Have International Interventions Reinforced Ethnic Identities and Divisions?

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International Interventions in Recent Years have Reinforced and/or Created Ethnic Identities and Divisions. Discuss with Reference to at Least one Example.

International intervention in conflicts – regardless of their cause – is conventionally understood as, 'third-party intervention… disinterested… (*and*) impartial' (Lewis & Marks, 1998: 94). However, in accordance with realist principles (Bellamy & Wheeler, 2008: 527), I contend that within the context of any conflict, a state cannot be separated from self-interests – bringing its status as objective mediator into disrepute. Accordingly, this essay argues that interested international intervention often leads to ethnic divisions and on occasion, creates new ethnic identities. Whilst conceding that, given the subjective nature of intervener self-interests, there can be occasions where self-interests can play a positive role regarding ethnic relations; it principally argues that lack of disinterest has adversely impacted ethnic relations in the 'intervened in' countries.

Modern convention dictates that 'international intervention' is most frequently understood in terms of detached, disinterested third-party intervention – wherein the intervener is not themselves an 'active' party within the conflict in which they intervene (Lewis & Marks, 1998: 94), but rather, simply seeking conflict resolution. However, the lines between 'detached' and 'active' intervention are often blurred – particularly, in recent years at least, with regards to the interventionary role of the US (Krieg, 2013: 40). Accordingly, the first part of this essay interrogates the ethnic consequences of 'international intervention' according to its more broad definition – that is, simply an out-of-state actor intervening in the affairs of a particular state, even where the former is themselves an 'active' party within said affairs/conflict (Murphy, 1996: 9-10). This definition is exemplified in the US' 2003 intervention in Iraq, also known as 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' – undertaken in the name of ridding Iraq of its tyrannical dictator, Saddam Hussein and eliminating the threat to the international community posed by Iraq's 'weapons of mass destruction' (Weeks, 2009: 151). Thus, if we accept this US justification, the Iraq War was an international intervention motivated by concerns of humanitarianism and 'international peace and security' (Weeks, 2009: 151), rather than with the aim of resolving an 'ethnic conflict'.

Nevertheless, although the relationship between international intervention and ethnic relations is typically considered in relation to already ethnicised conflicts, i.e. those mobilised along ethnic lines, in this first section, I will address what I propose as an equally compelling phenomenon – namely, the effect of international intervention upon ethnic relations in conflicts which are not, at their heart, 'ethnic'. It is this phenomenon which I argue is apparent in the US' role in the Iraq War and its repercussions for Sunni-Shiite relations. Wherein, US' pursuit of self-interests has resulted in both the creation and antagonism of ethnic identities – leaving Iraq on the brink of an ethnic civil war.

Dodge notes scholarly tendency towards rooting the present contentious nature of Iraqi Sunni-Shiite relations within primordialism; whereby, ancient Sunni-Shiite ethnic antagonisms rendered their eventual violent expression inevitable (Dodge, 2010: 112). However, I contend that primordialist explanations of Iraq's present ethnic strife become obsolete in light of these ethnic identities' non-existence prior to the Iraq War. For whilst Sunni-Shiite communities in Iraq long recognised *religious* differences, this did not equate to the presence of *ethnic* identities; with the US Institute of Peace acknowledging, 'prior to 2003… (Iraqi) Sunnis ha(d) little awareness of themselves as

Sunnis' (PeaceBrief, 2013: 2). Rosen echoes this sentiment, arguing that whilst, 'there was never perfect harmony, there was also no history of civil war between Sunnis and Shiites until the American invasion of Iraq' (Rosen cited by Smith, 2013); further suggesting that Sunni-Shiite ethnic identities are a direct product of the Iraq War. Accordingly, I argue that due to the US' pursuit of self-interests during Iraqi intervention, Iraqi Sunni-Shiite identities underwent a process of ethnogenesis – wherein religious differences were transformed into more salient ethnic groups. Therein, US intervention created new ethnic identities and subsequently reinforced their division.

If, in accordance with realist principles, we perceive states as generally rational entities, they must act according to what best serves their self-interests. Whilst interveners may consider interests of the greater good, this is only to the extent that self-interests are not impeded in the process (Krieg, 2013: 38). Consequently, I argue US intervention in Iraq was marked by conduct which, in aiming to secure US interests, necessitated the creation of ethnic divisions.

This essay examines how US interests informed their conduct in Iraq, rather than the interests themselves; thus, it will not attempt to comprehensively account for the innumerable examples of US interests in Iraq cited in scholarly debate – privileged access to Iraqi oil (Mann, 2005: 208), promoting liberalism (Hinnebusch, 2007: 14), and containing Iranian influence (Barzegar, 2008: 47), to name but a few. Nonetheless, the surest means of ensuring US interests remained paramount would have been in allowing the pro-occupation, interim government's continuation. However, US attempts to this effect in 2004 were met with considerable Shiite objection and the threat of an uprising, forcing them to acquiesce and allow the 2005 general elections (Cockburn, 2005).

This posed a significant threat to US interests; with Smith contending that the inter-ethnic solidarity which united Iraqis in their disdain for Hussein was matched only in their near universal hatred of US occupation (Smith, 2013). Certainly, poll results the following year showed that 82% percent of Iraqis opposed occupation and 57% wanted foreign troops to leave immediately (Hinnebusch, 2007: 19). I argue that this prospect of an inter-ethnic, anti-occupation government prompted a US 'divide and conquer' strategy; whereby Iraqis were persuaded the real enemy was not the US but each other. Accordingly, the US employed a two-part approach: politically entrenching ethnic divisions and inequality (producing ethnic tensions), and then failing to counteract when these tensions escalated into violence – legitimising sectarian violence as a means of achieving political aims and setting the tone for future ethnic conflict.

