya did not meet the “test” for US military action since US interests were too weak (Clark, 2011). Ideas centered on a narrower definition of national interests and the harrowing memories from failed interventions of the past were in fact prominently mirrored in the administration’s strategic vision. In that sense, reluctance to take on another mission in Libya cannot simply be painted as specific individuals in the Defense Department and military holding on to conservative principles. In the beginning of March, when planning for a possible military operation was already underway, Gates still minimized the possibility of US intervention by pointing to a lack of consensus within NATO (just as Clark argued the NATO allies could not be convinced to fully commit; Bumiller, 2011), but might have just as well pointed to the NSC.

6.2.3. Military Strategy and the No-Fly Zone

With the evacuation of US citizens complete towards the end of February, the NSC on February 23 opted for first unilateral sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, as well as concerted efforts

for a multilateral response together with European and UNSC partners. Additional meetings over the next days produced an unprecedented statement by the Libyan UN ambassador, who broke ranks to plead for UN intervention (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 47). First sanctions, including an asset freeze, travel bans, a weapons embargo, as well as a referral of Ghaddafi to the International Criminal Court for investigation of war crimes were implemented against Libya in UNSC Resolution 1970 (CNN World News, 2011; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 160). The UN Human Rights Council and the LAS suspended Libyan membership (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 160), leading to Libya's increased international isolation. Carney declared that Ghaddafi had lost all legitimacy (Carney, 2011b), a statement that was later mirrored by Obama as well, who added that Ghaddafi must therefore "leave office" (Obama, 2011; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 160). The consequences of this fact for US foreign policy were far from clear, however, specifically since Ghaddafi remained decidedly unimpressed by US and UNSC sanctions over the next days (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 160): he would never leave the country and rather "die as a martyr" (CNN World News, 2011), and urged supporters to "fight those who are against us" (Laing, 2011). Similarly, Ghaddafi's son and presumed successor Saif al-Islam warned that the loyalists would "fight until the last man, the last woman, the last bullet" (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 158). Within days, the regime's brutal counter-offensive against the unorganized and undersupplied rebels seemed to succeed (News Basics 2012), with loyalist forces pressing eastwards towards Benghazi and retaking cities that had been under rebel control (CNN World 2011). In mid-March, Ajdahbayeh fell and the route to Benghazi was clear. In a radio address to the rebel stronghold, Ghaddafi said: "We are coming tonight. There won't be any mercy" (Rojas, 2011), and that his men would hunt opponents down right into their homes: "We will come [...] house by house, room by room. We will find you in your closets. We will have no mercy and no pity" (Rojas, 2011), referring to the rebels as "rats" and "cockroaches" (O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 1; Rojas, 2011). This language employed by the regime reminded many in the international community of Bosnia and the genocide in Rwanda, triggering bitter memories of the failure to intervene in time and force and making a humanitarian catastrophe seem imminent (O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 11; Western & Goldstein, 2011, p. 49).

In Washington, the discussion shifted from whether the US had a responsibility to act when faced with atrocity crimes in a far-away country to the question of *how* it should act: in which ways and to what degree must US state power be mobilized? On February 28, Clinton only confirmed that the US and its allies were engaging in exactly these discussions: "No option is off the table" (Rodham Clinton, 2011; O'Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 8). Notably, at that point, a no-fly zone was explicitly included, not least because Clinton was asked about it: the attention drawn to the alleged use of Libyan aircraft in suppressing demonstrations had reached the White House. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman John Kerry argued the imposition of a no-fly zone would indeed be a sensible course of action since the US and the international community could "not afford to simply watch from the sidelines"

(Carnegie Endowment, 2016). For its early-stage proponents, the no-fly zone appeared attractive for several different reasons.

Firstly, in addition to slow-working and publicly unimpressive diplomatic and economic sanctions, a no-fly zone offered a good way to take what seemed at the time to be Ghaddafi's most egregious tools of indiscriminate violence, namely air planes and helicopters, out of the equation, and thus "level the playing field" in Libya. This is the military-strategic rationale for a no-fly zone: it would actually prove genuinely useful to conflict management and containment of violence, even though it disregarded that most deaths and violence in the Libyan conflict, just as in Iraq and Bosnia, resulted from small-weapons fighting on the ground as well as the indiscriminate use of artillery rather than from the air, and that it would unlikely be helpful in fulfilling goals of protection of civilians in the midst of armed conflict. However, the case for the no-fly zone was often made *not* in actual reference to events on the ground or to strategic characteristics a no-fly zone over Libya would likely exhibit. The no-fly zone was proposed in answer to ideas about military strategy, technology and the tool itself more generally that were disconnected from considerations of effectiveness, efficiency, or utility of the tool in the specific situation even further than in Iraq or Bosnia. This explains both the surprising dominance the no-fly zone proposal attained in US foreign policy discussions, as well as the concomitant vagueness with which it was discussed: up until the very last stages of decision-making, it remained unclear "who would be responsible for setting it up, the likely duration and, most importantly, whether or not it would be sufficient to stop Gaddafi's forces from committing what was expected to be a massacre if they were to capture Benghazi" (Michaels, 2015, p. 21).

Secondly, a central idea in the deliberation over the best way to mobilize state power in Libya was the fear of long-term involvement with ground troops, agreed between both proponents and skeptics of intervention. Indeed, "Afghanistan" and "Iraq" in ideational terms seemed to serve as an update of sorts to the "Vietnam" problem frequently cited in discussions over US policy in Iraq and Bosnia.⁷² This type of engagement was thought to involve unacceptable costs and risks both materially as well as politically. Instead, proponents of intervention championed the use of superior military technology believed capable to replace engagement of ground troops in intervention. As an ostensibly low-risk, low-cost tool of quasi-surgical involvement involving military assets almost immune to attack from the ground, the no-fly zone mirrored ideas about US supremacy in military-technological advancement and precision warfare previously embraced by the Obama administration in its use of unmanned aircraft (cf. Dyson, Aslam, Rauxloh, & Aaronson, 2014). *Thirdly*, in this way, the no-fly zone stood in

⁷² Even though any similarity with Afghanistan or Iraq in proposing US policy in Libya was a red flag, emulating the early stages of the war in Afghanistan could have actually been attractive: a no-fly zone could pave the way for a rebel advance similar to the way the US cooperated with the Afghani "Northern Alliance" in 2001/2 – which was what offensive aerial operations effectively did achieve later, even though without an explicit mandate.

more generally for a low-risk, low-cost way of involvement in a conflict theater that the US could not afford to ignore for reasons of humanitarian responsibility and credibility, but could also not afford to commit to long-term for lack of tangible interests. This function of the no-fly zone as a compromise solution implies that the tool becomes “idealized” – in the decision-making process, it begins to function symbolically, or as a short-hand of sorts, for a set of ideas subsuming US interests, responsibilities, incentives and constraints in the mobilization of state power. Decision-makers may start to rely on the no-fly zone by default, which implies that the causal claims behind the tool are accepted without closer scrutiny (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a, pp. 12–13).

After Clinton confirmed that a no-fly zone was “under active consideration”, Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mike Mullen, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and others expressed doubts for a variety of reasons – few of which had to do with the no-fly zone not effectively helping much on the ground. Gates labelled any calls for setting up a no-fly zone “loose talk” (Sanger, 2012, p. 339). Testifying before Congress on March 2, he said that the imposition of a no-fly zone would amount to an act of war as it necessitated preemptive strikes against Libya’s air defenses to guarantee risk-free patrols:

“Let’s just call a spade a spade. A no-fly zone begins with an attack on Libya [...] That’s the way you do a no-fly zone. And then you can fly planes around the country and not worry about the other guys being shot down. But that’s the way it starts. So it’s a big operation in a big country” (House Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Sanger, 2012, p. 340; Weissgerber, 2014).

Mullen piled on that installing a no-fly zone over Libya would be “an extraordinarily complex operation to set up” (Bumiller, 2011; House Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, 2011; Michaels, 2015, p. 20). Both skeptics confront the idea of the no-fly zone as a risk- and cost-free military endeavor by reminding the American public that in fact legal, political and material costs exist that may render the instalment of a no-fly zone prohibitive. In addition, strikingly, both Gates and Mullen testified that they had no reliable confirmation of reports of Libyan aircraft under control of the Ghaddafi regime being used to suppress demonstrations or fire on rebels at the time (House Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, 2011; H. Roberts, 2011). According to Sanger, Gates also had severe doubts about stopping Ghaddafi’s forces only by a no-fly zone (Sanger, 2012, p. 340). Instead, something more would be needed, which promised a slippery slope into broader engagement. This type of incrementalism contrasted with the long-held doctrine of overwhelming force, and was in the minds of the intervention critics exactly the type of slap-dash approach that had led to disaster in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In answer to these strategic debates surrounding the best way to mobilize US state power in answer to the Libya situation and at best ambiguously defined American interests in the conflict, Obama

remained hesitant. To his aides, he argued that US military intervention could “skew” the uprisings and make them look like an American-led conspiracy rather than the spontaneous dissent movement they were (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 162). Even though publicly calling for an immediate end to the violence and for Ghaddafi to step down immediately, the Obama administration opted for providing some humanitarian aid and diplomatic support to the rebels, a contrast that appeared particularly starkly in the face of Clapper’s comments before the Senate Armed Services Committee that over time Ghaddafi’s regime was “likely to prevail” against the rebels (Clapper Jr., 2011; Clapper Jr. & Burgess Jr., 2011, sec. Senate Armed Services Committee; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 162). Bar any clearly defined American interest, ideas supporting restraint and isolation seemed to win the day. At the same time, military planning for a no-fly zone went ahead as part of standard military procedure to prepare for all types of possible scenarios. Gates clamped down on speculation to the contrary at the March 10 NATO Defense Ministerial where he said publicly that planning would continue “but that’s the extent of it” (Bumiller, 2011; Michaels, 2015, p. 20), all the while NATO decided to reposition maritime assets in the Mediterranean.

At the same time, attempts at a political solution to the conflict had failed. Efforts by different international mediators, including the African Union and Turkey, could not provide reasonable hope that Ghaddafi would be willing to compromise: instead, on numerous occasions, he failed to deliver on his word, leading first the internal opposition and then the international community to harden their stance.⁷³ On March 3, in an unexpected and unprecedented move, the GCC started to support an intervention against Libya, and explicitly supported the imposition of a no-fly zone and the creation of safe areas. Only a few days later, on a meeting in Cairo on March 12, the LAS concurred despite internal dissonance (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 50). In the meantime, the different rebel groups in Libya coalesced under the umbrella of the National Transitional Council (NTC), which allowed them to exert additional pressure on the international sphere, including for a no-fly zone (Chivvis, 2013, pp. 32–33). Several days of hectic diplomacy and negotiations, including at the UN, NATO, and at a G-8 meeting on March 15, could still not quite bridge the international community’s continuing divide over the necessity and exact means of additional action in Libya (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 53; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 162; O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 10), even though in addition to regional organizations UNSC members France and the UK increasingly pushed for a military intervention (Chivvis, 2013, pp. 32–35).⁷⁴

⁷³ For a comprehensive overview of diplomatic attempts at conflict resolution: O’Brien & Sinclair 2011.

⁷⁴ Already during a news conference with Turkish President Abdullah Gul on February 25, Sarkozy called for Ghaddafi’s resignation but dismissed the possibility of a military intervention, asking: “What kind of credibility would such intervention bring to the people there?” (quoted in: O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 8). In the following days, France and the UK took on a leading role in the debate on Libya, even though they faced resistance from other EU and NATO members (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 50; Traynor & Watt, 2011a). For a discussion of their political rationales: Davidson, 2013; Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 48; Michaels, 2015, pp. 19–22.

6.2.4. Rescuing Benghazi: The March 15 NSC Meeting

In mid-March 2011, events on the ground intensified the pressure on US policy-makers to “do something”: Ghaddafi forces besieged Misrata, sacked Ajdabiyeh, and threatened to move onto Benghazi quickly. In response, the NSC met again on March 15, and the administration’s ideational divides came starkly to the fore. More and more of Obama’s advisors – notably Rice, Power, and Clinton,⁷⁵ but also several more junior and mid-ranking officials (M. Lewis, 2012; Michaels, 2015, p. 21) – had started to support intervention. Ideas of American leadership and responsibility had combined with a specific conception of military technology and strategy to make alternatives to a no-fly zone appear increasingly unattractive, including those the administration had in the previous week still seriously considered because they were even cheaper and less risky, such as arming the rebels or providing military assistance on the ground (Michaels, 2015, p. 21). In retrospect, Obama claimed that the participants knew that “if we waited one more day, Benghazi—a city nearly the size of Charlotte—could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world” (quoted in: Kuperman, 2015). A participant in the meeting is quoted with observing that “the ghosts of 800,000 Tutsis were in that room” (Hobson, 2016, p. 447; M. Lewis, 2012): “there was this group [within the NSC] that was haunted by Rwanda [...] They all walked into that session determined not to make the same mistake a second time” (Sanger, 2012, p. 339). Ideas of a “responsibility to protect” and the concomitant fear of being held responsible in the case of inaction combined with an impending sense of crisis and history repeating itself to suggest “doing something” was more important possibly than “doing the right thing” (Hobson, 2016, p. 477). Correspondingly, beyond the two guiding ideas of acting quickly while eschewing overt risks and high costs, the decision was made without careful consideration of a long-term military or political strategy (including regime change), or even short-term appropriate tools (Michaels, 2015, p. 26).

At the meeting, Obama was presented with intelligence reports and satellite photos showing that Ghaddafi’s attack on Benghazi was imminent (Sanger, 2012, p. 343). However, the mismatch between the evocation of Benghazi as the next potential Rwanda and Srebrenica on the one hand and the choice of the no-fly zone on the other as the favored tool of intervention onto which different positions had “converged” (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 53) was not lost on the president: Obama told his officials at the meeting that he was dissatisfied with the suggested tool as it could not prevent a massacre purely from the air, and was altogether “insufficient to stop Ghaddafi’s forces from crushing the rebels” (M. Lewis,

⁷⁵ Clinton is often ascribed a decisive role in the deliberations towards intervention, even though she split from Gates and subscribed to ideas favoring intervention relatively late, likely influenced by meetings with NTC representatives and other Arab diplomats (Erlanger, 2011; Michaels, 2015, p. 20; Wallace-Wells, 2011; Warrick, 2011). With a humanitarian catastrophe seemingly imminent and the LAS surprisingly in support, she argued that the US could not do nothing any longer (Sanger, 2012, p. 342).

2012; Michaels, 2015, p. 21). Sanger quotes the following exchange based on reports from participants in the meeting:

“What are we discussing at the UN? A no-fly zone?” Obama asked, turning to Admiral Mike Mullen [...]. “Mike, is a no-fly zone going to stop anything we just heard from happening?” Mullen shook his head. “No sir”. “Well, then what are we discussing here? Why are we even having this meeting?” Obama snapped [...] “If you’re telling me that this guy is tearing through his country, about to overrun this city of seven hundred thousand people, and potentially kill thousands of people – why is the option I’m looking at one that will do nothing to stop that scenario?” (Sanger, 2012, p. 343; M. Lewis, 2012).

For its main proponents, including Rice, Powers, and (by that time) Clinton (Chivvis, 2013, p. 67), the no-fly zone had stood in as a faux compromise between the costs of allowing a humanitarian disaster to take place, and the risks of intervention (Cooper & Myers, 2011; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 313). On March 15, Obama burst that bubble, and instead demanded more aggressive military options (Sanger, 2012, p. 343; M. Lewis, 2012). However, he still insisted on limited US involvement both in materiel and time, and strove to share the burden of intervention with US allies (Michaels, 2015, p. 21; M. Lewis, 2012; Lizza, 2011). This was a difficult task to set, especially since all the main decision-makers in the White House as well as America and its allies could agree on was indeed the no-fly zone, understood as a defensive tool ensuring the status quo on the ground. Aggressively supporting the rebels or fostering regime change had not been seriously considered in the NSC up to that point (Michaels, 2015, p. 23).

In answer to Obama’s criticism, the NSC scrambled together more aggressive options, including a cyberattack (Sanger, 2012, p. 343). With the “doing nothing” option ruled out by this point as not credible, “going in bigger” than the no-fly zone meant that previous ideational compromise seemingly found in this tool would have to be re-considered, the “entire intervention reframed and its goals more explicitly defined” (Sanger, 2012, p. 344). In addition, the upcoming UNSC resolution would have to be more authoritative. Correspondingly, ideas of restraint reemerged in the discussion: especially Biden and Gates argued their case one last time, emphasizing what they perceived as a lack of US interests and the risks of engagement (Sanger, 2012, p. 344; M. Lewis, 2012). When the meeting reconvened, Obama was presented with additional options as per his demand, including offensive air and missile strikes against Libyan forces. Per participants’ notes, Obama directly referenced American leadership, even exceptionalism in America’s special role as a supporter of democracy and human rights (in contrast to other states in the international community). The responsibility of the sole remaining superpower to lead the “free world” recalls themes prominently present in Bush’s and Clinton’s leadership during Iraq and Bosnia respectively. This contrasted with more pragmatic, interest-driven considerations of credibility and regional consequences, which he mentioned but seemed to interpret differently under pressures to “do something”. Obama thus came out on the side of activist expansion:

“We can’t play the role of a Russia or China [...] If we don’t act, if we put the brakes on this thing, it will have consequences for US credibility and leadership, consequences for the Arab Spring, and consequences for the international community [...] That’s just not who we are (Sanger, 2012, p. 345).

Correspondingly, Obama instructed Rice to seek a UNSC resolution endorsing more forceful intervention in order to more effectively protect civilians on the ground, with the goal of subsequently handing off any such mission to the NATO partners (particularly the UK and France), in line with the desire to rebalance US commitments in the Middle East and not get overly committed in Libya considering the lack of actual US interests (Indyk et al., 2012, p. 163; Sanger, 2012, p. 346). Neither on March 15 nor in the next week, however, was it clear that NATO and the allies could actually be persuaded to take front seat in the operation (Michaels, 2015, pp. 22–23), or how long the US would provide “initial” leadership. It is notable how Obama’s decision-making process on March 15 was largely detached from pressure from allies: “while it may have been a necessary factor, it was in itself not a sufficient one to change the debate within the administration” (Chivvis, 2013, p. 68). Instead, the emergence of a specific military option, namely the no-fly zone itself, combined with an impending sense of imminent catastrophe, paved a way out of the administration’s ideational divides. Instead of setting aside the no-fly zone as a tool of intervention altogether, the solution seemed to become “no-fly zone plus X”, where X had to be figured out while the operation would already be underway. In effect, Obama’s policy in mid-March boiled down to a US-enforced no-fly zone and limited air strikes to defend Benghazi, in the hope that something else was to follow (and someone else to take over). This bears striking resemblance to the strategy in Bosnia, where neither happened for a sustained period.

6.2.5. Operation Odyssey Dawn

The focus of US foreign policy from March 15 onwards shifted to ensuring that responsibility could be handed over to NATO or other international partners as soon as possible. This policy (referred to in earlier cases as “internationalization”) became known thereafter as “leading from behind” (Lizza, 2011, p. 10), where the US would provide initial leadership and then move to the sidelines in support of an allied operation. The policy shift surprised the international community and the members of the UNSC. France and the UK together with Lebanon had produced a draft resolution with more limited wording that likely would not allow for extended airstrikes (Chivvis, 2013, p. 56). Instead, the US now pushed for a tough resolution that mirrored the president’s decision to combine the no-fly zone with an actually effective military option (Chivvis, 2013, pp. 56–59), making even proponents of intervention worry that this was a ploy to have the drafts vetoed. Instead, by employing the same ideas that had worked to achieve compromise in the US foreign policy executive, the US and its allies managed to attain Resolution 1973’s rather open-ended wording, including the additional provision of “all

necessary means” to protect civilians, only two days after the deciding NSC meeting. A diplomat involved in the UNSC discussions recalled that “the Americans came out to say in the Council: ‘Do you want another Srebrenica?’” (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014; Hobson, 2016, p. 477) – a statement that gained additional legitimacy by Bosnia-Herzegovina’s subsequent endorsement.

In UNSC deliberations, several members, including NATO ally Germany, veto members Russia and China, as well as Brazil and India raised concerns over the impending intervention for different reasons (i.e. sovereignty, likely costs, or the factual basis for the threat of ethnic cleansing), but agreed to abstain rather than veto the resolution (Engelbrekt, 2015, pp. 55–57; Weitz, 2011, p. 1; Western & Goldstein, 2011, p. 48). At the time, the main reasons given for the abstentions were: firstly, that states believed the mission had a low chance of success, and secondly, that they were concerned about the indeterminacy of the resolution (Dunne & Gifkins, 2011, p. 525). Both veto powers cited the LAS statements as key to their decision to abstain, with Russia highlighting the importance of protection of civilians as a further reason (Dunne & Gifkins, 2011, p. 522). Particularly the voice of the Arab world, calling for an intervention in unusual unison, and the support of African countries Nigeria and South Africa had a strong impact on the vote (Beresford, 2015; de Waal, 2013; Weitz, 2011). Undoubtedly, the necessity for the US (and its Western allies) to carefully manage partners and opponents (especially the veto powers Russia and China) is reflective of a more constrained international environment. Indeed, the relative swiftness with which critics of an intervention were brought to accept UNSC Resolution 1973’s broad mandate has been the matter of much debate (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014; Davidson, 2013; Held & Ulrichsen, 2011; Meibauer, 2015; O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011).⁷⁶

On March 17, 2011, with Ghaddafi forces within 100 miles of Benghazi, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1973, which imposed “a ban on all flights in the airspace of Libyan Arab Jamajiriya in order to help protect civilians” (Schmitt, 2011, p. 45), thereby reiterating the purpose of the tool already stated in the first paragraph. The resolution authorized a no-fly zone over Libya as well as the use of “all necessary measures” to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country. At the same time, it explicitly excluded any “foreign occupation” of the Libyan territory, thereby ruling out the large-scale use of ground forces. In contrast to the no-fly zones in Iraq and Bosnia, for the first time in Resolution 1973 the UNSC authorized a no-fly zone “with the explicit purpose of protecting civilians” (Dunne & Gifkins, 2011, p. 523). The protection mandate was stretched and new wording introduced in comparison to earlier resolutions. The previously agreed language and standard terminology

⁷⁶ The subsequent implementation’s speed and forcefulness was surprising not only to outside observers, but to states that had been active in the drafting process and even within the mission. South Africa and with it the AU changed from supporters of intervention to critics. Russia and China criticized the NATO mission for its alleged hidden agenda of regime change and saw it as a transgression of the original mandate, finding it “extremely disturbing that a restricted UN mandate to use force should be totally ignored and then no action taken by the Security Council” to censure NATO “for unilaterally expanding the scope and nature of its military role” (Held & Ulrichsen, 2011).

consistently used was to “protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence” (Holt & Taylor, 2009). Resolution 1973 uses the phrase “to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack”, dropping the word “imminent” and including instead “civilian populated areas”, which implies that territory can be protected where civilians are not in immediate but rather in indirect danger (Schmitt, 2011, p. 56). Crucially, the resolution authorized member states to “act nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements”, paving the way for a coalition-of-the-willing format or NATO operations (Engelbrekt, 2015, p. 56).

Publicly explaining new US foreign policy and its push for a no-fly zone, Obama insisted that the US military would take the lead only in the initial imposition of the no-fly zone for what would amount to “days, not weeks” (ABC News, 2011; Obama, 2011) and that there would not be a large-scale ground operation. Speaking from the White House on UNSC Resolution 1973 as well as in meetings with congressional leaders, Obama explained that the US could not stand idly by when a situation such as Libya “undermined global peace and security”, framing the policy choice in terms of national interest rather than humanitarian responsibility. He also stressed the collaboration of allies and partners, including the LAS and the UNSC, in enforcing international law, to underline burden-sharing (Obama, 2011; Chivvis, 2013, p. 64; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 163). Here, using a no-fly zone proved useful, as it was both suggested as well as supported by others in the international community, and would likely not result in US casualties. The tool was in that sense “ideationally malleable”: it could be used to appeal both to those supporting ideas of intervention as well as pragmatics and realists in the US political landscape. Crucially, at the time the no-fly zone was still interpreted more defensively so that Obama could successfully deny that the intervention’s ultimate goal was regime change: in a speech on March 28, Obama argued instead the operation would be limited, not least because an offensive interpretation would “splinter” the international coalition (Obama, 2011; Steinberg, 2011, sec. Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Aaronson, 2014, p. 133).

Outside observers (especially those that supported a more robust or even unilateral approach, such as Republican “hawks” McCain and Graham) noted how this argumentation and employing the no-fly zone specifically was at odds with previous declarations that Ghaddafi had lost legitimacy and should leave office (T. Cohen, 2011; Indyk et al., 2012, p. 164; Schwartz, 2011). The no-fly zone was quickly identified as exactly what it was – a compromise solution, a “halfway in” operation (Sanger, 2012, p. 349). Obama was charged with “dithering” and, despite the last-minute policy shift, failing to effectively help in avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. The administration’s uneasy mixture of restraint and responsibility was seen as a “failure of US leadership” (Singh, 2012, p. 128). At the same time, supporting the no-fly zone led to charges of interventionism and neo-colonialism, with a third intervention in the Middle East suggesting that despite efforts to differentiate himself from his



predecessor, Obama continued failed policies of the past: Obama was seen, depending on perspective, as

“either a kinder, gentler version of his Texan predecessor, a more insidious version promising better relations in speeches but failing to deliver in substance [...], or a hopelessly ineffective leader – “inaction man” – unable to achieve the rather modest reforms he sought to achieve” (Singh, 2012, p. 128).

Two days after the vote, an international coalition began no-fly zone operations. Although reluctant to become involved at all only days prior, the US had initial strategic command and coordinated contributions by the different partners in a coalition-of-the-willing format (Michaels, 2015, p. 22; Nygren, 2015, p. 111). Its own military contribution was named Operation Odyssey Dawn, which established a no-fly zone over Libya and initiated airstrikes against Libyan ground forces to protect civilians. In an effort to disable Libyan air defense, the US initially targeted air defense sites, command and control and communication nodes with Cruise missiles (CNN World News, 2011; Gertler, Blanchard, Dale, & Elsea, 2013; Nygren, 2015, p. 111). Then, allied fighter jets started to attack moving and immobile ground targets around Benghazi. Air superiority was established quickly and without casualties, not least because of the state of Libyan air force and air defense systems – four days after the first attack, air operations over Libya were practically risk-free (BBC News, 2011; Nygren, 2015, pp. 115–117). The subsequent no-fly zone in Libya, to a larger extent than in the late stages of the Bosnian no-fly zone, was intertwined with aerial and missile attacks against ground targets and military infrastructure, including several sites where Ghaddafi supporters were presumably located, as well as with other tools of intervention, particularly a naval blockade. This broader frame, predicted by Gates in his statements to Congress, has led some authors to conclude that the overall mission that included no-fly zone over Libya increasingly exhibited features of a “no-drive zone” and “a no-sail zone” (Hanover & White, 2011), and outside observers found it difficult to clearly distinguish between the no-fly zone as a form of protective air cover and the use of airpower as an “air force” for the rebels (Nygren, 2015, p. 121). Indeed, within the next weeks, deterring further attacks on rebel strongholds and reactively protecting civilians in certain hotspots was (predictably) deemed inadequate to “solving” the situation on the ground. Subsequently, the no-fly zone was widened to allow for aerial occupation of almost the entire country, in contrast to e.g. the no-fly zones in Iraq.

6.2.6. Operation Unified Protector and Aftermath

The Obama administration’s own ideational competition over Libya confused both allies and states opposed to intervention (Singh, 2012, p. 129). It first played a part in the internal dispute over NATO’s role that was to follow in the first weeks and months after UNSC Resolution 1973 (Michaels, 2015, p. 27). It was agreed after considerable friction and a final four-way telephone conversation including



Clinton and her British, French and Turkish counterparts that NATO would take operational control (Brunnstrom & Taylor, 2011; Michaels, 2015, p. 24). Finally, by April, the diverse ongoing military operations (including Odyssey Dawn) were unified under NATO mission “Unified Protector” (Engelbrekt, Mohlin, & Wagnsson, 2015; Gertler et al., 2013). However, while NATO thus took over no-fly zone enforcement, still interpreted as the “defensive” aspects of the intervention, there was no agreement on more offensive operations –this could only be resolved in the affirmative after additional days of debate (Michaels, 2015, p. 23; Traynor & Watt, 2011b).

The mid-term goals of the campaign continued to divide the alliance, particularly on the question of regime change and removing Ghaddafi from power (Michaels, 2015, pp. 21–25; O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011, pp. 12–15). When deciding on implementation in mid-March, all that the core intervening states had agreed on was limited to “ensuring the rebel position did not collapse, and in this sense, military action was viewed in ‘defensive’ rather than ‘offensive’ terms. Beyond this, the prospect of using military force to assist the rebel forces in ‘regime change’ was not seriously considered” (Michaels, 2015, p. 23). Between March 19 and March 31, control of important cities between Tripoli and Benghazi swung back and forward (Laing 2011), but by early April, Benghazi was no longer under imminent threat of attack, and the Libyan air force and air defense were completely degraded. At the same time, decision-makers started to acknowledge a major shortcoming of the no-fly zone: there was “no endgame” beyond the immediate UN authorization to protect Libyan civilians, and it was uncertain whether select military strikes could and would force Ghaddafi from power (New York Times 2012). Apparently in contrast to earlier assessments, the rebels seemed unable to win outright, and the situation on the ground resembled a stalemate. Leading NATO partners feared a dragged-out mission would prove costly with critical publics.⁷⁷ Unclear US positioning vis-à-vis the intervention and its NATO partners did not help the issue: when in April the Obama administration announced its intent to pull back but left open just how much that would impact on its committed forces, the nature of the mission and its momentum were in doubt (O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011, pp. 13–15). The shortage in aircraft and munitions supply was felt immediately. Obama, in keeping with his compromise between leadership and risk-averseness, initially refused to renew support (Michaels, 2015, pp. 27–29), only to be forced to renege on that policy again when NATO capabilities proved unable to cope with mission demands (Sanger, 2012, p. 352).

On April 15, Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy published an opinion piece in which they stressed that they were “united on what needs to happen” to end the conflict in Libya, writing that “it is impossible to

⁷⁷ Only 14 of NATO’s 28 members were playing an active role in Unified Protector at that point (with support from other states including Qatar, the UAE, Jordan and Sweden), and only 6 states were striking targets in Libya (Engelbrekt, Mohlin, & Wagnsson, 2015; Gertler, Blanchard, Dale, & Elsea, 2013; O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011).

imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power” (quoted in: O’Brien & Sinclair, 2011, p. 15). Only at that point did decision-makers converge on an actual strategy that stood in stark contrast to the administration’s desires both to restrain US engagement and to differentiate the administration from its unfortunate predecessor: the initially undefined “plus X” to a no-fly zone turned out to be regime change after all, and replaced any pretensions to a defensive interpretation of the tool (Sanger, 2012, p. 353). To prevent stalemate and prolonged engagement, it became necessary to help the rebels achieve military victory, and therefore to interpret the original protection mandate more offensively, both territorially and mission-wise broaden the no-fly zone operations to include all possible military targets, and cooperate more closely with the rebels (Sanger, 2012, p. 352).⁷⁸ Operations were subsequently enlarged to include additional military targets, and rotary-wing aircraft were employed against loyalist forces. Enforcing the no-fly zone became replaced with an air campaign on behalf of rebel forces (Boston Globe, 2012). Airstrikes continued against targets throughout the country amidst both regime and independent claims of collateral damage and civilian casualties, and growing discontent within the international community about the offensive interpretation of the UN mandate (CNN World News, 2011). The rebels took Tripoli and Ghaddafi’s compound at the end of August, while the last regime supporters gathered in Ghaddafi’s home city Sirte. Large-scale fighting ended in late October 2011 with the death of Ghaddafi, and NATO promptly finalized operations over Libya. Subsequently, the lack of post-intervention planning had troublesome repercussions, with arms flowing out of Libya to neighboring countries such as Mali and Sudan, general lawlessness due to lack of governmental control and powerful militias that refused transitional governmental oversight and set up multiple competing governments (Boston Globe, 2012; Hanover & White, 2011). By 2016 Libya had become a “failed state”, which enabled the rise of an “Islamic State” terrorist group offshoot around Sirte in 2016.

6.3. Conclusion

The no-fly zone (and with it the initial stages of the Libyan intervention) was not the result of carefully optimized military or political strategy. This chapter suggests what may seem as a strategy of deliberately sequencing of tools in escalatory steps was more likely a series of piece-meal, short-term decisions to address political divisions in the White House. The no-fly zone is best described as symptom and symbol of the Obama administration’s ideational divides when faced with unclear

⁷⁸ It is unclear to which extent this offensive interpretation of the original mandate, based on its “all necessary means” clause, was part of the no-fly zone or a separate air campaign (cf. Schmitt, 2011). There are some indicators that the later air campaign was an extension of the no-fly zone: for instance, all air operations ran under the same operational code (in contrast to e.g. Bosnia), all sorties used the same bases, materiel, personnel, and operational command, and the air campaign ran in parallel to more “traditional” no-fly zone operations. However, there are important political, strategic, and legal differences, particularly with regards to “Rules of Engagement” and mission objectives.

systemic conditions. In the decision-making process, it appeared as an easy way to overcome intra-administrative ideational competition when faced with ambiguous stimuli from a permissive but contracting international environment, unclear interests, and the perceived necessity of restraint given its previously announced grand strategic shift (Singh, 2012, p. 46). America's relative power declined, and the necessary management of international partners and adversaries placed major policy constraints on the administration. At the same time, the US still enjoyed considerable leeway and excess capabilities to potentially spend on intervention abroad. By tracing the Obama administration's decision-making process in the months leading up to no-fly zone initiation, this chapter provided confirming evidence of the suggested causal mechanism: ideas intervened in the transmission belt between these ambiguous systemic conditions and foreign policy choice. They appeared as diagnostic heuristics grounded in individual beliefs which were carried, referenced and countered in the decision-making process as tools employed to deliberate and persuade (cf. Holland & Aaronson, 2014). These ideas can be subsumed into two broader sets: ideas focusing on the nature of the conflict and on corresponding existence and importance of US interests on the one hand, as well as the appropriate (degree) of mobilization of state power in the form of military strategy and technology on the other. Because of its strategic flexibility and its low-risk and its presumably low-cost character, the no-fly zone seemed to correspond to otherwise contradicting ideas. The tool worked to overcome the rift – only to be proven unfit for the purpose of effecting desirable outcomes in Libya, because it did not in fact correspond to systemic conditions and the problem at hand (Singh, 2012, pp. 129–130). Notably, as evidenced by multiple statements of Obama's closest military advisors and the president himself, this outcome was already considered likely at the time the no-fly zone was installed. Only after weeks of additional diplomacy and decision-making were the US and the enforcing coalition able to formulate a coherent military strategy in Libya – which stood in contrast to previously announced US foreign policy, replaced the no-fly zone with an offensive air campaign towards regime change, and yielded results that in hindsight proved disastrous for the stability of the entire region.

7.1. Introduction: No-Fly Zone Non-Use

In three deviant case studies, this chapter discusses the causal primacy of systemic variables for the use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy. In the preceding chapters, I have provided a theoretically informed answer to the question: When and why are no-fly zones used? I argued that no-fly zones play a crucial role in overcoming, from the perspective of decision-makers, pervasive ideational competition in the US foreign policy executive. Absent agreement or presidential leadership, the no-fly zone may function as a faux compromise in short-term decision-making because of its inherent military-strategic characteristics: it is a quick fix – adhesive tape on deep ideational divides. I argued that by taking on this “doing something” role, the no-fly zone functions symbolically in foreign policy deliberations, disconnected from its actual strategic properties or utility and indeed from any detailed political or military planning. This “idealization” process is most visible over time and across the three cases discussed in previous chapters. In northern Iraq, the no-fly zone emerged out of the hesitancy to commit large-scale support to Kurdish refugees combined with available capabilities and a misguided sense that helicopters were crucial in the Ba’athist regime’s crackdown in the north. In Bosnia and particularly in Libya, the no-fly zone stood in for an easy way in which the US could signal commitment, yet shed any actual responsibility for the conflict at hand, and avoid the risks of involvement – even though these assumptions were wrong based not only on how the cases developed subsequently, but also on the advice from other decision-makers and experts in preceding foreign policy deliberations. Based on preceding chapters which conceptualize decision-making processes as sequences of ideational competition, diverging viewpoints and arguments are frequent in the US foreign policy executive. If in these competitive foreign policy deliberations, the no-fly zone takes on the role of a faux compromiser, a follow-up question arises: why do we not see more no-fly zones?

Firstly, as has been argued in previous chapters, use of the no-fly zone is connected to military-technological improvements that make aerial intervention against lesser powers seemingly risk-free for the US armed forces. In that sense, the no-fly zone is a post-Cold War tool of intervention. This limits the numbers of comparable cases considerably to about 15-20 between Iraq in 1991 and Syria in 2016, depending on counting method. Three to five no-fly zones in this period⁷⁹ mean that the tool has been employed in a considerable percentage of all US military interventions in the post-Cold War era. It is thus still acceptable to argue that the no-fly zone has not been used frequently, e.g. in

⁷⁹ The exact number depends on how different and sequential operations (e.g. Operations Northern and Southern Watch) specifically in Iraq are counted, see above.

comparison with sanctions or Special Forces. However, it has been used often enough to constitute an important part of the US foreign policy toolkit. In addition, trying to count non-cases of no-fly zones is inherently methodologically difficult. I argued that no-fly zones are particularly attractive to decision-makers that seek to “do something”, and thus may be understood as a first step to overcoming ideational divides. When decision-makers consider the no-fly zone but opt for less or more forceful tools, additional investigation is merited to clarify whether this provides disconfirming evidence for the suggested causal mechanism of my theoretical framework. Hence, in this chapter I discuss some of these non-cases, which are sampled based on no-fly zone potential – that is, the no-fly zone was at some point or other introduced as a policy *option* in the respective cases at the time, but then not picked.

Secondly, as has been outlined above, not all ideational divisions lead to no-fly zones. Instead it is perfectly reasonable to assume that most ideational competition is resolved deliberately (whether by agreement between decision-makers or by presidential leadership). Elsewhere, ideational competition may simply linger and not result in action until the context fundamentally changes (e.g. through developments in the scenario, or a presidential election). While it is beyond the purview of this thesis exactly to predict when which dynamic will arise, and there is a limit to the generalization possible from the in-depth, case-based analysis of preceding chapters, assuming for the sake of simplicity that each of the four dynamics occurs about equally often corresponds quite well with the observed number of no-fly zone cases.

Thirdly, I have argued that systemic conditions are the primary causal driver for US foreign policy choice, i.e. they function as the independent variable in the suggested causal mechanism. The post-Cold War order is characterized by a system generally favorable to the USA in terms of relative power. That does not mean, however, that systemic conditions are always permissive or unclear. No-fly zones are less likely to be employed, logically, if systemic stimuli are perceived by decision-makers as clearly favoring a different course of action. Ideas (as beliefs) are used in the first instance as heuristics guiding the interpretation of systemic conditions and the deduction of interests. They are then carried into deliberations where they are used to argue with and persuade other decision-makers. The (seemingly) clearer systemic conditions, however, the more likely decision-makers may agree on their preferred course of action (although they may still be wrong). The intervening force of ideas would then be more limited, and ideational competition less causally important. This chapter delves deeper into these questions on the relationship between system, interests and ideas, which serves to highlight empirical and theoretical limitations, but also the potential inherent in analyzing US foreign policy decision-making through a neoclassical realist lens. To that end, I collate empirical evidence from brief case studies on Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, and Syria respectively.



7.2. Systemic Conditions, US Foreign Policy, and No-Fly Zones

Theoretical research employing the case study method requires the definition of a set universe of cases for which the analytical framework applies. As outlined above, “while neoclassical realism can explain phenomena ranging from individual states’ short-term foreign policy behavior to recurrent patterns of international outcomes, an individual neoclassical realist theory should have clear scope conditions” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 122). Scope conditions are here understood as a theory’s validity limitations. It has been pointed out above that this thesis’ cases are purposefully sampled based on informativeness and typicality, and that selecting a limited number of positive cases (in which no-fly zones have been used) for detailed analysis based on archival data follows from this approach. It is still beneficial to ask, however, which other cases at the fringes of such a selection may possibly be comparable, and whether insights gained from preceding analysis and theory-building may be applicable (generalizable) to them. In the following analysis, I discuss several closely related cases of US foreign policy decision-making and ask if and how they match the proposed theoretical framework. These additional cases are each in turn representative of a specific type of case with regards to no-fly zone implementation.

Guiding the following analysis is an “inverted” question: When and why are no-fly zones *not* used? What does this tell us about the way in which structure, interests and ideas interlink? To that end, I look at several brief cases placed in the same time frame between 1990 and 2011 also present in earlier chapters. While just as in these cases, important differences remain between Kosovo, Sudan, and Syria (as outlined in further detail below), each of these cases stands in for reasons of *not* employing no-fly zones. In the Kosovo case, intra-administrative ideational competition was backgrounded by systemic conditions: Kosovo touched on higher national interests, i.e. the preservation of NATO. The initial steps towards the air campaign resembled the dynamics towards a no-fly zone in many ways. However, the air campaign was escalated as part of a broader coercive effort as higher interests became apparent and ideational convergence occurred more quickly amongst decision-makers. In South Sudan and in Darfur, systemic conditions made any type of intervention, including a no-fly zone, costly. National interests that would merit such an investment were not present. Even though a no-fly zone for southern Sudan was repeatedly debated, “doing something” seemed unnecessarily risky. With regards to Syria, strong systemic constraints were present from the start, and only increased with Russia’s open support for the Syrian regime. They counter-balanced US interests, and made a no-fly zone first improbable, then impossible. I argue that these cases are united by the prevalence of systemic constraints which influenced the likelihood of no-fly zone initiation negatively. While ideational divides in the respective administrations were clearly present, ideas could not intervene in the causal mechanism from systemic conditions to foreign policy choice in the same way given overwhelming

systemic conditions. This reiterates the role of systemic conditions as the primary causal variable of neoclassical realism and my theoretical framework.

7.2.1. Kosovo

The case of Kosovo is particularly interesting as a “deviant” case because it suggests many similarities in the foreign policy executive’s decision-making dynamics, compared especially to the Libya case. And yet, as will be argued below, it did not result in a no-fly zone but rather in a more aggressive air campaign as the initial tool of intervention. I suggest here this is partially because Kosovo was tied to the preservation of NATO and thus higher-order interests, including during foreign policy deliberations, in a way that Libya was not. The preceding chapter on Bosnia has already briefly mentioned the Bush administration’s 1992 so-called “Christmas demarche”, in which the US warned Serbia that aggression in Kosovo would lead to the unilateral use of force. At the time, the Bush administration worried that a spread of hostilities to Kosovo would open doors to even wider conflict on the Balkans: Holbrooke reminisces that “[...] there would have been a real risk that Bosnia would merge with Kosovo into a huge firestorm that would destabilize the entire region” (quoted in: Sciolino & Bronner, 1999). However, the simmering problem was then overshadowed by the Bosnian conflict. The case of Kosovo reappeared on the Clinton administration’s agenda after clashes between Serbian security forces and Kosovar rebels had erupted in late 1997 and intensified throughout early 1998. Still faced with a largely permissive international environment, ideational divisions promptly re-emerged in the decision-making process between the administration’s stance on US leadership and responsibility on the one hand, and its unwillingness to risk the large-scale use of force to assert these ideas on the other.

On October 1, 1998, National Security Advisor Samuel Berger outlined in a programmatic speech why the US should be involved in Kosovo: “[the] United States has two overriding interests in Kosovo: preventing a humanitarian crisis and stopping a dangerous and destabilizing conflict from spilling over into the Balkan tinder box” (Berger, 1998b). Analogies to Bosnia were frequent: for example, he noted that the administration had learned from Bosnia that “inaction is perilous” (Berger, 1998b; Barthe & David, 2007). Berger was joined in this assessment by other administration officials, especially Albright (Gellman, 1999). The lessons they drew from Bosnia concerned the likelihood of failure from procrastination and “appeasement” through diplomacy (Barthe & David, 2007, p. 90). Similarly, Clark, then NATO commander of European Forces, thought (around May 1998) that “we could use a carrot-and-stick approach to bring Milosevic to the point of negotiating a political solution to the emerging conflict”, where the sticks would be strategic air strikes (because he felt the Serbians were impressed by NATO airpower in Bosnia, Clark, 2002, pp. 112–116). In his memoirs, Clinton claims he came to the insight that Kosovo was reminiscent of Bosnia (Clinton, 2004, p. 849). However, similar in many ways



to decision-making in Bosnia, Clinton did not actively lobby for any one policy – there was no decisive presidential leadership (Barthe & David, 2007, p. 91). This interpretation of systemic conditions and the analogy between Kosovo and Bosnia were opposed by other decision-makers. Secretary of Defense William Cohen warned about intervention by invoking Somalia in Principals Committee meetings, pointing out that any involvement would be risky, might end in failure, and would not be tolerated by domestic audiences (Barthe & David, 2007, p. 92; Halberstam, 2002, pp. 441–442). Similarly, the Joint Chiefs worried about Vietnam-like scenarios, and wanted to uphold the “Powell doctrine” of overwhelming force: Halberstam notes that for the military, Kosovo was

“a reminder of the ambiguity of the Vietnam decision making, of civilians who were willing to enter a war zone without any of the hard decisions having been made [...] it was a replay of both Vietnam and Somalia. Start with something small and relatively innocent, then something larger and unpredictable is born of it” (Halberstam, 2002, p. 465; also quoted in: Barthe & David, 2007, p. 93).

In his October 1 remarks, Berger put forward two ideas: given permissive conditions, America had a responsibility and must show leadership when faced with “ethnic cleansing” and the corresponding necessity to act quickly (Berger, 1998b), i.e. to “do something”. Combined with concerns about costs, risks, and the extent to which core interests were at stake, this was reminiscent of just the type of ideational confrontation present in earlier case studies. However, beyond these “lesser” interests of humanitarian concern and regional order, Berger also noted that this “is a moment that forces us to reassert our partnership with the UN and NATO, and to remember how crucial these organizations are to the architecture of peace”: “focused action, in concert with our allies, has a real effect” (Berger, 1998b). Thusly, Berger connected the humanitarian imperative to act with an idea that had by then become a staple of the Clinton administration and of “liberal internationalism”: multilateralism (especially through NATO) was an imperative of systemic conditions in the post-Cold War era. As Berger and others deduced, the otherwise relatively unimportant (for US interests) case of Kosovo tested the transatlantic alliance.

Explicitly connecting Kosovo to larger questions of NATO’s purpose after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and of the role it plays for the US, had several implications for tool choice in 1999: firstly, it raised the case’s importance in the hierarchy of interests. Sustaining and managing NATO is conventionally defined as a vital US interest, not least because it serves America’s security and welfare. Kosovo as a test of this relationship may not be an automatic connection. There was very little inherent to Kosovo that made the case a problem for the entire alliance (comparable with the 2011 Libyan intervention). Secondly, while bringing in NATO thus raised the profile of Kosovo, and, in this sense, made US involvement more likely, it also flagged up advantages of intervention burden-sharing, and in this other sense may have helped persuade US decision-makers otherwise unwilling to bear risks

and costs. Multilateralism and the existence of allies with similar interests and positions vis-à-vis intervention can influence the *domestic* political landscape in different ways, e.g. by expanding the “domestic coalition that supports the operation to include the partisans of the ally or alliance involved” (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 157; Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 47). In calling on the preservation and credibility of NATO as the true interest at stake, proponents of intervention could, firstly, persuade internal critics who would have (perhaps rightfully) questioned Kosovo’s importance for US foreign policy. Unlike the Libya case, this served to make ideational convergence more likely. Secondly, winning elite support (beyond the administration) for intervention was pertinent because of Clinton’s impeachment process, which lasted until early February of 1999. However, while bringing in NATO had several positive effects on overcoming intra-administrative ideational divides, in other ways it may have constrained decision-makers. Once tied to multilateral approaches, unilateral, more aggressive decisions are difficult: Cohen observed that “[i]f we were to carry out and act unilaterally, we would have a much more robust, aggressive, and decapitating campaign...the difference here, of course, is that we are acting as an alliance” (PBS, 2000). At the same time, then, tying Kosovo to NATO implied that once NATO was engaged, “losing” the conflict became impossible – it imposed a constraint based on an ideationally-driven interpretation of systemic incentives. Crucially, it made limited action more likely, but very robust action (i.e. ground invasion) less likely.

Comparable in many ways to Libya, these dynamics paves the way for something like a no-fly zone. Indeed, as Taliaferro notices (with a hint of astonishment), the fundamentally flawed lesson the Clinton administration seemed to have internalized from Bosnia was that when it came to mobilizing state power, the threat of air strikes or at most the implementation of limited bombing “would be sufficient to ensure Serbia’s compliance no matter what the issue at stake” (Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 44). As follows from my previous arguments about ideas, ideational competition, and the continuous attractiveness of no-fly zones in US foreign policy decision-making, this lack of a learning process is in fact to be expected because (1) the international environment was largely permissive and systemic stimuli ambiguous and unclear, and (2) the intra-administrative ideational competition that occurs with regards to Bosnia and to Kosovo is similar in nature. The Clinton administration’s supposed lesson ignored both the circumstances of the flawed Bosnian no-fly zone, the circumstances of the air campaign towards the end of the Bosnian conflict (namely that it coincided with a ground offensive by Croat and Bosnian-Muslim forces), as well as the effectiveness of airpower in general in achieving political aims. A limited air campaign was unlikely to stop Serbian security forces from further violence against Kosovars: Hugh Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, had warned beforehand that without the additional threat of ground invasion, an air campaign would not deter further Serbian aggression

(Graham, 1999; Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 48).⁸⁰ And yet, ideas surrounding military technology partially unrelated to actual effectiveness of tools framed this debate in favor of using aerial capabilities (D. R. Lake, 2009).

Indeed, beyond the ideational differences over US interests and the nature of the conflict, the Kosovo intervention is comparable to cases of no-fly zone initiation because of the suggestion by US and NATO political and military leadership to employ a “phased approach” against Serbia. Because of a complete lack of Serbian aggression from the air an actual no-fly zone never gained traction in political or public debates. However, military-strategic characteristics here associated with a no-fly zone, namely establishing air superiority and preventively suppressing Serbian aerial capabilities, air defenses, and command and control installations, were at the core of political and military planning. The difference to Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya lies more in the initial outcome, namely a phased air campaign, than in the decision-making dynamics. That is, US foreign policy, because NATO was directly tied to the case in deliberations, started at a higher step on the ladder of escalation. This has led to a considerable degree of confusion with regards to comparing Kosovo to previous and later “actual” no-fly zones in popular and quasi-academic description (Kayyem, 2011) and policy analyses (Gertler et al., 2013). The focus on the use of aerial forces to deter Serbia and protect Kosovar civilians on the ground was visible early in the US and allied response to Serbia’s violent crackdown. Cohen suggested contingency planning for intervention and the necessity to signal allied commitment by conducting air exercises in the region in a NATO ministerial meeting on June 11, 1998, which led to the so-called “Balkan air show” a few days later. By September 1998, the US considered a diplomatic solution to the crisis unlikely, and in internal memos suggested threats and ultimately the use of force would be necessary to stop a “humanitarian catastrophe” (Berger & The White House, 1998). This should take the form of “initial air and cruise missile strikes” combined with the threat of further escalation. Evidently, this suggests a strategy of coercive diplomacy as outlined above.

The relative lack of military planning is strikingly similar to cases discussed previously (particularly Libya): again, the suggested solution vis-à-vis Kosovo seemed to be “doing something + X”, where X would be specified sometime into the mission. Also similarly, in September, the UNSC issued Resolution 1199, which amongst other measures demanded a ceasefire in Kosovo and the start of negotiations between parties, a Serbian withdrawal and humanitarian access, and called for “additional measures” in case of Serbian non-compliance. However, in contrast to earlier cases, a Principals Committee meeting on September 30, 1998 decided that an ultimatum was necessary,

⁸⁰ In fact, there was good reason to assume already at the time that using airpower only could not only not help, but be potentially actively detrimental to the protection of civilians, for example by provoking Serbian escalation of the conflict (Kay, 2000; Whitney & Schmitt, 1999).

which Holbrooke was to deliver on behalf of NATO (Clinton Digital Library & The White House, 2016). This was largely Albright's doing: when she made a "plea for air strikes to bring Milosevic to the bargaining table [...] instead of their usual debates [...] members of the committee supported her recommendations" (Moscowitz & Lantis, 2002, p. 70; Barthe & David, 2007, p. 95). Here, an earlier tendency towards ideational convergence on a more assertive stance may be observed which is dissimilar to cases of no-fly zone initiation, and which may be explained by the explicit linkage of Kosovo to NATO. In short sequence, NATO backed up the threat and signaled its willingness to employ limited military force against Serbia.

Subsequently, a Principals Committee meeting on January 15, 1999, did not overcome the ideational divide between individuals like Albright, who pushed for a renewed and strongly worded military ultimatum and planning for military intervention (Berger & The White House, 1998), and her colleagues, namely Shelton, Cohen and Berger, who argued Kosovo only touched on lesser interests and thus did not merit intervention (Clinton Digital Library & The White House, 2016). Clinton came out on the latter group's side on that day (Albright & Woodward, 2003, p. 387). On the same day, however, Serbian security forces committed the so-called "Racak massacre", which the world learned about through reports from an observer mission (the unarmed OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission) as well as news outlets around the world the next day. This provided a trigger event, comparable to some degree to the Srebrenica massacre or the threat to Benghazi, for renewed political activism.⁸¹ In answer to the "Racak massacre", the Principals Committee reconvened, and the impetus to "do something" in the face of such atrocities led to a military ultimatum vis-à-vis Serbia (Clinton Digital Library & The White House, 2016). The initial proposal mirrored the plans for Operation Deliberate Force in 1995 Bosnia (Posen, 2000, p. 59). Consensus on it was reached in Clinton's absence, but he agreed to it shortly afterwards (Barthe & David, 2007, p. 96). It was at that point that "doing nothing" was effectively ruled out: it was only a hypothetical option in the unlikely event that Serbia would yield to US and NATO demands.⁸² The debate in the White House centred more on different ways to mobilize state power in response and "do something".

By mid-March, the US and NATO had contingency plans for the large-scale aerial bombardment of Serbian targets. However, this approach would have defied the tenuous ideational compromise the

⁸¹ In response to increased pressure to act, the conflict parties, NATO and Russia also convened the Rambouillet process, which not unexpectedly failed on March 18 when Serbia (and Russia) refused to sign the Rambouillet Accord. Indeed, the accord may have been "designed to fail". For a discussion of the Rambouillet process, its many shortcomings and reasons for its ultimate failure, cf. (Bellamy, 2000).

⁸² Taliaferro suggests the Clinton administration chose the "riskier" of two options with the subsequent air campaign – while ground forces were not an option, he sees "continued negotiations" as a minimal alternative ("doing nothing"), which was subsequently rejected only because it would have led to a diminution of US prestige (what is in the above analysis captured as ideas surrounding leadership; Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 47). I argue here that "doing nothing" was only an option in the unlikely case that Serbia yielded to US demands.

Clinton administration had struck, namely the authorization of very limited initial strikes. When on March 20, the President and the principals met in the Situation Room to discuss military options for Kosovo, they focused on their “phased approach”. “Phase I”, the “initial package of airstrikes”, focused on suppressing air defense systems in Serbia and Montenegro, “with the United States providing just over half [of the necessary capabilities], including B-2s and F-117s” (Berger, 1998a, p. 1). This phase is similar in many ways to the initial phases of a no-fly zone (unless, like in Iraq, air defenses are already depleted). Logically, both a no-fly zone as well as a more aggressive air campaign depend on air superiority if they are to be low-risk operations, with the difference one of motivation rather than tactical implementation. As a follow-up to this phase, two different contingency plans were drafted: one targeting Serbian security forces and logistics in case of continued violence in Kosovo, and another in case of a Serbian attack on other neighboring countries, specifically Macedonia (Berger, 1998a, p. 1). Notably, while Shelton would brief Clinton further on these options, they were not at that point authorized by NATO, and seemed to not entail details or wide-enough contingency operations in case of continued Serbian intransigence. The Clinton administration simply assumed that Serbia would yield after a limited air campaign. The tenuous ideational convergence in the Clinton administration built on (1) the supposed systemic incentive of Kosovo’s connection to the preservation of NATO as well as on (2) the “trigger” of Serbian atrocities only extended to an initial response. Hence, on March 24, 1999, Operation Allied Force/Noble Anvil began.

However, there was no ideational agreement between decision-makers on what to do if hostilities extended beyond forty-eight hours. A phased approach implied the potential for escalation and indeed so do the contingency scenarios. The concrete decision (and the corresponding military planning) was postponed into the mission to uphold the initial ideational agreement within the administration (and within NATO). Given the limited evidence available, it must remain unclear for the case of Kosovo whether this dynamic is deliberate. Clearly, though, decision-making patterns are suggestive of at least a perceived necessity to act first and think more afterwards: “the weight of evidence suggests that NATO forces began the war over Kosovo without a well worked-out plan for employing airpower to affect directly the ability of Serb forces to operate in Kosovo” (Posen, 2000, p. 66; Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 48). In fact, some authors observe that the Clinton administration seemed to have a general tendency to use force “in small, demonstrative doses, claiming that it had “degraded” or “damaged” an enemy’s capabilities, declaring victory, and ending its combat operations regardless of the broader strategic implications of the outcome achieved” (Daalder & O’Hanlon, 2000, p. 160; Taliaferro, 2006a, p. 45). I argue that this pattern can be generalized beyond the Clinton administration. The Kosovo case can be interpreted in line with Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya as a case of ideational competition over US interests and the appropriate mobilization of state power intervening between permissive and ambiguous systemic conditions and foreign policy choice. The difference lies more in the tools that were used (i.e.



the outcome) than in the decision-making dynamics. The connection of Kosovo to NATO, and thus to higher US interests, as well as the absence of an aerial threat posed by Serbian forces, may explain the more aggressive approach vis-à-vis Serbia. In other aspects, however, namely overcoming ambiguity of systemic incentives and constraints and intervening ideational differences through an ill-devised and short-term compromise solution, the case is comparable to earlier and later instances of the “doing something” dynamic.

7.2.2. South Sudan and Darfur

The discussion around potential no-fly zones both in South Sudan and in the Darfur region presents an intriguing deviant case, not least because it has (to my knowledge) not been addressed by other authors writing about no-fly zones. In early 2000, the international community observed increasing indiscriminate bombing of civilians and civilian facilities by Sudanese fixed-wing military aircraft in Southern Sudan. In response, first demands for a no-fly zone were made in April 2000, when several Sudanese church officials demanded protection (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 346ff.). They were joined in their protest by a visiting South African church delegation, and by a growing number of international NGOs and organizations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights which passed a resolution on April 18 in which it called on the Sudanese government “[t]o stop immediately the aerial bombardment of the civilian population and civilian objects, including schools and hospitals, which runs counter to fundamental principles of human rights and humanitarian law” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000). The Sudanese air force’s conduct in South Sudan subsequently became an issue for US conflict resolution strategy. The no-fly zone demand was picked up by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom that demanded in its May 1 report that the US government support a military no-fly zone “through peaceful means” (Shea, 2001). This position was reiterated in a September 2001 hearing before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (Shea, 2001). Over the next two years, US special envoy John Danforth as well as the state department repeatedly protested indiscriminate bombing and tried to explicitly address it through several brokered agreements, e.g. in the initial proposals made to Sudan and its adversary, the SPLM/A, in September 2001. In subsequent negotiations, the parties agreed to most of Danforth’s suggestions, but expressly not to the cessation of attacks on civilians (Irinnews, 2002). Danforth commented: “[Ending] the direct, intentional and egregious [flagrant] attacks on civilians is the key to our proposals [...] I am sorry to say we have made no real progress on these issues” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 370; Irinnews, 2002). The US continued to insist on an end to indiscriminate bombing as one of the conditions to taking up a formal role in any peace negotiations. In February 2002, US officials again pushed the Sudanese to accept a ban on civilian attacks and, in addition, international monitoring of violations of that ban, which the Sudanese continued to resist (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 372ff.).



Quite apparently, decision-makers deduced that systemic stimuli and the situation in Sudan did not touch upon US interests in ways that would merit additional involvement, however. Correspondingly, despite repeated attacks in Southern Sudan, the US foreign policy executive did not see the need for additional action beyond repeated diplomatic protest and outrage, and in February 2002, the Danforth initiative's suspension. Finally, in mid-March, Sudan and the SLM/A agreed to a suspension of all attacks (not only aerial) on civilians as well as outside monitoring (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 373), which subsequently neither party adhered to. However, calls for a no-fly zone (based on currently available documents) never led to a decision-making dynamic comparable to the other cases for several reasons: firstly, South Sudan's geographic position made any US involvement risky and costly even if limited tools such as a no-fly zone were to be considered. Even though the US possessed the necessary capabilities in principle, these systemic constraints made an intervention unlikely in this case. Secondly, this is combined, in the case of South Sudan, with a sense that while US interests in leadership, responsibility and regional order more generally were present, these interests would not warrant military involvement. Therefore, the Clinton and (more so) the Bush administrations invested some political capital in diplomatic conflict resolution, but stopped short of seriously considering military involvement. Thirdly, this calculus may have changed had South Sudan been raised onto the White House agenda, for example through a "trigger event" (such as the attacks on Srebrenica or the threat to Benghazi). South Sudan in the perception of US decision-makers may have simply not constituted "enough" of a problem to consider "doing something" to avoid further bloodshed, although based on the limited evidence available such an interpretation must remain speculative.

The longer the conflict in South Sudan lasted, the more especially the Bush administration became invested in a series of negotiations and different accords – which links to the case of Darfur. The case of a no-fly zone in Darfur quite possibly offers two distinct situations in which the tool might have been used: in 2004, when the conflict in Darfur flared up, and in 2007, when presidential elections in the US shone a light on perceived failures of the Bush administration. *Firstly*, in 2004, the Darfur crisis in western Sudan captured world attention and American policy debates (much more so than South Sudan ever had). Just at a time when conflict in South Sudan receded in 2003, two different movements (SMLA and JEM) re-engaged in large-scale rebellion (low-level and inter-community violence had been ongoing since the late 1980s) against the Sudanese government. The latter responded violently, employing regular armed forces as well as state-sponsored militia ("Janjaweed"; Verhoeven, Soares de Oliveira, & Jaganathan, 2016, p. 22; P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005, p. 28). In the US, this iteration of the Darfur conflict (and with it, the no-fly zone as one suggested tool of foreign intervention) became

closely connected with descriptions of and analogies to genocidal violence.⁸³ In March 2004, Mukesh Kapila, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, claimed Sudanese counter-insurgency tactics were comparable to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and described the situation in Darfur as “the world’s greatest humanitarian crisis” (quoted in: Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 23). Increasingly, pressure was put on the Bush administration by civil society groups such as the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC)⁸⁴ to classify Darfur as a genocide, which would have had extensive implications for the case’s importance for US foreign policy as well as the capabilities then to be invested to end the conflict. At the same time, efforts by the African Union were portrayed as ineffective (Thomas-Jensen & Spiegel, 2007; Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 25). In September 2004, the US Congress in a bipartisan resolution indeed called the situation “genocide”, as did, shortly thereafter, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell in an unprecedented move (Powell, 2004a, 2004b).

With regards to appropriate response strategies, the suggestion of a no-fly zone likely originated in SMLA/JEM demands in answer to Sudanese use of military and civilian aircraft to support the regime’s crackdown, including through indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets. This was mirrored in the N’Djamena accords of April 2004 which urged the Sudanese government not to conduct military flights in the Darfur region. Also in April, Samantha Power introduced the tool into US policy debates in a New York Times op-ed. In it, she framed Darfur as comparable with Rwanda, and argued it therefore touched on much more important US interests than the Bush administration thought at the time. She denounced what she saw as a flawed “all-or-nothing” approach: “If [the US] doesn't send troops, it tends to foreclose other policy options” (Power, 2004). She then detailed these other policy options, from sanctions and more assertive diplomacy to a peacekeeping mission. Finally, she settled on demanding a no-fly zone be declared to stop the killings (Power, 2004). Power did remain unclear on who exactly should declare a no-fly zone, implying it could be the result of a negotiated agreement between the conflict parties or initiated by the Sudanese government as a sign of goodwill (under diplomatic pressure) rather than a tool of foreign intervention. Clearly, such a policy, however unlikely, would have contrasted with other previously discussed cases.

⁸³ One additional reason why Rwanda comparisons were frequent around April 2004 may have been because of the Rwandan genocide’s then-10th anniversary: “The shame surrounding Rwanda and replays of the images of the slaughter of unarmed civilians provided a fertile context for “the case for action” in Darfur” (Verhoeven, Soares de Oliveira, & Jaganathan, 2016, p. 24; Welsh, 2009; Slim, 2004).

⁸⁴ The Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) brought together “an unlikely alliance of college students, Deep South churches, Holocaust survivors, African-American civil society, Hollywood grandees and former Clinton administration officials” (Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 24). It quickly gained traction in the North American public, and is often seen as very successful in pressuring the US government on the particular issue of Darfur (Thomas-Jensen & Spiegel, 2007).

A no-fly zone was subsequently explicitly demanded by the SMLA in June and August 2004, notably in the second round of the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks (Toga, 2007, p. 223). The Sudanese government firmly rejected it. UNSC 1564 from September 2004 reiterated the N'Djamena agreement, namely that Sudan should refrain from any (explicitly not only "hostile") military flights over Darfur (United Nations Security Council, 2004). Subsequent negotiations and agreements continued to focus, among many other elements, on the question of military flights in Darfur: drafts for the Abuja negotiations in November 2004 contained a no-fly zone, but were blocked by the Sudanese government. Instead, the Abuja protocol entailed a ban on "offensive military flights", which was explicitly not understood as a no-fly zone by the Sudanese government (BBC News, 2004; Toga, 2007, p. 228), although it arguably still constituted a success for the SMLA/JEM negotiators at the time. Finally, UNSC Resolution 1591 came closest to establishing a monitored no-fly zone in Darfur as a tool of intervention – in contrast to previous mentions, which resulted from mediated negotiation between the conflict parties themselves. In Article 6, the UNSC demanded

"that the Government of Sudan [...] immediately cease conducting offensive military flights in and over the Darfur region, and invites the African Union Ceasefire Commission to share pertinent information as appropriate in this regard with the Secretary-General, the Committee, or the Panel of Experts [...]" (United Nations Security Council, 2005).

Proponents of a monitored and/or enforced no-fly zone in Darfur as a tool of external intervention since argued that this phrasing might offer the legal basis for doing so (Reinold, 2011, p. 73), although this position was debatable.

If the suggestion by the US government of a (potential) genocide in Darfur was to be taken seriously, this rendered a US or coalition-imposed no-fly zone to remedy the situation evidently absurd: there was a striking mismatch between suggested interest, rationales and goals of intervention on the one hand, and suggested means on the other. This mirrors Obama's insight into the Libyan no-fly zone to save Benghazi outlined above, and points to two crucial observations already made in previous cases: firstly, that the no-fly zone was not regarded as an optimal or even particularly useful military tool when considering the factual reality on the ground, and secondly, that the no-fly zone had become shorthand for a faux ideational compromise rather than an actual policy option. Several important similarities between the cases of Darfur and Bosnia or Libya are notable: A pressing humanitarian catastrophe connoted with international crimes (possibly genocide), a regime using all its military assets to repress an outgunned internal adversary, and US elites incensed by horrible pictures and reports of atrocities. And yet, suggestions of military intervention more broadly and the no-fly zone in particular were never seriously contemplated by the Bush administration (based on currently available sources) or by the international community as a whole (P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005, p. 29). The Bush administration still likely faced some ideational divides over whether American responsibility and

leadership should prevail over considerations of risk all the while outside voices suggested a no-fly zone. However, at no point was no-fly zone enforcement a goal of US foreign policy in Darfur. Why did the Bush administration in 2004 *not* opt for the tool? As argued below, reasons can be found in systemic constraints at the time. The same constraints were also present in 2007, when a second window of opportunity for a no-fly zone over Darfur presented itself.

There had not been much progress made on effectively observing the Sudanese government's use of aircraft in the region since 2005. In 2007, however, the evident failure of the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (which entailed a "ban on offensive military flights"; Government of Sudan/SLMA/JEM, 2006) to stem the violence, as well as reports of particularly astonishing violations of the UN arms embargo and of Sudan's use of aircraft (painted white to resemble UN planes) to transport military equipment (Hoge, 2004; Reinold, 2011, p. 73) coincided with the start of presidential election campaigning. Already in September 2006, the Senate called on Bush to establish a no-fly zone over Darfur "in cooperation with the United Nations, NATO, or NATO allies" in Resolution 559, co-sponsored by then-Senators Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Obama (United States Senate & Biden, 2006). Subsequently, the call for a no-fly zone became a frequent soundbite especially in the Democratic Party primaries. Candidate Obama referred to a "moral imperative" to bring an end to the violence in Darfur, saying "we can't say never again and then allow it to happen again" (Blanchard, 2012, p. 27). To that end, Susan Rice, foreign policy advisor to the Obama campaign, supported a more forceful stance, including the imposition of a NATO-enforced no-fly zone "in order to end the genocide" (Blanchard, 2012, p. 27; Crossley, 2016, p. 126; A. Lake, Payne, & Rice, 2006; Rice, 2007). When prompted about Sudan, Obama's rival Clinton answered that while she was against US ground troops, she also thought that in addition to tougher sanctions "NATO has to be there with the no-fly zone" for which the US should provide logistical support (CNN/YouTube, 2007; Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2007), and which could possibly be declared unilaterally by the US or NATO (CSPAN/PBS, 2007). She explained the need for a no-fly zone in two different ways: one, because the Sudanese government bombed villages, and two, because downing Sudanese planes violating a hypothetical no-fly zone was "the only way to get their attention" (CSPAN/PBS, 2007; Flint, 2007a).⁸⁵ When Obama took office in 2008, his foreign policy executive included supporters of intervention in Darfur, such as Rice and Samantha Power, who had previously suggested the US had been a "bystander to slaughter" in Sudan (Power, 2004). Subsequently, Obama appointed a new special envoy, retired Air Force Major General Scott Gration, and Clinton's state department announced new policy towards Sudan, including a mix of pressures and incentives for the Sudanese government to achieve progress on South Sudan, Darfur, and counter-

⁸⁵ These ideas were also held outside of the US and the Democratic Party. Then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is reported to have tried to push for a UNSC resolution authorizing a no-fly zone over Darfur, and opined in March of 2007: "We need to consider a no-fly zone to prevent the use of Sudanese airpower against refugees and displaced people" (Borger, 2007).



terrorism (Blanchard, 2012, p. 27). In her confirmation hearing, Clinton confirmed a no-fly zone was considered for Darfur: “We have spoken about other options, no-fly zones, other sanctions and sanctuaries, looking to deploy the UN/AU force to try to protect the refugees but also to repel the militias” (Pleming, 2009). However, even though the tool continued a life of its own in external analysis and (academic) debate (Kristof, 2009; McPeak & Bassuener, 2009; Zenko, 2009), it did not become part of US policy (House of Commons International Development Committee, 2006; C. Lynch, 2014). Why did the Obama administration in 2008 similarly *not* opt for the tool?

The similarities to previously discussed cases may be striking, but crucial differences remain. For one, while the rhetoric of (potential) genocide certainly reached the US and was reproduced on- and offline, it never took hold of executive decision-making either in the Bush or the subsequent Obama administration to the degree later visible in Libya. This may be related to the Bush administration’s more homogenous ideational orientation, in which ideas of humanitarian responsibility (often tied to specific carriers like Rice and Powers, both of which subsequently held office in the Obama administration) were not as prominently present. Even more notably, however, the Bush administration *rejected* the claim that identifying a situation as “genocide” would mean employing all necessary means to stop it, or indeed any military means at all (Straus, 2005; Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 25). Similarly, despite its earlier (campaign) rhetoric, the Obama administration, once in power, stepped back from employing a no-fly zone. The reasons for these decisions and for why the US did not use a no-fly zone (either in 2004 or 2008) can be found in systemic conditions. These manifested in four ways: (1) the absence of strong incentives in the form of US interests relative to capabilities necessary for a no-fly zone, (2) the strategic interest in the War on Terror as opposed to the interest in protecting civilians, (3) the concomitant focus on Iraq and Afghanistan, and (4) the linkage with South Sudan.

Firstly, while both during the Bush and Obama years the US did have the necessary capabilities at its disposal to enforce a hypothetical no-fly zone, it was clear that, while suggesting the tool be used may have been an “easy sound bite” (Flint, 2007b), actually enforcing it over Darfur would be “an expensive, asset-intensive operation in a logistically difficult environment” (Reinold, 2011, p. 73). At the time, doubts also concerned military prudence and prospects of success in a similar way compared to Iraq and Bosnia (Flint, 2007a; Reinold, 2011, p. 73): a no-fly zone would have again done little to address ground-based violence, especially from small arms and from “Janjaweed” raids. Support from the air of these raids and ground-based offensives against supposedly rebel-held villages actually decreased as the conflict became bogged down in increasingly complex inter- and intra-group fighting (Flint, 2007a, 2007b). What drove non-use of the tool, however, were questions of feasibility derived from systemic constraints. Suppressing Sudanese capabilities and subsequent patrol flights, while possible,

would have put US forces under considerable strain purely based on Sudan's geographic location, and Darfur's sheer size (even bigger than the entirety of Iraq). Even more limited enforcement, e.g. through punitive airstrikes against Sudanese airfields, would have been costly and risky: the closest US bases with necessary resources (airfield, jets) were in Chad and Djibouti. The enormous military expenditure of enforcing a no-fly zone over Darfur may in fact have crossed the threshold at which costs outweigh the benefits. The no-fly zone did not appear as a cost-free, risk-free compromise tool. This mattered especially given that US decision-makers determined the US had only very limited interests in the region. The "Kosovo experience" was unlikely to be repeated: while in itself unimportant to national security, the US had some strategic interest in it through its connection with NATO, in contrast to Darfur (Reinold, 2011). "Doing nothing" in Darfur was tolerable from a US decision-maker's standpoint: as former NSA Lake commented retrospectively, "many people have learned to live with the thought that we haven't done enough in Darfur" (quoted in: Reinold, 2011, pp. 73–74).

Secondly, US interests certainly since 2001 laid squarely with the "War on Terror" and corresponding US engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as globally in Operation Enduring Freedom.⁸⁶ Sudan had practically (although not on paper) been considered a "rogue state" like Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria even before the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, the checklist for the "rogue states" label in the respective national security strategy doctrine at the time would imply that it was of considerable interest to the US to actively stop the Sudanese government from harming its own citizens (The White House, 2002). However, the Bush administration's subsequently focused on counter-terrorism and nuclear non-proliferation (Bolton, 2002). With regards to Sudan, the administration's foreign policy boiled down to convincing the Sudanese government to support its anti-terrorism efforts in East Africa and elsewhere, rather than militarily opposing it. This did not change even when the Darfur crisis appeared on the agenda. The primary incentive was to focus capabilities in response to a direct threat to national security after the 9/11 attacks. (Perceived) systemic stimuli for US foreign policy derived from global jihadism considerably narrowed (certainly in the interpretation of the Bush administration) the leeway necessary to deal assertively with the Darfur conflict. At first, this had to do with the spurious relationship between Sudan and global jihadism of the sort responsible for the 9/11 attacks. In subsequent years, growing US engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan made additional involvement in Sudan even less likely. Additionally, the feeling that the language of humanitarian intervention and R2P was "overused" since Kosovo contributed to making intervention generally and no-fly zone use in particular unattractive (P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005). In fact, as shown in the Libya case, *preventing* another Afghanistan or Iraq (which replaced Vietnam as the go-to analogy for critics of intervention)

⁸⁶ The reasons for and implications of this strategic interpretation and concomitant adjustment during George W. Bush's presentation are discussed in (Bentley & Holland, 2013).

became a core idea in decision-making circles. The new Afghanistan/Iraq analogy entailed the avoidance of large-scale ground intervention with under-defined ends (like “Vietnam”), but also any intervention in complex intra-state conflict theaters in the wider MENA region.⁸⁷

Thirdly, the Bush administration strongly supported the slogan of “African solutions for African problems” as well as the efforts of the wider international community and institutions such as the UN and AU in Darfur (Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 25). This was doubly convenient: firstly, it reduced the likelihood of direct US involvement. Secondly, it could create some goodwill for the US, as these calls partially came from critics of US foreign policy who demanded both a more active role of international institutions and a reduced role of the US in such conflicts in response to what was perceived as American unilateralism in Afghanistan and Iraq. Also, several different governmental and non-governmental agencies were active in Darfur before the crisis appeared on the White House agenda. This added another layer of complication not only to the political side of the problem, but also to military-strategic considerations. As Flint (2007) outlined, a no-fly zone in the eyes of aid agencies would likely worsen the humanitarian situation: “[...] Khartoum would respond by grounding humanitarian aircraft and, at worst, by forcing aid agencies to leave. Even if Khartoum didn't ground flights, the United Nations most likely would, for fear of sending its planes into a potential combat zone” (Flint, 2007a). This was detrimental to relief efforts, which for reasons of geographic location and available infrastructure were unusually dependent on aerial deliveries: “United Nations and African Union traffic accounts for 9 of every 10 flights in Darfur. Some agencies deliver as much as 90 percent of their supplies using aircraft” (Flint, 2007b). The explicit opposition by other states and international actors to no-fly zone initiation increased the costs associated with the tool and constrained America’s leeway.

Finally, in what was an odd turn of events considering earlier American reluctance to become involved in conflict resolution in South Sudan, by the time the Darfur crisis erupted the Bush administration felt it had invested considerable political capital in a solution to the former conflict and worried that engagement in the latter might derail its initiatives. Specifically, the US had been diplomatically active in the Naivasha peace process, which it saw as a framework for solving not only the conflict between Sudan and the SPLM/A, but also others in Darfur, Abiyei, and the Blue Nile region. To that end, the administration envisioned that these regions would be integrated into the settlement during a transitional period (P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005, p. 38). This meant that addressing these conflicts individually, as suggested by a no-fly zone for Darfur, would have to take the backseat to a broader peace agenda. Also, a no-fly zone for Darfur was seen as “giving oxygen to regime hard-liners” in

⁸⁷ It has been argued that the drastic language of genocide employed by the Bush administration was in fact not an attempt to justify intervention, but to deflect from the possibility of more forceful action (Verhoeven et al., 2016, p. 25).

Khartoum (Flint, 2007a), and as likely to provoke a Sudanese exit from the Naivasha peace process and a “domino effect” back to wide-spread conflict (P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005, p. 38). From the Bush administration’s perspective, linking these conflicts had to be avoided in the early phases of the overall settlement. Secretary of State Powell explained that

“[t]here is a concern that we don’t want to put so much on the Sudanese government, that causes internal problems that might make the situation worse [...] At the same time, everybody recognizes that pressure is needed or else we would not get any action at all” (quoted in: Hoge, 2004; P. D. Williams & Bellamy, 2005, p. 38).

Power explained that the Bush administration was not willing to sacrifice the prospects of finally solving the South Sudanese conflict for Darfur (Power, 2004) – which again stands in harsh contrast to the rhetoric of genocide employed by administration officials. In this way, the contextual linkage of Darfur with a preceding or connected conflict (which also pertains to the linkage of the Syrian civil war with Libya in 2011 and 2012) mattered in limiting, from the perspective of US decision-makers, the leeway necessary for more forceful military intervention.

The interrelated cases in Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur speak to common themes in US foreign policy decision-making when it comes to the non-use of the no-fly zone because they highlight both the importance of systemic conditions as well as their interpretation by decision-makers. Constraints included Sudan’s land-locked location and limited opportunities for military intervention in the first instance, but also its relative irrelevance to core US interests. Contextual specificities, such as Sudan’s “rogue state” status and its alleged connection to Islamist terrorist groups, might have in theory widened this field of possibility. However, in the period when no-fly zone use was discussed, systemic incentives instead led to attempts to coopt the Sudanese government into the “war on terror”. This was important to the US not least because its other fronts in this new war, Afghanistan and Iraq, bound extensive capabilities. This not only severely limited incentives to intervene in Sudan, but also led to an ideational convergence within the Bush and Obama administrations on restraint and pragmatism rather than on responsibility and leadership, even at a time when particularly the Bush administration sympathized with unilateralism and the expansive assertion of US power.

7.2.3. Syria

The civil war that broke out in Syria in 2011 and has since not only ravaged the country but also spilled over into neighboring Iraq offers several different angles on no-fly zone non-use in US foreign policy. With regards to the discussion of US and/or Western military intervention and specifically the use of the no-fly zone, the Syrian conflict falls in a period of contracting systemic leeway for the US. Respective foreign policy can broadly be categorized into three different phases: one, the initial crisis phase, characterized by increasing complexity on the ground and US restraint; two, an intermittent

“red line” phase, in which concerns over the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime dominated US foreign policy and made intervention (through air strikes rather than a no-fly zone) seem imminent for a short period; and third, a geostrategic phase, once Russia decided to openly intervene on the side of the Assad regime. Within these phases fall different moments of opportunity when pressure to “do something” led to calls for a no-fly zone. However, stimuli derived from both different tactical considerations compared to the preceding Libyan intervention, as well as from Russia’s commitment to its Syrian ally made a no-fly zone first unattractive, then impossible.

Demonstrations broke out across major Syrian cities in 2011 (Sorenson, 2016, p. 9). By mid-2011, after Syrian security forces began firing on protesters, demonstrators called for Bashir Al-Assad’s resignation. Protesters turned to violence and quickly took control of several cities and regions across the country (for a comprehensive overview, see: Ajami, 2012; Jenkins, 2014; Phillips, 2016; Sorenson, 2016). The situation was compared early on with Libya, not least because the initial conflict dynamics as well as the viciousness of the regime’s response suggested similarities. In some ways, the Libya intervention acted as a “force multiplier” because it raised proponents’ hopes for and opponents’ fears of intervention into Syria, to the extent that regional leaders and actors on the ground adapted their policies in anticipation of US involvement (Phillips, 2016, p. 171). Commentators and (Western) politicians began debating a no-fly zone to protect demonstrators (and rebel forces), as the Assad regime’s crackdown became increasingly violent and indiscriminate (Phillips, 2016, pp. 65–67). In late 2011, Syrian rebel groups themselves called for a no-fly zone to protect them from aerial assault (Phillips, 2016, p. 113). They also had additional motives: various opposition groups hoped a no-fly zone would provide the Syrian rebels with greater freedom to operate across Syria, legitimize further uprisings, and encourage regime defection (Zenko, 2011): A no-fly zone would “level the playing field” towards regime change.

The loudest calls for a US-enforced no-fly zone were made with regards to Aleppo. The fight for Aleppo (2012-2016), during which variously Syrian, Hezbollah, Iranian and (at a later stage) Russian forces besieged Kurdish, Syrian and Islamist fighters, raised the practice of barrel bombing of insurgent-controlled areas from helicopters as well as bombardment by jetfighters onto the agenda (Cave, 2012). The increasing use of aerial bombardment across Syria stemmed not least from governmental loss of control on the ground (Yourish, Lai, & Watkins, 2015). Indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets provided the clearest military-strategic rationale for a no-fly zone, which in most scenarios would be limited to parts of northern and southern Syria.⁸⁸ A hypothetical no-fly zone over northern Syria, including Aleppo, would have likely eased the pressure on the rebel groups there, and allowed for

⁸⁸ For an overview over different tactical models for a no-fly zone, cf. Harmer, 2015.

easier humanitarian access. However, much of the Aleppo siege was fought on the ground, and most civilian deaths came from small arms fire as well as artillery shelling rather than aerial bombardment, which depending on estimates made up around 22% of all civilian deaths in 2013 (Yourish et al., 2015; Zenko, 2015, 2016a). Helicopters and jets were used as much as a symbol of superiority as an actual weapon of war by the Syrian regime. In response to calls for a no-fly zone, US allies were of two minds (also cf. Phillips, 2016, pp. 67–75). Neighboring Turkey stated that it would support it (Shalchi, 2012), as Prime Minister Erdogan reiterated: “Right from the beginning [...] we would say ‘yes’” (“Turkey PM ‘will support’ Syria no-fly zone,” 2013). Turkey became a fervent supporter of any type of no-fly zone, “safe zone” or “buffer zone” in northern Syria along the Turkish border (Sorenson, 2016, p. 93), tried to get NATO (and US) backing for an intervention, and unilaterally installed a buffer zone in 2016. France and other allies were more hesitant, but still considered implementation a military option and prepared for a possible intervention in early 2012 (Siddique & Whitaker, 2012). However, then-NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, when asked about a no-fly zone in 2011, replied: “It's totally ruled out. We have no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria” (Zenko, 2011). The main opposition to intervention against the Assad regime with a no-fly zone stemmed from Russia (see below; for a comprehensive discussion of international approaches to Syria, cf. Phillips, 2016; Sorenson, 2016, p. 91ff.).

In the US, Obama had raised hopes of intervention early in Summer 2011 when he said that “for the sake of the Syrian people [...] the time has come for President Assad to step aside” (Goldberg, 2016). Several politicians in both Houses of Congress as well as within the administration supported a forceful policy to help that process along (Thompson, 2013). In Congress, these included prominent “hawks” John McCain and Lindsey Graham, but also Democrats such as Bob Menendez and Carl Levin. Levin, then chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, said that it was “essential that the US step up the military pressure on the Assad regime” by creating a no-fly zone and launching airstrikes against Syria (Munoz, 2013). The Obama administration refused to commit as it was marred by ideational divides over what the right strategy vis-à-vis Syria might be. Even though internally advocating for a more forceful response, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a press conference in Turkey agreed that a no-fly zone and other assistance the rebels were seeking from Western powers “need greater in-depth analysis,” adding that “you cannot make reasoned decisions without doing intense analysis and operational planning” (LaFranchi, 2012). State department officials pushed for additional action, but were opposed by the Department of Defense. Some in the administration worried about another potential failed state in the Middle East in case of intervention, and wanted to stick to its grand strategic narrative of disentanglement from the region and a “pivot” to Asia (AbuZayd, Sullivan, Akram, & Roy, 2015). Proponents of intervention complained of a lack of overall strategy, and an overt focus on “aspirational rhetoric” that did nothing to actually deter Assad (Phillips, 2016, p. 178). Opponents

argued that given limited interests and a complex situation on the ground, proponents had failed to suggest clear policy alternatives: when Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and CIA director David Petraeus suggested a “muscular” plan on Syria following the 2012 elections, it was “shot down” by Obama’s domestic advisors (AbuZayd et al., 2015, p. 1; Sorenson, 2016, p. 97). Increasingly, with the failures of post-intervention Libya visible, Obama himself favored a cautious approach in Syria. He explained this stance in the 2012 re-election campaign, and subsequently replaced the more assertive Clinton and Panetta with “instinctively cautious” advisers in Kerry and Chuck Hagel (Phillips, 2016, p. 178). This did not actually help distill clearer US policy on Syria, and the Obama administration continued to refer to the no-fly zone as one of several options on the table. In early 2013, Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes intimated: “We have not made any decision to pursue a military operation such as a no-fly zone [...] We have a range of contingency plans that we've drawn up” (Hafezi & Solomon, 2013). After initial pressures to “do something” subsided, the use of chemical weapons (particularly sarin gas) by the Assad regime brought renewed calls for intervention in a second window of opportunity. The subsequent “red line” debate, centering on the use of airstrikes rather than a no-fly zone, provided a particularly sharp distinction within the Obama administration between those that would favor intervention, and those that deemed such a policy risky, costly, and overall unwarranted by US interests (Phillips, 2016, pp. 175–184).

In late August 2013, after reports of the use of sarin gas by the Assad regime, Obama said:

“We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus” (The White House/Office of the Press Secretary, 2012).

A day later, the Assad regime employed sarin gas in Ghouta (The White House/Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) and the subsequent media frenzy convinced the administration that the US needed to act to back up its threats. Among Obama’s advisers, Rice and Power, already supportive of intervention, pressed for further action, with Biden, Hagel and Kerry in agreement, although Dempsey remained cautious: the debate now centered on the right means to punish Assad, with the preferred option cruise-missile strikes against regime positions rather than a more extensive no-fly zone (Phillips, 2016, p. 179). However, UK Prime Minister Cameron’s lost house vote on airstrikes against Syria, Director of National Intelligence Clapper’s doubts about the evidence alleging Assad’s use of chemical weapons, and finally McDonough making the “anti-interventionist” case on August 30, convinced Obama to not authorize strikes immediately but rather seek Congressional approval, which was not guaranteed (Phillips, 2016, p. 180). In the end, Obama chose not to use airstrikes (Obama, 2013). Obama’s principal goal, based on his diagnosis of limited US interests, continued to be the avoidance of entanglement and deeper intervention, for which he was willing to countenance a short-term loss



in domestic and international credibility (Phillips, 2016, p. 182). Instead, a deal was subsequently struck with the Assad regime and Russia to remove chemical weapons from Syria (Goldberg, 2016). Obama's non-intervention stance vis-à-vis the Ghouta incident has been described as a "watershed" moment in the Syrian war. Until that point, military involvement still seemed realistic to both proponents of such a policy as well as actors on the ground (Phillips, 2016, p. 169). Only in fall 2015, when the presidential election campaign as well as Russia's more open involvement brought the no-fly zone discussion up again, Kerry re-introduced a toned-down no-fly zone concept along the Turkish border in a NSC meeting in October 2015 (Labott, 2015). Obama did not reject the idea altogether, but remained hesitant to commit to it. He explained:

"We all want to try to relieve the suffering in Syria, but my job is to make sure that whatever we do we are doing in a way that serves the national security interests of the American people, that (it) doesn't lead to us getting into things that we can't get out of or that we cannot do effectively" (quoted in: Labott, 2015).

On October 7, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest subsequently explained that a no-fly zone was "not something we're considering right now" (Wroughton & Shumaker, 2015).

Both the use of barrel-bombs particularly during the Aleppo siege as well as the use of chemical weapons could have provided the momentum necessary to break out of the agonizing circle of ideational division and simply "do something" with a no-fly zone. However, two major factors based in systemic conditions made a no-fly zone in Syria appear much less easy and risk-free to US decision-makers throughout the Syrian civil war than it had for a short while in Libya in early 2011. *Firstly*, like in earlier cases, the actual military utility, effectiveness and efficiency of a no-fly zone was hotly debated (Phillips, 2016, p. 182). The length and cost of the Libyan campaign followed by Libya's descent into chaos made a repeat Libya decidedly less attractive. The conflict geography in Syria did not favor easy air-based intervention, as the violence played out in urban environment rather than on "empty desert roads" with easily discernible frontlines (M. Lynch, 2012). In comparison to Libya, Syria was much more populous, with a diverse landscape and more difficult operational terrain (Phillips, 2016, p. 170). The Syrian opposition was "far weaker, more divided", and did not control continued swaths of territory (M. Lynch, 2012). It was doubtful how a no-fly zone implemented under these circumstances would help in protecting civilians on the ground, let alone contribute to conflict resolution as its most fervent supporters hoped. In addition, a no-fly zone not accompanied by additional measures on the ground would just mean a shift in the type of violence committed in the conflict (Zenko, 2016a, 2016b): Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey cautioned that a no-fly zone "may also fail to reduce the violence or shift the momentum because the regime relies overwhelmingly on surface fires – mortars, artillery, and missiles" (Dempsey, 2013). Imposing a no-fly zone or proactively destroying Assad's air force may have reduced the conflict's casualty rate in the



short-term, but could have also spread the conflict more widely as rebel forces or terrorists enter additional regions (Phillips, 2016, p. 182). Retrospectively, Obama later commented that “the notion that we could have – in a clean way that didn’t commit U.S. military forces – changed the equation on the ground there was never true” (Goldberg, 2016). Even if a no-fly zone were to be considered militarily useful in Syria, experts, analysts and presidential advisers alike highlighted throughout the conflict that such an operation would be altogether more difficult from a capabilities standpoint compared to Libya. It was not so much that the US lacked the capabilities to implement or enforce it, but that the risk to US forces would rise exponentially when faced with an outdated, but functioning air defense system and an unknown number of MANPAD-armed soldiers on the ground (Phillips, 2016, p. 170). Both Dempsey and his successor Joseph Dunford warned in no uncertain terms of potentially ensuing costs: in early 2012, Dempsey warned in a presentation in the situation room that a no-fly zone operation akin to Libya would require “as many as 70,000 American servicemen to dismantle Syria’s sophisticated anti-aircraft system and then impose a 24-hour watch over the country” (Mazetti, Worth, & Gordon, 2013). In a letter to the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Dempsey summarized all tactical elements and potential flaws:

“This option uses lethal force to prevent the regime from using its military aircraft to bomb and resupply. It would extend air superiority over Syria by neutralizing the regime’s advanced, defense integrated air-defense system. It would also shoot down adversary aircraft and strike airfields, aircraft on the ground, and supporting infrastructure. We would require hundreds of ground and sea-based aircraft, intelligence and electronic warfare support, and enablers for refueling and communications. Estimated costs are \$500 million initially, averaging as much as a billion dollars per month over the course of a year [...] Risks include the loss of U.S. aircraft [...]” (Dempsey, 2013).

Clearly, none of these costs in materiel and money are sustainable over the long term in a theater not touching upon vital US interests. The only possible interpretation of this letter is that even though technically possible, a no-fly zone over (parts of) Syria would amount to a drastic and imprudent foreign policy decision. Finally, in the same letter, Dempsey stated that the decision to use military force means “no less than an act of war” (Dempsey, 2013). In a hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services on October 27, 2015, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Dempsey’s successor Dunford therefore testified that at the time there was no existing “concept of operations” for a no-fly zone in Syria which they could recommend as strategy (Carter & Dunford, 2015).⁸⁹ The suggestion of a no-fly zone masked the most likely outcome: a slippery slope towards large-scale US military commitment in Syria, and finally the risk of hostilities with another great power, both of which were prohibitively costly (Beehner, 2016).

⁸⁹ In the same hearing, Dunford elaborated on the technical possibility of a no-fly zone (based on US military capabilities), but stressed multiple political and legal limitations, including the diversion of resources from fighting ISIS.

Secondly, this directly links to systemic constraints, specifically the positioning of Russia in Syria, which made a no-fly zone inevitably directed against the Assad regime first politically difficult, then strategically impossible. The way in which the no-fly zone mandate in Libya was seen to be interpreted by the intervening coalition in an overly expansive fashion had immediate repercussions for Syria in that it “left a sour taste in the mouths of powers like China, Russia and India [...]” (Johnson & Mueen, 2012, p. 4). A legacy of the Libyan intervention, where Russia and China were taken by surprise by clever diplomacy in the UNSC, and subsequent re-interpretation of what they perceived to be a relatively innocuous and strictly limited mandate, was that these powers feared the model prescribed by a no-fly zone was actually regime change “under the cloak of R2P” (Johnson & Mueen, 2012, p. 4). Having been able to implement a no-fly zone over Libya, then, directly influenced the inability to prevent mass atrocities in Syria: the permissive international environment that had allowed the Libyan intervention could not easily be transposed only shortly afterwards (Johnson & Mueen, 2012, p. 5). Russia strongly opposed any attempts at implementation over Syria by explicitly referring to its experience of the Libyan intervention. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov explained that “[t]he international community unfortunately did take sides in Libya and we would never allow the Security Council to authorize anything similar” (MacFarquhar, 2012). In June 2013, Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashovich explained that

“all these maneuvers about no-fly zones and humanitarian corridors are a direct consequence of a lack of respect for international law [...] We have seen the Libyan example of how such a zone is implemented and how such decisions are brought to life. We do not want this to be repeated in the Syrian conflict” (Gutterman, 2013; The Guardian, 2013).

Russia opposed calls for a repetition of the Libyan model particularly strongly because of its own strategic interests in Syria (Chivvis, 2012): Syria was an important ally as probably the last strategic hold-out of Russia in the Middle East, and in Tartus hosted a crucial Russian military and naval base with access to the Mediterranean. Even though in the early stages of the Syrian civil war Russia insisted it was not particularly wedded to the Assad regime (MacFarquhar, 2012), it increasingly provided political and also military support, which drew Russia ever closer into the conflict over the years. In September 2015 Russia intervened predominantly with airpower on behalf of its ally (Phillips, 2016, p. 211; 217; 224), and US foreign policy entered its third, geostrategic phase. Russia became heavily involved in air support of Syrian regime forces and its allies on the ground, and participated in bombardments of insurgent fighters, Kurdish, and ISIS forces throughout Syria to the extent that some authors assume that Russian airpower killed more civilians than the Syrian regime since September 2015 (Zenko, 2016a). For the US, this meant that a no-fly zone over Syria would now not only incur heavy political costs, as it would not receive a UNSC mandate. It would also have the most far-reaching geostrategic consequences, namely potential escalation to great power conflict. Dunford warned: “For

us to control all the airspace in Syria would require us to go to war against Syria and Russia. That's a pretty fundamental decision that certainly I'm not going to make", although he then specified that a more limited no-fly zone need not always mean full-on escalation with Russia (Carter & Dunford, 2016). Any notion that a hypothetical no-fly zone could be "de-conflicted" with Russian operations over Syria (similar to air operations against ISIS, Department of Defense/Press Operations, 2015), however, negated the purported military rationale for employing it in the first place. A no-fly zone directed only against Syrian aircraft would have been tactically difficult and militarily useless. Even a geographically limited no-fly zone (e.g. only in northern and southern Syria) would not only have required aerial operations under threat of anti-aircraft missiles and near Russian jets, but also meant enforcement against the perpetrators of indiscriminate violence against civilians, namely Russia. Finally, a no-fly zone with Russian cooperation would have technically been possible, but had no basis in political reality if Russia continues its current Syria policy. Any suggestion of a no-fly zone as a serious policy option for Syria, then, was either wishful thinking or a reckless gamble risking larger-scale conflict between great powers. This acceptance of powerful constraints in a geo-strategically much less permissive international environment explains the Obama administration's restraint with regards to this particular part of the Syrian civil war, despite atrocities and outright war crimes such as the bombardment of a humanitarian aid convoy in September 2016 which would have otherwise possibly provided momentum for "doing something" with a no-fly zone (Barnard & Sengupta, 2016). Once the possibility of Western intervention was removed by Russia's open support of the Assad regime, the Syrian conflict worsened (Phillips, 2016, p. 187).

7.2.4. The 2015/16 US Presidential Elections

By the time the presidential election campaigns started in 2015/16, possibilities for a no-fly zone in Syria were severely limited, to the extent that a no-fly zone would have been if not impossible then certainly extremely costly both politically and strategically. And yet, in opposition to the Obama administration's stance on a potential no-fly zone, and in direct *contradiction* to systemic constraints and military capabilities, the no-fly zone continued to be presented as a supposedly serious policy option both in the Republican and the Democratic primaries as well as in the presidential debates. The next paragraphs illustrate how even though systemic conditions during the Syrian civil war became continuously less permissive, to the extent where direct military intervention against the Assad regime was impossible bar substantial geostrategic changes, the no-fly zone did *not* disappear from policy debates. Instead, its relevance grew. Not limited to the secret processes of high-echelon executive decision-making anymore, the no-fly zone became almost fully detached from military-strategic possibility and instead shorthand for nuanced but also determined, responsible but also firm foreign policy. Candidates across the aisle grasped the attractiveness of this vague, characteristically



compromising military tool, and positioned themselves around it. Again, the characteristics of the no-fly zone as a flexible and under-defined tool of military intervention make it ideal for such political posturing.

In the Republican primaries, the no-fly zone was used primarily to oppose the Obama administration's perceived weakness and hesitancy in foreign policy, both with regards to using US military force generally and in Syria specifically, as well as with regards to demonstrating resolve against Russia and the Assad regime. Of the initial candidates, only two opposed a no-fly zone on principle: libertarian Rand Paul positioned himself as isolationist on foreign policy, and warned of the no-fly zone specifically as a "recipe for disaster". Similarly, but with recourse to ideas centering on US interests, Ted Cruz suggested the US had "no business" in Syria's civil war (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015). For most others, as Ben Carson commented, there was a feeling of frustration that the US was "only reacting when somebody does something" (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015). Chris Christie wanted to "do something":

"And if you think that a no-fly zone is a reckless policy, you're welcome to your opinion. But how is it working so far? As we have 250,000 Syrians murdered, slaughtered; millions running around the world, running for their lives. It's not working. We need to try something else. And that is not reckless" (Washington Post/Team Fix, 2015).

Similarly, per John Kasich, the US should show "moral leadership" and "prevent further escalation and suffering by civilians and refugees" by implementing a no-fly zone. Marco Rubio demanded a coalition-enforced no-fly zone to protect civilians. Lindsey Graham, known for hawkish foreign policy positions, had suggested as far back as 2013 that "vital national interests" were at stake in Syria, and said a no-fly zone could "end the war" because it would neutralize the Syrian air force: "We can crater the runways. There are four air bases he uses. We can stop the planes from flying. We can shoot planes down without having one boot on the ground" (Everett, 2013). This demonstrates a good understanding of how a no-fly zone might operate tactically, but also a complete misconception of the course of the Syrian conflict and what a no-fly zone could achieve in it. By 2015 and the primaries, Graham spoke of the no-fly zones as at least a "great relief", highlighting humanitarian aspects more than any originally suggested military-strategic benefits with regards to conflict resolution (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015). Christie not only seemed to agree with Graham on the no-fly zone's role in conflict resolution more generally ("We're not going to be able to rebuild [Syria] unless we put a no-fly zone there, make it safe for those folks"; Washington Post/Team Fix, 2016), but actually doubled down on military aggressiveness with regards to opposing Russia: "My first phone call would be to Vladimir, and I'd say to him, 'Listen, we're enforcing this no-fly zone [...] And I mean we're enforcing it against anyone, including you. So don't try me. Don't try me. 'Cause I'll do it'" (Kaplan, 2015), even if it meant war with Russia (Washington Post/Team Fix, 2015). Even more moderate candidates such as Kasich agreed: "You enter that no-fly zone, you enter at your own peril" (Kaplan, 2015). Jeb Bush repeatedly



highlighted the humanitarian aspects of a no-fly zone, and how it would address refugee management problems (Washington Post/Team Fix, 2015), but similarly suggested the US should impose it against Russia (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015).

Clearly, these candidates' use of the no-fly zone transports a political position, a vague idea about US interests and appropriate ways to mobilize state power, much more than an actual policy suggestion. For most of the Republican candidates, then, the no-fly zone solves all problems at once: leadership, resolve, humanitarian responsibility, refugee management, opposition to Russia, and risk-free no-boots-on-the-ground use of force. Even candidates who did not originally have a pronounced vision on US foreign policy were forced to declare themselves vis-à-vis no-fly zones. Carson and Fiorina both fell in line, with the latter suggesting the no-fly zone is "a tricky maneuver, it's a dangerous maneuver, but it's a maneuver that we must undertake" (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015; Washington Post/Team Fix, 2015). Donald Trump managed to extricate himself from a position on no-fly zones (just as he managed to extricate himself from declaring any foreign policy details). When prompted, he commented: "This [a no-fly zone] does not sound like me very much, but I want to sit back and I want to see what happens" (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015), although he promised to build a "big, beautiful safe zone" primarily in response to refugee flows (Key, 2015). In the debates with Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, he moved away from this general support, as discussed below.

In the Democratic primary debates, the debate over Syria similarly very quickly became enmeshed with different candidates' positions on a no-fly zone. Again, the candidates deployed their stance on the no-fly zone as a signifier of political positioning. The overall aim was to differentiate the respective own foreign policy stance from the Obama White House while at the same time avoiding any notion that further involvement would mean "boots on the ground" ("Transcript of the Democratic Presidential Debate," 2016). This was a problem particularly for Clinton, who used the no-fly zone to signal both the resolve to "stand up to Russia" as well as a pragmatic policy of refugee management and humanitarian responsibility (Seitz-Wald, 2015). Notably, to do so she positioned herself against a more careful position she had expressed in 2013 (Norton, 2016): in a speech at a Goldman Sachs event, she had shown an awareness of the tactical necessity to "take out all of the air defense", which could lead to many civilian casualties. She had also rejected the similarity of Syria to Libya, where air defenses "were not that sophisticated" and where there had not been any air defenses near chemical stockpiles, which would further increase the risk of civilian deaths (Speech to Goldman Sachs, 2013 IBD Ceo Annual Conference, 6/4/13). In the first primary, Clinton explained with regards to Russia (and President Putin): "We have to stand up to his bullying, and specifically in Syria, it is important [...] to provide safe zones so that people are not going to have to be flooding out of Syria at the rate they are" (CNN, 2015). Much more than reiterating purely a humanitarian stance, this depicts Clinton as a

pragmatic diplomat. At a later stage, she added: “What I believe and why I have advocated that the no-fly zone - which of course would be in a coalition - be put on the table is because I'm trying to figure out what leverage we have to get Russia to the table [...]” (CNN, 2015). She reiterated this stance at the third primary debate in an exchange with host Martha Raddatz:

“Clinton: [...] [O]ne of the reasons why I have advocated for a no-fly zone is in order to create those safe refuges within Syria, to try to protect people on the ground both from Assad's forces, who are continuing to drop barrel bombs, and from ISIS. And of course, it has to be de-conflicted with the Russians, who are also flying in that space. [...] A no-fly zone would prevent the outflow of refugees and give us a chance to have some safe spaces.

Raddatz: Secretary Clinton, I'd like to go back to that if I could. ISIS doesn't have aircraft, Al Qaida doesn't have aircraft. So would you shoot down a Syrian military aircraft or a Russian airplane?

Clinton: I do not think it would come to that. We are already de-conflicting air space. We know...

Raddatz: But isn't that a decision you should make now, whether...

Clinton: No, I don't think so. I am advocating...

Raddatz: ... if you're advocating this?

Clinton: I am advocating the no-fly zone both because I think it would help us on the ground to protect Syrians; I'm also advocating it because I think it gives us some leverage in our conversations with Russia [...] The no-fly zone, I would hope, would be also shared by Russia [...]” (CBS News, 2015).

On October 1, Clinton had outlined: “I personally would be advocating now for a no-fly zone and humanitarian corridors to try to stop the carnage on the ground and from the air” (Kaplan & Andrews, 2015). Only in later primary debates did she return to the humanitarian aspect when she pointed out: “We need to put in safe havens for those poor Syrians who are fleeing both Assad and ISIS and have some place that they can be safe” (Washington Post/Team Fix, 2016b). The no-fly zone Clinton proposed was not actually a specific military tool to be used in answer to some military-strategic problem in Syria. Instead, it signified a rhetorical catch-all solution to entangled political, diplomatic, and humanitarian challenges, which proved useful as an election soundbite. In lieu of acknowledging the complex (and therefore “boring”) realities of a problem without simple solutions, the no-fly zone at least signaled resolve. Obama observed as much when he said that “there’s a difference between running for president and being president” in response to Clinton’s calls for a no-fly zone (P. Baker, 2015). Indeed, it remains unclear to what extent the Clinton team “seriously discussed” the no-fly zone as a policy proposal (Borger, Boone, & Phillips, 2016). However, it was conveniently already established as both a possible tool the US could employ as well as the one the Obama administration, for a variety of good reasons, had said it would not use. Obama, in response to calls for a no-fly zone, complained about “people offering up half-baked ideas” that amounted to “a bunch of mumbo-jumbo”. As these remarks were aimed at the Republican side, he quickly excluded Clinton from this category (P. Baker, 2015; Kaplan, 2015).

Democratic contender Bernie Sanders in response to Clinton warned of over-engagement and the risks of intervention: “Let me just respond to something the secretary said. First of all, she is talking about, as I understand it, a no-fly zone in Syria, which I think is a very dangerous situation. Could lead to real problems” (CNN, 2015). He would not support a no-fly zone “which the president certainly does not support” because “it will cost an enormous sum of money, second of all, it runs the risk of getting us sucked into perpetual warfare in that region” (Washington Post/Team Fix, 2016b). This utilizes the flank Clinton left open when proposing a no-fly zone: Sanders could portray her as a reckless warmonger, a trope already established for Clinton before the primaries, all the while evading the difficulties of an own policy plan. It also taps into the Iraq/Afghanistan analogy of endless conflict. In similar contrast to Clinton (identified as the candidate to beat in the primaries), candidate Martin O’Malley presented himself as a prudent pragmatist in line with the Obama administration, and similarly used this stance to contrast with Clinton:

“I believe that, as president, I would not be so quick to pull for a military tool. I believe that a no-fly zone in Syria [...] would be a mistake. You have to enforce no-fly zones, and I believe, especially with the Russian air force in the air, it could lead to an escalation because of an accident [...]. I support President Obama. I think we have to play a long game” (CNN, 2015).

In the campaigns and the debates between Clinton and Trump, the no-fly zone continued to be a favorite foreign policy position particularly of the former, and a go-to talking point with regards to Syria. In both the second and third debates, Clinton tied the humanitarian situation in Syria directly to Russian involvement. She advocated for a no-fly zone “not only to help protect the Syrians and prevent the constant outflow of refugees, but to frankly gain some leverage on both the Syrian government and the Russians” (Politico, 2016b). She explained that “we need some leverage with the Russians because they are not going to come to the negotiating table for a diplomatic resolution unless there is leverage over them [...] I want to emphasize that what is at stake here is the ambitions and aggressiveness of Russia” (Politico, 2016b). Clinton knew the Obama administration’s (accurate) rationale for not using the no-fly zone: systemic constraints made intervening against Russia in Syria prohibitively risky. Indeed, it was questioned by Rhodes whether she would go through with her no-fly zone stance (Jaffe, 2016). And Fredric Hof, Obama’s former special advisor for transition in Syria, offered that she would “end up in the same place” as Obama: “I would suspect that Secretary Clinton will not allow much in the way of differences to emerge between her and President Obama” (Wong, 2016). But when pushed by moderator Chris Wallace on this contradiction and on whether she would shoot down Russian planes violating a hypothetical no-fly zone, Clinton insisted:

“[...] I think a no-fly zone could save lives and hasten the end of the conflict. I am well aware of the really legitimate concerns you have expressed from both the president and the general. This would not be done just on the first day. This would take a lot of negotiation and it would also take making it clear to the Russians and the Syrians that our purpose is to provide safe

zones on the ground [...] So I think we could strike a deal and make it very clear to the Russians and Syrians that this was something that we believe the best interests of the people on the ground [...] It would help us in the fight against ISIS” (Politico, 2016b).

It was the inherent flexibility of the no-fly zone as a military tool, its super-limited and supposedly risk-free yet forceful and kinetic character that made it both an ideal compromise tool and a perfect political soundbite. In Clinton’s election campaign, it stood for a slightly more aggressive, yet responsible and limited foreign policy. In one sweep, the no-fly zone could solve all problems in Syria: for Clinton, employing the no-fly zone rhetorically seemed an appropriate way of signaling both her support of the protection of civilians and coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis Russia, as well as her determination to fight ISIS and solve the refugee crisis, without having to commit to any actual conflict resolution strategy. Trump, in his own way, seemed to wish to express something along these lines when he responded:

“She talks really tough against Putin and against Assad. She talks in favor of the rebels. She doesn't even know who the rebels are. [...] Every time we take rebels whether it's in Iraq or anywhere else, we're arming people. And you know what happens? They end up being worse than the people. Look at what she did in Libya with Qaddafi [...] It's a mess” (Politico, 2016a).

In a telling turn, the question of whether to forcefully intervene against the Assad regime and how to do so divided not only the two contenders, but the Republican ticket. When asked whether the humanitarian disaster in Syria would need to be addressed more directly, Trump disagreed with his own running mate: whereas vice-presidential candidate Mike Pence suggested airstrikes against Syria, Trump suggested a focus on ISIS was more pertinent and that opposing Russia and Iran would be a mistake (Politico, 2016a).

Ever since Trump entered office, the no-fly zone has lingered at the fringes of foreign policy deliberations. However, faced with the same systemic conditions prohibiting a no-fly zone in Syria since 2011, and an administration interested more in scoring domestic points than risking adventurism abroad, the tool never took hold. In the 2015/16 presidential election campaign, the no-fly zone has, in many ways, completed its transition from foreign policy tool to political shorthand. Not only is its actual utility doubtful for a specific policy problem, and the tool’s suggested use detached from broader military-strategic planning, such as in earlier iterations in Iraq and Bosnia. There, as I argued, the no-fly zone was used to overcome specific ideational divides within the foreign policy executive. In the presidential election, a complete disconnect was visible between the likelihood that the tool could be employed and the way presidential contenders continued to present it as a policy option. In that sense, the “pessimistic” prognosis for no-fly zones in US foreign policy, namely that the tool was “burned” after the 2011 Libyan intervention, proved both correct as well as irrelevant: the tool was promptly opposed and in the end proved impossible to implement in Syria, which did not seem to

impinge its usefulness in political debate over hypothetical courses of action. This may mark the full “idealization” of the no-fly zone as a purely political tool used to signal and combine specific types of ideas rather than provide actual solutions to far-away conflicts.

7.3. Conclusion

In foreign policy deliberations, the no-fly zone since the early 1990s has slowly grown into a particular role – because of its inherent characteristics, it appeared attractive to decision-makers intent on disentangling themselves from ideational competition when under pressure to “do something”. The no-fly zone quickly took on the mantle of a “silver bullet” compromise solution to all sorts of foreign policy crises in which at best unclear, at worst non-existent US interests and a worry about risky and costly over-extension clashed with ideational commitments to US leadership, humanitarian responsibility, and belief in technological superiority and progress. In some cases, systemic incentives and constraints prevented the actual use of no-fly zones: in Kosovo, a permissive international environment, a direct linkage to higher-order US interests in alliance management, and lacking military rationale for preventing overflights let the US favor a more aggressive air campaign from the start. In the multiple iterations of the Sudan case, a no-fly zone was prevented by the absence of clear “trigger moments” as well as capability concerns even in a permissive international environment. Both aspects reinforced the interpretation that the US lacked sufficient interests in Sudan. In Syria, systemic constraints in an era of perceived US decline were apparent: both geo-strategically as well as capabilities-wise, the no-fly zone could not be portrayed as an attractive policy option any longer.

This chapter re-affirmed, by means of short case studies, the causal primacy of systemic variables in the theoretical framework employed in this thesis and in its explanandum, the use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy. Crucially, in this limited goal, it cannot and should not be understood to discard alternative explanations for US behavior in any of the cases here looked at cursorily. Instead, it aims at suggesting a specific causal route which helps both to illuminate the specific foreign policy decision-making processes at hand as well as theoretically clarify the interplay between causal and intervening variables in neoclassical realism. As was shown for a small selection of deviant cases, in which no-fly zones were debated or could have been debated as a policy option, but were not in fact used, systemic conditions can re-assert themselves in a variety of different ways: on the one hand through case-specific or general limits on state capacity and capabilities, or a lack of relevance for core state interests, which by trend lead to inaction and restraint; on the other hand through incentives to act, especially in times of “geopolitical slack”, e.g. through tying specific cases (even if nominally irrelevant to US security or welfare) to interests of greater relevance, such as the preservation of NATO. It has become clear that these systemic stimuli by the nature of the decision-making process require

interpretation, which leaves room for rhetoric, group-dynamics, and *politics*, which are at the core influenced by different competing sets of ideas over the nature of the crisis, respective US interests, and appropriate strategies of state power mobilization in answer to them. The no-fly zone can play the role both of a compromise tool to bridge ideational divides in the executive, as well as (increasingly) serve as shorthand for limited involvement more broadly. In this role, the no-fly zone itself becomes idealized, and detached from any actual strategic value – a dynamic that the Kosovo case suggested may be the case for the limited use of airpower generally, and which has perhaps been illustrated best by the role the no-fly zone played in the 2015/16 US presidential election.

8.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I have aimed to advance theoretical perspectives on foreign policy and state behavior, conceptualizations of foreign policy executive decision-making processes, and the empirical study of different US administrations from 1991 to 2016. I demonstrated the utility of neoclassical realist approaches, and particularly the use of ideas as intervening variables in the foreign policy executive's decision-making process, to answering theoretical and empirical questions about the American use of no-fly zones for external intervention. The tool is ostensibly employed, variously, for the protection of civilians in intra-state conflict and/or for coercive diplomacy. However, based on theoretical accounts as well as empirical observations, the no-fly zone is not in fact suited to these purposes. As the literatures on coercive diplomacy, air strategy and no-fly zones are frequently grounded in rationalist and (structural) realist thought and thus lack a conception of foreign policy decision-making (beyond rational optimization), they cannot easily account for continuous "sub-optimal" choice. I therefore turned to neoclassical realism, and demonstrated the compatibility of ideational variables with realist ontology, epistemology and methodology. My framework employs ideas as an intervening variable in the transmission belt from systemic conditions to foreign policy choice to explain no-fly zone use in US foreign policy. In a permissive international environment, decision-makers use ideas to guide their interpretation of systemic conditions, and to wield them as tools of persuasion in foreign policy deliberations. Decision-making in the US foreign policy executive can then be conceptualized as a competition between diverging ideas about systemic incentives and constraints, as well as about appropriate strategies to mobilize state power. Absent agreement or presidential leadership and under pressure to act quickly, the no-fly zone is used to patch over ideational divides and "do something". I investigated and provided confirming evidence for this causal mechanism in three detailed case studies on US foreign policy towards northern Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya. Three deviant case studies on decision-making vis-à-vis Kosovo, South Sudan/Darfur, and Syria delineated scope conditions and illustrated the causal primacy of systemic conditions in determining US foreign policy.

In the following paragraphs, I re-visit the contributions this thesis has made to several interrelated issue areas: neoclassical realism, foreign policy decision-making and US foreign policy, literatures on air power, coercive diplomacy, and the empirical cases of no-fly zones under investigation. I place these contributions within broader literatures, and outline how this thesis contributed to them in turn. Thereby, I also highlight important limitations of this thesis, and point out avenues for further research in the three areas I contribute to.



8.2. Contributions to Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism as an approach to the analysis of foreign policy decision-making processes either perceived as “anomalous” from a structural realist perspective or more broadly as underdetermined by systemic conditions, has over the last two decades developed into the new mainstream approach in realist foreign policy analysis. To its proponents, neoclassical realism’s use of intervening variables promised a way in which the specifics of foreign policy choice could be made visible and causally important for state behavior, following the intuition that structural realist over- or under-determination of foreign policy choice (either as strictly determined by systemic imperatives, or alternatively as “errors” by incompetent decision-makers) was unsatisfactory to explain both long-term as well as short-term positioning of not only the US, but a wide variety of other powers. The initial insight, put forward by Christensen, Wohlforth and Zakaria in three separate books (Christensen, 1996; Wohlforth, 1993; Zakaria, 1998), and subsequently synthesized by Rose and other authors into “neoclassical realism”, concerned the limitations placed on the state by a variety of domestic factors with regards to mobilizing its capabilities in response to different systemic incentives and constraints. At the same time, these early authors and those neoclassical realists that followed in their footsteps wanted to hold on to structural realist commitments to parsimony, generalizability, testability and (possibly) predictive value. This had led critics to charge it with a “having-one’s-cake-and-eating-it” mentality, which neoclassical realists have responded to with a variety of their own contributions. More forceful and perhaps more stinging was the charge, partially from within the theoretical approach, that neoclassical realism (despite its name) was not in fact a “school of thought” particularly because its proponents could not agree on either its scope conditions, or its exact causal mechanism, or indeed which variables (variously “loaned” from classical realism, Foreign Policy Analysis literature, and/or Constructivist approaches) mattered when and to what extent (Wivel, 2005). Indeed, neoclassical realists have developed a wide range of intervening variables that may explain why states defy structural realist predictions based on systemic conditions, e.g. by under-balancing or over-expanding, including strategic interactions, domestic institutions, public opinion and the media, elite bargaining, culture, identity and beliefs. In the latest comprehensive attempt to address these concerns, Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro suggest ways to coherently integrate the various approaches to neoclassical realism by, firstly, introducing a temporal dimension in the causal sequence of independent variable (systemic stimuli), intervening variables, and state behavior, so that specific intervening variables would matter more in short-term decision-making, and others more in longer-term grand strategic positioning (Ripsman et al., 2016). I argued that while intuitively convincing, this also risks obscuring the ontological and epistemological differences between neoclassical realist contributions and may stand in the way of a comprehensive appraisal of neoclassical realism as a budding school of thought. Therefore, I suggest ordering contributions to neoclassical realism in terms



of the degree to which they deviate from “standard” structural realist assumptions. Secondly, Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro suggest broadening the scope of neoclassical realism to systemic outcomes because the sum of state properties and behaviors across the system affects the international environment. It remains to be debated whether this iterative conception of structure, systemic conditions and state behavior, not least in response to the structure-agency problematique (Wendt, 1987; Wight, 2006), is accepted by other (neoclassical) realists. For now, its added value in terms of theoretical parsimony as well as explanatory power over both structural realism as well as other theoretical approaches in IR remains to be convincingly demonstrated. Until then, neoclassical realism remains more firmly anchored in the explanation of specific foreign policy choice.

In neoclassical realism, systemic conditions (specifically the relative distribution of capabilities amongst the units of the system and the unit’s position with regards to both structural modifiers as well as to allies and opponents) do most of the “causing” when it comes to state behavior and foreign policy choice. Repeatedly and especially in short case studies on US foreign policy vis-à-vis Kosovo, South Sudan and Syria, I outlined the causal dominance of systemic incentives and constraints. America’s position in the international system, both with regards to alliances and alliance management as well as geography and available capabilities, affect the material and political cost structures, both real and perceived, of potential no-fly zones. They may make more forceful measures attractive where higher national interests are (perceived to be) at stake, or alternatively render any action prohibitively costly. In the case of the 1998 Kosovo intervention, systemic incentives were clearer with regards to the US position vis-à-vis international partners. The intervention became more aggressive as higher interests in the maintenance and management of NATO were at stake. In contrast to Bosnia, then, the Clinton administration assessed its position vis-à-vis its European allies differently. In the case of South Sudan/Darfur, while the international environment was largely permissive, conditions for the specific scenario were not. The Clinton and Bush administrations both assessed US interests as limited and the required capabilities for a no-fly zone in Sudan as prohibitive. Systemic constraints to US involvement prevented military intervention. In 2011, the Libyan no-fly zone model was suggested for use in the Syrian civil war. However, the Obama administration faced restrictive systemic conditions. Although multiple windows of opportunity opened throughout the course of the Syrian civil war, the administration could not risk a costly intervention against Russia’s ally. With the open involvement of Russia in Syria, even the most fervent supporters of a no-fly zone in Syria within the Obama administration realized its impossibility. However, for very powerful states, such as the USA after 1990, systemic conditions may leave leeway for state action in many other cases. I argued that where systemic incentives and constraints that touch on core interests of the state, i.e. concern the survival and welfare of the state and its citizenry, are easier to deduce, in other cases of regional or local relevance or of importance for prestige or norms of conduct, which touch on “lesser” interests,

appropriate state behavior may be much more difficult to determine. The existence of systemic leeway makes the interpretation of existing systemic incentives and constraints, the corresponding deduction of interests, and the resulting determination of foreign policy more difficult. This is not least because it also increases the range of available alternatives on which excess capabilities can be spent. I argue that the diagnostic “gap” between permissive systemic conditions, under-defined national interests and excess of potentially available strategies of state action leads decision-makers to resort to ideational heuristics. Based in individual cognition and wielded as tools of argumentation in foreign policy deliberations, ideas guide their appraisal of the international environment’s incentives and constraints.

The integration of ideational factors into realism is not a straight-forward proposition. In fact, as ideas are frequently connoted with streams of thought explicitly or implicitly opposed to (neo-)realist thought (especially “idealism”/liberalism and constructivism), their utility for realist frameworks has often been underestimated or denied. However, the integration of ideational factors into realism has a long tradition especially with regards to what are today considered proto-realist and classical realist writings. I have shown that authors such as Machiavelli, Niebuhr, Carr and Morgenthau are interested in the myriad connections and contradictions present between norms, ethics and morality on the one hand, and power and interests on the other (Barkawi, 1998; Barkin, 2003; DiJoseph, 2010; Frankel, 1996; Kitchen, 2010; Lawrence, 1987; Morgenthau, 1965; M. C. Williams, 2004, 2007; Wrightson, 1996). Carr and Morgenthau felt that “idealist” writings in the Wilsonian spirit and liberalist notions of cooperation and peace had to be counter-balanced with pragmatic considerations of power inherent to the international system. As I have argued above, the process of deliberating and judging the normative and moral contents of possible state behavior given the constraints of interests and power, and the resulting distinction between good and bad statesmanship, is at the core of much of classical realist writing. Far from denying the role of ideational factors, these authors dwelled on the extent to which moral principles, ethical considerations, and ideas about appropriate behavior would lend decision-makers agency and the ability to affect courses of action beyond the mechanistic determinism of the international order (M. C. Williams, 2004, p. 634, 2007). They identify ideas as “sources of change” (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 11; quoted in: Kitchen, 2010, p. 124) which can mitigate the forces of anarchy and state competition. This distinguishes politics from the mere application of violence (Morgenthau, 1938, p. 125; M. C. Williams, 2004; Kitchen, 2010, p. 125). Decision-makers would carry these ideas into deliberation to persuade, mobilize support and incentivize action (Carr & Cox, 2001, p. 120; Kitchen, 2010, p. 125). I have followed up on this notion to develop the role of ideas in foreign policy decision-making as deliberative tools of persuasion, as reiterated below. One of Waltz’ original criticisms of classical realist writing was that while these authors offer nuanced and inspirational treatises of power and leadership in the international environment, they do not provide a generalizable

analytical framework (Waltz, 1979). Similarly, their writings open up theoretical space in realism to consider how interests, ideas, and deliberation interact in determining state behavior, but necessitate further work on how these factors can consistently be combined in a testable causal mechanism. One way to do so is already present in classical realist writing: as argued above, classical realists have frequently found inspiration in the writings of Max Weber, and Weberian thought on interests, ideas, and the relationship between the two concepts, albeit not always clearly developed and at times even contradictory, continues to influence realist writing. By extension, it has inspired neoclassical realist authors to investigate the role of ideational content in the deduction of interests (Dueck, 2004, p. 521; Kitchen, 2010, p. 129). It is in two of Weber's metaphors on "switchmen" and "elective affinity" that one may find starting points to the introduction of ideas into an interest-based framework of foreign policy decision-making.

In preceding chapters, I discussed the integration of ideas into a neoclassical realist framework along several paradigmatic assumptions of realism, namely materialism (loosely understood), rationalism and individualism, "soft" positivism, and Humean causality. I have argued that ideas have two functions in my framework: firstly, based in individual beliefs, they help decision-makers appraise the international environment by filling gaps of information and knowledge about the material world. Decision-makers use ideas as heuristics in decision-making to come to terms with the ambiguity and complexity of unclear systemic incentives and constraints. Defining ideas as rooted in beliefs (e.g. Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p. 3; Beland & Cox, 2010), i.e. as products of human cognition inherent to the individual (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 198; Yee, 1997), is consistent with the retention of neoclassical realist commitments to rationalism as well as to (methodological) individualism. However, to matter in foreign policy deliberations, individual beliefs must have interpersonal relevance. This is why I argue, in a conceptual clarification frequently missing in other works (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 206), that in addition to their diagnostic function, ideas also have a deliberative function. This function makes them influential for human action more generally (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 7) and fits with an intuitive understanding of the interpersonal impact of ideas. Decision-makers feed their individually held diagnoses of the scenario, interests, and response strategies into foreign policy deliberations, where they argue with and try to persuade other decision-makers. Ideas are then understood as externalized or carried beliefs that matter in policy deliberations when they are introduced by individual participants, e.g. decision-makers. This aligns with a Weberian understanding of the origins of ideational content (Swidler, 2000, p. 270): Weber argues that ideas are "effective forces" only if they are "carried by demarcated and influential groupings" (Kalberg, 2002, p. lxxx; Swedberg, 2005, p. 17). Even Goldstein & Keohane, despite defining ideas as beliefs, then add that beliefs need to in fact be "shared". Ideas do not achieve relevance on their own, but must be "championed" by carriers, who are "individuals or groups capable of persuading others to reconsider

the ways they think and act" vis-à-vis given systemic conditions (Berman, 2013, p. 228; Blyth, 2002; Berman, 2001; Checkel, 1997). This insight has been picked up by many analysts of ideas in politics (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 207): ideas are thus beliefs "introduced" (P. A. Hall, 1989, p. 367) or "inserted" (Sikkink, 1991, p. 252) into political discourses by "carriers" (Goldstein, 1993, p. 14; Sikkink, 1991, p. 242) or "political entrepreneurs" (Goldstein, 1993, p. 18; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 13; Sikkink, 1993, p. 142). Given a material context, ideas allow decision-makers to deliberate the existence and nature of national interests and make decisions about the costs and benefits of alternative policy sets (see below).

This re-conceptualization has three advantages: *firstly*, it is broadly consistent with rationalism and specifically procedural rationality. Under procedural rationality, decision-makers still choose between "options based upon the costs and benefits associated with their probable consequences" (Schaub, 2003, p.3), and are in a general sense "goal-oriented and purposive": they will probably "diligently [consider] the anticipated consequences of [their] actions" (Oneal, 1988, p. 602). However, especially under external constraints of time and information, they "simplify the world by adopting interpretive categories" (Christensen, 1996, p. 17; Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1980, p. 123). Decision-makers may end up choosing acceptable alternatives given these ideas, rather than optimal solutions given actual interests (Schaub Jr., 2003, p. 11; Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1980, p. 124). Ideas then function as "inputs" into rational decision-making (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 196). *Secondly*, it circumvents a methodological problem inherent in equating ideas and beliefs, namely the investigation of internal mental events based on external sources of evidence. Neoclassical realism is committed to positivism, i.e. to testing theory against empirical evidence with the aim of generalization and prediction, although paired with an awareness of the difficulties of such an endeavor in the study of human behavior (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 105). The study of beliefs as cognitive products is made more difficult empirically, as they can only be investigated indirectly: to that end, authors frequently rely on a combination of interviews, character studies or biographies, and extraction from speeches, conversations and so forth to triangulate a set of original beliefs. Instead, making explicit the difference between beliefs as internal products and ideas as socially expressed communicative tools allows me to avoid this methodological challenge, and extract ideas directly from various "conduits", i.e. texts, speeches, etc. *Thirdly*, this makes it easier to identify the independent influence of ideas in the causal process, which upholds neoclassical realist commitments to Humean causality (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 28; King et al., 1994). Ideas are found to intervene in the causal path between systemic conditions and state behavior if there is an observable alteration in the dependent variable which is not explicable solely by systemic conditions, and which can be traced to co-variation between ideas and subsequent state behavior (Laffey & Weldes, 1997, p. 204).



As argued, the introduction of ideas into a neoclassical realist theoretical framework poses several theoretical challenges. These relate specifically to a variety of constructivist ontological and epistemological premises, which may indeed “provide a useful corrective to the assumptions of individual rationalism and materialism” attributed to (structural) realism (Barkin, 2003, pp. 338–339). This thesis can be read as an interrogation into the ways in which neoclassical realism can embrace concepts conventionally associated with constructivist research into IR in a coherent and theoretically sound way. It has been established that classical realist writing includes the theoretical space for a discussion of ideational factors. Neoclassical realism (because of its theoretical roots in structural realism) may be a harder case. However, it may similarly be in fruitful dialogue with at least “thin” constructivist approaches, which are coincidentally also at times referred to as “neoclassical” in their own right (Barkin, 2003, p. 327; Wendt, 1999). I have discussed the integration of ideas as intervening variables in neoclassical realism by outlining, in order, their relationship to interests, beliefs, and their role in foreign policy deliberations (which is further detailed below). In so doing, I also delimit neoclassical assumptions of materialism, rationalism, individualism, positivism, and causality. This expands on Barkin’s discussion of the three charges brought forward by those who argue the incompatibility of realism with constructivism (Barkin, 2003, p. 329), and could possibly pave the way towards further reflection on the theoretical assumptions and overlap between different paradigms, not least in the empirical study of foreign policy. Foreign policy and state behavior may in fact be uniquely suited to such an endeavor precisely because they are placed at a middle level of aggregation and abstraction between individual actors and systemic conditions. However, this is not to underplay the “real and substantial differences” between realism and constructivism in International Relations. While I demonstrate a way in which realist approaches to state behavior can take ideas “seriously as objects of analysis” (P. T. Jackson & Nexon, 2004, p. 338), truly bridging paradigmatic commitments is different to the integration of a specific type of variable into an existing theoretical framework. In this thesis, then, I make no theoretical claims to a “constructivist neoclassical realism”. Beyond the description of anomalous cases (from the perspective of structural realism) or the in-depth analysis of foreign policy decision-making, neoclassical realism’s potential to coherently and systematically develop own theoretical aspirations remains to be more fully developed. In this thesis, I have suggested a careful combination with ideational variables is a promising way to do so.

8.3. Contributions to US Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Introducing ideas as intervening variables within a neoclassical realist framework allows me to conceptualize a foreign policy executive decision-making process defined by ideational competition over 1) systemic conditions given the scenario and US interests, and 2) appropriate strategies to mobilize state power in response. This responds to two theoretical problems at the same time: for one,

as outlined above, it clarifies the role of ideas as based in individual beliefs, but then wielded in interpersonal deliberations, as tools of argumentation and persuasion. In terms of conceptualizing specifically American foreign policy processes, it also both contrasts with and adds to the scholarly tradition of identifying, descriptively as well as proscriptively, different schools of strategic thought, ideological paradigms, or strategic cultures in US foreign policy behavior. All the way from “manifest destiny” and American exceptionalism rooted, variously, in Christian symbolism and ethics, imperialist ambition, and an amalgamation of European thought with the experiences of colonialists, settlers, immigrants and revolutionaries on the American continent (e.g. McCartney, 2006; McCrisken, 2003; Merk, 1963; Twing, 1998), to grand strategic paradigms (Dueck, 2004; Kohout et al., 1995; Mead, 2002; Nacht, 1995; Nau, 2002, 2013; Nordlinger, 1996; Posen & Ross, 1996; Quinn, 2010), ideology, identity and ideas are presumed to be at the core of US foreign policy. The end of the Cold War in particular is hypothesized to have thrown the foreign policy establishment into a renewed search for ideational clarity. Debating what to do with the new-found permissiveness of the international environment intensified the long struggle between “isolationists” and “interventionists” who respectively favor either restraint or assertiveness and international leadership (Barreto, 2013; F. Cameron, 2002; Dumbrell, 2009; Fitzgerald & Ryan, 2014; Gholz et al., 1997; McEvoy-Levy, 2001; Nabers, 2016; Onea, 2013).

While consciously building on previously outlined work and trying to integrate its insights into a neoclassical realist framework, ideas as used here differ from these approaches in crucial ways: *firstly*, it is my contention that ideas underlie any deductive process concerned with the diagnosis and interpretation of scenarios, corresponding US interests, and appropriate response strategies no matter what specific party or ideological affiliation decision-makers adhere to. Assertive ideas are found in both Democratic and Republican “camps”, and ideas surrounding restraint are equally represented across both the partisan as well as the theoretical aisle. Across administrations, and with changing political and contextual circumstances, these sets of ideas may find different discursive iterations (J. A. Edwards, 2007; Khong, 1993; Paris, 2002; Riker, 1996). The case studies have illuminated how decision-makers employ different historical analogies (e.g. “Vietnam”, “Rwanda”, and “Afghanistan”), metaphors and rhetorical strategies in foreign policy deliberations and persuade their colleagues. However, the underlying ideas behind these iterations do not easily change. In fact, they may be more deeply ingrained in American identity or culture (Hunt, 1987). *Secondly*, I argue these ideas matter not only in the long-term formulation of grand strategy, but also in specific crisis-related executive decision-making scenarios, that is, as argued above, all the way down to the deliberation and choice of specific tools of military intervention. *Thirdly*, as the point is to outline ideational competition and the role the no-fly zone plays in this competition, ideas are not to be understood as coherent sets, but as competing and contradictory building blocks of what may post-facto be described as broader



ideological or grand strategic paradigms. Grand strategy formulation can then be understood as the sum of a sequence of different foreign policy deliberations. These specific decision-making processes and deliberations, as I argue, can be conceptualized as defined more by ideational competition than consistency.

Even within an administration or a close circle of advisers, different people have different, indeed incommensurable beliefs, which they carry into foreign policy deliberations as ideas. These deliberations between divergent ideas in the foreign policy decision-making process can be understood as an “interactive process of conveying ideas” (Schmidt, 2008), during which decision-makers seek “to make policy decisions reflect their preferred interpretation” (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 9), and to persuade other decision-makers to share their ideas. This is a process steeped in competition: decision-makers are likely to reach consensus with those individuals that carry similar ideas, and run into conflict with others (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 4). Then, ideas that individuals carry “vie with one another for dominance and autonomy” (Kitchen, 2010, p. 132; Zelikow, 1994, p. 153; Holland & Aaronson, 2014). Foreign policy decision-making becomes a process of “pulling and hauling among individuals with different perceptions at stake” (Allison & Halperin, 1972, p. 57). Ideas are thus deliberative tools employed in communicative strategies between different individuals, i.e. a sender and a (receptive) audience (Chadwick, 2000, p. 288; Jacobs, 2014, p. 48). During processes of ideational competition, carriers of ideas engage in exchange and persuasion through a variety of different communicative conduits, particularly texts (reports, memos, briefings) and spoken language (meetings, telephone conversations, speeches), from which they can be extracted (Lakoff, 1995). Which ideas prevail in the foreign policy decision-making process may depend on their internal validity, on who holds them, and on the degree of their pervasiveness (Kitchen, 2010, p. 132; Zelikow, 1994, p. 153). At other times, such conflicts may go unsolved and linger (Beland & Cox, 2010, p. 4). Indeed, as I argue, four idealtypical paths to foreign policy outcomes given ideational competition can be identified: firstly, decision-makers may converge on a common standpoint. A variety of factors may incentivize this convergence, e.g. clarity of the initial scenario (in terms of systemic conditions) or homogeneity in the foreign policy executive. Secondly, given the authority vested in the president as the final arbiter of US foreign policy, presidential leadership and ultimately presidential choice may break through otherwise entangled ideational competition in the White House. These two initial “normal” scenarios are where much of the preceding literature on US foreign policy choice is focused. Successful decision-making is by trend attributed to either convergence and agreement, or presidential skill and leadership. In turn, failures of US foreign policy are by trend attributed to overly confident or consistent administrations (e.g. in explanations focusing on “groupthink”), or to failures of presidential leadership. Less attention tends to be given to the two other possible outcome paths: thirdly, ideational competition may go unsolved, with foreign policy choice delayed despite pressures to act

quickly. Resulting inaction may less be a function of deliberate choice, and more of an inability to come to any decision, even though “doing nothing” may clearly be a sensible outcome given opaque systemic conditions in the post-Cold War environment. Fourthly and finally, however, “doing nothing” resulting from unsolved ideational competition may be perceived to incur prohibitively high delay costs. In other words, the pressure to “do something” may become unbearable to decision-makers otherwise locked in deep and seemingly unbridgeable ideational competition over US interests and appropriate response strategies to a given scenario. Note that I do not wish to presuppose a normative judgment on this or other decision-making dynamics: “doing something” need not be *bad* in a moral sense. While it can lead to suboptimal and even counter-productive outcomes or preempt thorough planning, it can also provide the necessary momentum for decision-makers to think and act about specific policy problems in dynamic and potentially fruitful ways. Instead, I thoroughly investigate this peculiar dynamic because I hypothesize it may best explain the continued use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy, and thus tell us something about foreign policy decision-making dynamics more broadly. In doing so, I also add to the foreign policy decision-making literature an awareness of the relative regularity of procedural dysfunctions resulting from ideational competition in foreign policy executives. This insight could be extrapolated, refined, and tested in other types of choices, issue areas and countries.

Within the cases, extensive archival material and other primary and secondary sources are employed to carefully trace the decision-making process, and outline confirming and disconfirming evidence for the role of ideas about US interests and about appropriate response strategies in the American foreign policy executive’s deliberations prior to no-fly zone implementation. The early 1990s saw the US at the height of its power – with the Soviet Union in decline, the international environment quickly and unexpectedly became permissive, which allowed the US to use thusly freed capabilities to further even limited interests globally. The 1991 intervention immediately after Saddam Hussein’s forces had suppressed the Kurdish minority in northern Iraq provided decision-makers with a new tool to supposedly protect civilians from afar: the no-fly zone developed out of “combat air patrol” (CAP), specifically jetfighters accompanying humanitarian airdrops to cover against adversarial obstruction, into a stand-alone tool addressing not the necessities on the ground, but the ideational divisions in the White House. The first no-fly zone, still embedded in a quickly growing humanitarian assistance mission, transcended its tactical support role to symbolize, in decision-making deliberations, an ideational compromise between those in the Bush administration worried about “another Vietnam” and those in favor of using the international environment’s new permissiveness to militarily assert American ideals. The Bush administration, perhaps stretched thin by months of crisis-mode decision-making on Iraq, failed to converge on actual policy on whether the Ba’athist regime should stay in power. It continued to waver when faced with Saddam Hussein’s brutal crackdown against the Kurds,

and committed to a large-scale humanitarian effort only after a lengthy period of piece-meal, short-term decision-making. Subsequently, the no-fly zone was left in place over northern Iraq for a decade without any apparent purpose. The focus on and contextualization of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq not least adds to the empirical literature on US foreign policy towards Saddam Hussein's regime throughout the 1990s, specifically by locating the origins of the tool which is frequently associated with the larger sanctions regime built up in parallel and subsequently in the ideational competition over the incentives and constraints of the new environment the Bush administration faced in 1991.

The no-fly zone in Bosnia is found to have resulted from similar ideational competition into which both the Bush administration in 1992 and the Clinton administration in early 1993 maneuvered themselves. And yet again, many contributions on US foreign policy vis-à-vis Bosnia focus on the decision not to intervene forcefully early on, and finally to do so in 1995. This obscures the role of the no-fly zone in bridging, for a sustained period, the ideational divides between those that favored intervention and those that opposed it in the Bush and Clinton administrations. Initially, the international environment was largely permissive, although particularly the European allies constrained potential unilateral engagement as they were worried about their peacekeepers on the ground. The Bush administration assessed US interests as limited, but as the situation on the ground worsened became torn between ideas of pragmatism, restraint and the dreaded "Vietnam effect" on the one hand, and ideas about leadership and "clean" intervention by air on the other. Intense situational and domestic pressure slowly pushed it toward endorsing no-fly zone enforcement. Before it had to commit, however, it could hand off its ideational dilemma to the Clinton administration, which quickly realized Clinton's ideas about US involvement and responsibility in the face of atrocities contradicted those about multilateralism. Throughout, ideas about appropriate strategies of state power mobilization centered on ways in which particularly airpower could be limited and restrained. I show that the no-fly zone was a decision based on ideational competition within the foreign policy executive given ambiguous systemic conditions rather than on military-strategic utility for conflict resolution or the protection of civilians. This decision-making dynamic is repeated in foreign policy deliberations on the 2011 Libya intervention. Faced with a largely permissive environment, but amidst discussions of America in decline and a grand strategy re-focus to Asia, the Obama administration struggled to identify appropriate foreign policy when the Ghaddafi regime started cracking down on the Arab Spring uprisings. The no-fly zone offered a way out of the administration's ideational competition: because of its military-strategic characteristics, it seemingly bridged the divides between those favoring assertive intervention and regime change, and those hesitant to backtrack on the administration's declared policies and involve the US in another MENA conflict theater. Not unsurprisingly, the no-fly zone proved insufficient to address problems on the ground or effectively protect civilians as the conflict persisted, and was replaced with a more aggressive air campaign.

While not an explicit focus of this thesis, the empirical evidence provided in the case studies and the theoretical use of ideational factors as intervening variables allow for a (limited) realist lens on ideational change and persistence (Morgenthau, 1972, p. 11; Kitchen, 2010, p. 124). The no-fly zone evolved over the years since its “inception” in the early 1990s into a full-fledged foreign policy tool which decision-makers use confidently and with implicit connotations to signal a range of ideas and persuade their counterparts in foreign policy deliberations. Choosing the no-fly zone is influenced by historical experience, and is applied to seemingly similar contexts schematically depending on what any given decision-makers thinks the no-fly zone does, regardless of whether (a) that would actually be what the no-fly zone does, (b) that choice of action contradicts given systemic conditions as material reality. This implies a sort of ideational “stickiness”: holders of ideas are often disinclined to give up ideas even in the face of more valid claims or data, and instead disregard or discredit the contradicting source (Foulon, 2015, p. 18; Jervis, 1976, pp. 45–46, 291–294, 410–413, 1988; D. W. Larson, 1989; Festinger, 1962). *Proposing* a no-fly zone specifically may then be detached in domestic debates from its actual strategic or military value, and indeed from any sort of detailed planning or long-term strategy. The Syrian case shows that the no-fly zone is used to signal a type of catch-all ideational compromise in domestic (election) politics even though it is *not, and cannot be*, an actual foreign policy option. The no-fly zone, because it is so malleable and flexible, may solve a political rather than a military-strategic problem: in one term, it allows politicians to express a wide range of incommensurable ideas at the same time, and yet remains easy to understand both to decision-makers and their audiences, which in turn makes it more likely to be adopted (Blyth, 2002; J. L. Campbell, 2002; Colander & Coats, 1993; Goldstein, 1993; Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b; Kingdon, 2010). Perhaps counterintuitively, it has been suggested the importance of tools such as the no-fly zone (see below) in policy debates actually increases the more uncertain actors are about the exact consequences of different policies (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b, p. 173ff.). While such catch-all compromise tools may indeed serve to break through the Gordian knot of conflicting ideas (as was visible in Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya), it is also usually apparent both to outside observers as well as to the respective administrations themselves that the tool has considerable disadvantages, which may threaten the initial compromise. Decision-makers would suggest a no-fly zone knowing that it is not an optimal tool to intervene into intra-state conflict. Instead, they interpret it as an acceptable solution that allows them to signal to “do something” to domestic audiences. The no-fly zone would then be “the gift that keeps on giving for politicians whose idea of war is informed not by any assessment of ways, ends, risks, and means, but by scoring votes in battleground states” (Beehner, 2016). The tool may be so successful in this dynamic that it has over two decades of US practice developed from an actual military-strategic tool used in conflicts such as Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya, into (at the same time) political shorthand to be employed in the domestic political arena. The no-fly zone then takes on fictional political

instrumentality rather than actual policy relevance, and persists in foreign policy deliberations despite its factual ineffectiveness: it becomes “internalized” in political discourses to the extent that decision-makers apply it automatically to a specific type of ideational problem. The causal claims behind the tool are accepted without questions as to their match with systemic conditions and interests. No-fly zones, just like other internalized ideas, may help to “specify policy in the absence of innovation” simply because they have been applied before (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a, pp. 12–13).

Finally, especially since the end of the Cold War, US grand strategic positioning, policy debates, and state behavior have been driven by ideational debates about the capabilities and possible application of technological systems, skills, and tools the US supposedly has or will have at its disposal. That better military technology as such increases US capabilities is a straightforward proposition. How decision-makers determine what type of technologies can or should be employed when and why represent questions that cannot easily be answered by structural realist approaches to state behavior, or strictly rationalist approaches to foreign policy choice. As suggested above, the choice of tools the US employs vis-à-vis its adversaries and in conflicts around the world, or the translation of grand strategy into means and ways to project US power, is not simply a function of military experts optimizing on political guidance. It is instead a political process that can be conceptualized as an ideational competition within foreign policy executives. I have provided confirming evidence for the way decision-making is influenced, in part, by specific ideas surrounding appropriate strategies to mobilize state power which focus on military capabilities and airpower. This linked the study of ideas with the study of military technology and innovation, particularly the debate around the concept of a “Revolution in Military Affairs” (see above; also: Futter & Collins, 2015; Adamski, 2010; Buley, 2007; Benbow, 2004; Cohen, 1996), which holds much promise given the increasing “technologization” of American warfare (as well as of the daily lives of politicians, generals and broader publics).

To decision-makers, the limitations and risks of military technology particularly in non-conventional conflicts, e.g. regarding target identification or natural challenges such as terrain, appeared to decrease continuously. This would not only guarantee superiority in almost any conflict the US chose to engage in, but further the applicability of advanced military systems to complex conflict theaters. It would also reshape the way in which forces are organized (Arquilla, 2008). The potential for safer, calmer and faster “zero-casualty warfare” is important as the US is decreasingly willing to risk soldiers’ lives in battle (Coker, 2002; Kaldor, 2013). The increasing reliance on technology, even its substitution of strategy (Harris, 2008), plays a part in how modern democracies and public more broadly, but also decision-makers specifically, think about choosing to wield state power (Caverley, 2014; Rasmussen, 2006). It creates problems where supposed risk-averseness is offset by the supposed ease of using advanced military technology (Caverley, 2014). The ways in which decision-makers think about



technology may originate in how technology is perceived and used culturally and symbolically (Bijker, Hughes, Pinch, & Douglas, 2012; Goldman & Eliason, 2003; Helpman & Rangel, 1999; Bijker & Law, 1992), which would pose a “constructivist challenge” to the fundamentally realist framework here suggested. However, research into the ideas decision-makers hold about technology, and how these shape decision-making towards employing force is in dialogue with several recent publications on how the US foreign policy executive employs, thinks and talks about technology in intervention and crisis management (K. P. Mueller, 2015; Dyson et al., 2014; Aslam, 2013). That these literatures are based in different ontologies and epistemologies makes their integration into a single theoretical framework challenging, but also potentially fruitful for conceptions of realist and ideational paradigms.

8.4. Contributions to No-Fly Zone Research

At the core of this thesis’ initial puzzle, the dependent variable on which the cases here under investigation have been sampled relates to the use of no-fly zones in US foreign policy. I have introduced the theoretical and empirical puzzle driving this thesis based on a comprehensive review of relevant literatures on air power and no-fly zones as well as on coercive diplomacy. Following the literature on no-fly zones, I defined the tool as a space defined by distinct territorial borders in which one state patrols by the means of military control flights to impose *whatever rules* it set to hold therein, and specifically to forcefully deny another state (“enemy”) the use of that designated air space. The no-fly zone is not necessarily limited to the interdiction of flyovers, which is but a necessary *condition* to enforcement and may precede other “rules” within the designated territory that the patrolling state wants to enforce. Numerous authors suggest that the no-fly zone is neither strategically optimal nor even appropriate for interventions into intra-state conflict, and that it is unsuitable for the protection of civilians. Its previous uses in Iraq and Bosnia have supported this argument empirically, with the Bosnian no-fly zones a disastrous failure (Burg & Shoup, 1999; Jakobsen, 1998; Ripley, 1999), and the Iraqi no-fly zones ineffective at best, and irrelevant at worst in preventing the Hussein regime to crack down against Kurds and Shiites or coercing it into cooperation with the international community (Brattebo, 2006; Frelick, 1992; Haulman, 2000; Petersen, 1996; A. Roberts, 1993). In Libya, employing a no-fly zone for the protection of civilians not least on the insistence of America’s international allies (particularly France and the UK) seemed to give the Obama administration a chance to “lead from behind”. Instead, the no-fly zone proved ineffective and inefficient in the conflict as soon as it established a shaky status quo, and was subsequently replaced, against the administration’s previously declared foreign policy stance and its aims in Libya, with a more aggressive air campaign (Daalder & Stavridis, 2011; Lindström & Zetterlund, 2012; Meibauer, 2015). Authors dealing with the effectiveness of no-fly zones more generally (Angle, 1999; Benard, 2004; Benitez & Pietrucha, 2016; Francis II, 1999; Gibbons, 2002; Knights, 2003, 2011; Kramlinger, 2001; K. P. Mueller, 2013; Renner, 2011) seem to

come to the conclusion that “a no-fly zone is unlikely to alleviate the suffering of ordinary [civilians] and may potentially be harmful” (Beehner, 2016) because it “cannot effectively counter ground-based lethality” (Zenko, 2016b; Kildron, 2012; M. Lynch, 2012). Past implementation of no-fly zones was thus

“based upon a flawed and unproven hypothesis [...] [T]he ways and means available are insufficient to accomplish the desired ends. Due to the risk of civilian casualties, environmental factors, and the inherent limitations of airpower, no-fly zones are not capable of protecting civilians from government repression” (Renner, 2011, p. 2).

The no-fly zone and broader airpower literature largely focusses on the military-strategic aspects of implementation, and by trend strives to optimize tool choice through insights into what the no-fly zone can and cannot do. This ignores political realities of choice: “[N]o-fly zones have existed in a vacuum of theory and definition while enveloped in other acts of political leverage” (Cook, 2012, p. 19) and current “theory does not provide any framework on which to make resource-based decisions” (Cook, 2012, p. 28). Authors speculate that there may be “overt justifications” of no-fly zones, such as protection and coercion, and more “hidden motives” which may either not have been openly stated or evolved over the course of the mission (K. P. Mueller, 2013, p. 10). However, as the focus of these literatures is on the implementation, utility and effectiveness of tools, they have little to offer beyond these initial hunches on questions of prior foreign policy decision-making, and thus cannot satisfactorily answer why no-fly zones would be used the way they were in Iraq, Bosnia, and Libya.

I therefore turned to the literature on coercive diplomacy, which explicates the choice and sequencing of tools in a strategy of diplomatic and military bargaining. The literature on coercive diplomacy has been hugely influential both in the description of state behavior and US foreign policy vis-à-vis a variety of adversaries. Coercive diplomacy models the threat (and, to a lesser extent, the use) of force to the extent that military capabilities are used in a “functional strategy” to compel adversarial compliance with own demands. Specifically, it prescribes a series of escalating steps from diplomacy to open warfare in which a variety of tools can be employed to signal to the target the situation’s urgency and the sender’s motivation and willingness to escalate. The no-fly zone could be fit into such a strategy as a “hybrid” tool (see below): on the ladder of escalation, the tool is placed somewhere between economic sanctions and more aggressive uses of force. However, its practical application has shed doubts on its capacity to effectively signal urgency or motivation: as demonstrated in this thesis, no-fly zones emerged out of short-termism, haphazard decision-making and ideational compromising more than any rational strategy of escalation. The no-fly zone cannot simply be understood as a harbinger of more aggressive future policy: while all no-fly zones were eventually replaced by more extensive military tools, this escalation was neither part of any pre-planned administration policy and (certainly in Iraq and Libya) nor in fact considered desirable by the respective administrations all the way up to when the context (and the no-fly zone’s failures) seemed to make it inevitable. As I pointed

out, these empirical shortcomings of coercive diplomacy's explanatory power correspond with the model's theoretical limitations. Focusing on no-fly zone initiation allows me to identify the framework's core shortcoming: at its core, coercive diplomacy is tightly interwoven with (structural) realist and rationalist conceptions of state behavior and foreign policy choice (Schultz, 2001, p. 15). This is advantageous for analytical reasons, and may also explain coercive diplomacy's wide reach amongst policymakers.

However, the approach therefore lacks a clear conception of motivation and agency on the side of the sender: it cannot explain its own onset, or the *when* and *why* of coercive diplomacy as a foreign policy strategy. By implying tool choice follows a pre-determined strategy of coercive diplomacy, it needlessly obscures the intricacies involved in what is frequently a more complex political process intervening between systemic conditions and tool choice. Coercive diplomacy, in its most general form, conceptualizes the interaction between two states as a narrow game between a coercer and a target, where the game consists of moves and counter-moves these two players can make between them, answering and reacting to the other; hence the focus on asymmetries of motivation and clarity of communication. Narrowing state interaction to an essentially one-dimensional two-player game comes at a price, namely leaving out domestic factors that play into foreign policy creation (Rose, 1998, p. 165). The coercer, in the sense of a decision-maker (e.g. the president or government) does not only play against the target, but also deliberates with other actors domestically. Coercive diplomacy theorists themselves have highlighted the need to consider a broad variety of additional contextual variables and think about exactly how, why, and when domestic politics, political competition or negotiations play a role (Schultz, 2001, p. 2). As no-fly zone use remains interwoven with coercive diplomacy and the sequencing of tools on the ladder escalation, an explicit conceptualization of foreign policy decision-making as it relates to tool choice may help redress this shortcoming in coercive diplomacy approaches. Thusly enriched by a conception of the coercer's motivation, coercive diplomacy literature may increase in analytical value, and be more than a useful starting point to think about logics of escalation and intervention vis-à-vis adversarial target states.

By extensively surveying theoretical contributions on this tool found in airpower and military strategy as well as coercive diplomacy, I have identified several theoretical weaknesses that limit such previous analyses of US foreign policy and strategy vis-à-vis Iraq, Bosnia and Libya. These weaknesses relate to conceptions of choice. Where air power as well as coercive diplomacy literature do discuss the choice of tools (which for several reasons subsequently discussed at length is a rare occurrence), they tend to have a hierarchical concept of decision-making. The choice of tools is derived from a superior interest dictated by systemic conditions and the national interest. I have pointed out how this starting point in systemic conditions anchors the airpower and coercive diplomacy literatures in realist thought. This



can be an advantage, as it allows a parsimonious conception of strategic choice and a model of coercive diplomacy that involves only a limited number of actors, rules and variables at play. However, the focus on national interest and military-strategic optimization obfuscates the intricacies of foreign policy decision-making which affect the deduction, interpretation and translation of systemic conditions, and correspondingly, intervention decisions and the choice of tools. In fact, both air power and coercive diplomacy literatures frequently point towards the essentially political nature of intervention behavior. The theoretical abstraction appropriate to outlining ideal processes of persuasion, compellence and coercion in cases of clear national interest and motivation fails when faced with the empirical multitude of problems, ideational bargaining processes and political machinations involved in any actual case of foreign policy and tool choice. As outlined above, this holds especially in cases where systemic conditions are unclear, and the international environment permissive: updating air power and coercive diplomacy literatures traditionally based in a Cold War world to the complexities of the modern international system has been an ongoing process with many of its own challenges, successes and failures. When attempting to explain, then, why the US would conduct military intervention the way it does and continues to employ no-fly zones, analysis must move beyond systemic conditions and strictly rationalist optimization to consider the decision-making process itself (Hudson, 2005, p. 2).

A view as to the when and why of no-fly zones in coercive diplomacy and air strategy may lead to a more comprehensive view on several connected or “related” tools, e.g. buffer zones, safe havens, naval exclusion zones, or anti-piracy missions, which may fulfill similar functions in political decision-making, coercive diplomacy and military strategy (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016; Cravelle, 1997; Posen, 1996; von Heinegg, 2015). It may be argued that these tools not only share important military-strategic characteristics, e.g. “zonality” or flexible-use capacity, but fulfil similar political functions and optimize secondary objectives rather than supposedly mandated goals. In terms of “zonality”, these tools militarily occupy parts of adversarial territory (if by air, land or sea) to police rules, specifically about the use of this territory (i.e. who enters, leaves, and controls sovereign space). Such zones are limited in the application of military force to their demarcated area, and otherwise tightly rule-bound. This in turn leads to a complication at the demarcation edges with regards to e.g. prevention of adversarial threats from just outside the zone, or the right to pursue adversarial forces. The sense that no-fly zones, buffer zones, naval exclusion zones and anti-piracy missions zone in and render manageable a demarcated area both may serve to delimit and focus the intervening force.

These tools can be used passively and defensively as well as opportunistically and offensively, for the purposes of defense, containment, safeguarding (e.g. of civilians, infrastructure, or territory), but also for coercion, compellence, and other offensive military operations. This connects to the question repeatedly brought up in the case studies, namely when and how tools such as the no-fly zone develop



into or merge with other (more or less aggressive) tools. In addition, the exact purpose of such tools need not in fact be clearly defined in advance, as the military capabilities in use are fungible and the respective strategic function may change with the brush of a pen. This is evidenced by the use of buffer zones in conflict (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016), but may similarly be observed for the 2011 no-fly zone in Libya. This inherent flexibility is underlined and perhaps increased (in the case of buffer zones and no-fly zones, and to a lesser degree in naval exclusion zones) by an unclear legal status of these tools and the areas they establish in international law, as within their bounds “*ius ad bellum* or *ius in bello* norms are temporarily suspended” (Beehner & Meibauer, 2016, p. 4; von Heinegg, 2015). This strategic ambiguity goes beyond merely asserting that factual use of the tool in question will depend on contextual factors or military tactics of the day. Instead, it may lie at the core of why and how such tools are employed, and what makes them attractive to decision-makers.

The combination of “zonality” and strategic flexibility results in what could be labelled “hybridity”, i.e. the combination of tightly rule-bound application of state power on the one hand with strategic and military flexibility on the other, which result in the military-strategic characteristic of super-limited force. In many regards, as outlined above for no-fly zones, this makes these military tools comparable to sanctions. The difference between the two ends of the ladder (military force on the one end, sanctions on the other) is mostly (but not only) a qualitative distinction between direct application of military force and more indirect and less kinetic types of influence, namely differences in seriousness of commitment (motivation), impact on the target, and risk. These hybrid tools can be understood to bridge the sanctions-force gap on the ladder of escalation, which would mean that they would by trend be used after sanctions and before more aggressive military force in coercive diplomacy strategies. This type of research into the combination and sequencing of tools, including hypothesized “hybrid” tools, may both deepen insights into the application of coercive diplomacy (not limited to US foreign policy), as well as broaden the universe of cases against which to test the suggested political dynamic of decision-making outlined above. It may also serve to explicate political dynamics of tool choice, in the US foreign policy executive and elsewhere, and thereby point to oft-overlooked regularities and dysfunctions inherent in foreign policy decision-making. After all, given a changing international environment, “hybrid” tools such as the no-fly zone will likely continue to be of interest for decision-makers tasked with deducing interests, solving complex problems quickly and “doing something”.



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