Critics state, '2005 will be remembered as the year Iraq's latent sectarianism took wings' (International Crisis Group, 2006: i); a development I argue was a direct consequence of – in accordance with the first step in safeguarding US interests – the US' 2005 restructuring of Iraqi political institutions according to 'an ethno-religious quota system of power-sharing' (Kubba, 2011: 42). This resulted in a government where power was virtually monopolised by the Shiite majority; alongside rapid ethnic mobilisation and competition as ethnic groups rallied to guarantee a share of Iraqi power and resources for themselves (PeaceBrief, 2013: 2). This promotion of an ethnically orientated conception of power and politics was further cemented by the ratification of a constitution which 'marginalised and alienated' (International Crisis Group, 2006: i) the minority Sunni population – a constitution only agreed under US pressure (Tisdall, 2005).

This approach institutionalised ethnic divisions, equating ethnic population size with political power and control over resources, e.g. oil – invariably disadvantaging the minority Sunnis. Furthermore, I argue that organising power along ethnic lines in a country with such size disparity between its ethnic groups (Shiite 65%, Sunni 32% [CIA, n.d.]), renders ethnic tensions virtually inevitable and violence a distinct likelihood. It legitimizes a perpetual state of social inequality from which an ethnic minority has only two means of escaping: rapid population growth or – more feasibly – violent overthrow of the system that condemns them. The latter was realised in 2006's Sunni-led insurgency, provoked by feelings of marginalisation in the absence of a significant governmental role (Rand, 2008: 23). It seems almost cruelly ironic then that Obama recently declared hopes that, 'new elections in which (Iraq's) minority Sunni population is more (politically) active could help stem some of the violence' (Madhani, 2013), given that the Sunni political inactivity that sustains ethnic violence is a direct consequence of US actions.

As was mentioned above, this essay argues that the US' lack of ethnic impartiality drastically intensified Iraqis' 'security dilemma', provoking violence and bringing Iraq to the brink of civil war. I propose it is here where the

second part of the US' programme to secure its interests may be observed. For whilst Sunni bombing attacks on Shiite communities were initially fuelled by resentment regarding political exclusion (Shepherd, 2007: 282), they instigated a pattern of tit-for-tat sectarian violence between Sunni armed resistance and Shiite militias. This in turn led escalated 'security dilemma'-motivated violence to levels that now threaten to engulf the country in civil war (Cordesman, 2008: 2).

As the occupying power when this pattern of sectarian attacks first began, the US' responsibility (in accordance with human security obligations) was to curb the violence. However, in keeping with their 'divide and conquer' policy, reports suggest that, on the contrary, the US actively encouraged the violence – 'arm(ing) and deploy(ing) openly sectarian Shiite and Kurdish militias to fight Sunnis and police Sunni neighbourhoods' (Susskind, 2008). The result was to fuel Sunni feelings of persecution, further driving them towards armed resistance (PeaceBrief, 2013: 2), and stimulating counter-violence from Shiite militias. This volatile state of affairs compelled the US Department of State to begrudgingly admit that Shiite militias – whom the US had trained and equipped – had, 'greatly exacerbate(d) tensions along purely ethnic lines' (Fainaru & Shadid, 2005), thus implicitly admitting their own culpability for the violence. What ensued was a state of crisis which endures today, whereby Iraqis who previously condemned militia violence, instead – due to US failures to protect them from sectarian strife – increasingly believe that 'only "their" ethnic… militia can provide protection from other rival ethnic… militias' (Committee on Government Reform, 2007: 117). Given post-war Iraq's ethnically volatile state, there seems a degree of tragic irony that the intervention was christened 'Operation Iraq Freedom'; far from freedom, its greatest legacy has been to so perilously ethnicise Iraqi religious identities as to bring Iraq to the brink of civil war.

I have explored the adverse manner by which intervener self-interests can impact ethnic divisions in non-'ethnic' conflicts. However, I argue the principle may also be applied regarding international intervention in conflicts that *have* traditionally been defined 'ethnically', i.e. where conflict has mobilised along ethnic lines *prior* to intervention. Accordingly, I seek to explore its applicability in the case of US diplomatic intervention in the Israel-Palestine conflict; often cited as an archetypal ethnic conflict (Piersen & SIeslen, 2001: 172), wherein both Israelis and Palestinians claim the disputed territory as their ethnic homeland. For despite the US' portrayal of its role in the conflict as generating 'progress in a peace process… which consists of negotiations between near-equals under the impartial gaze of a disinterested American intermediary' (Khalidi, 2013: xxxv), I contend that contrary to these claims, the principal outcome of US intervention in Israel-Palestine has been to exacerbate ethnic divisions, setting the tone for further conflict, rather than peace.

Whilst the Israel-Palestine conflict first escalated into warfare in 1967 (Kelman, 2007: 289), the breakdown of the Oslo Accord and failure of the Camp David II peace negotiations in 2000 provoked the Second Intifada – precipitating significant escalations in both violence and ethnic saliency (Quandt, 2010: 365), and consequently, a more pressing role for the US to achieve peaceful resolution. Thus, it is the US' interventionary role in the conflict post-2000 (and thus the role which their self-interests have played therein), which I wish to examine.

As with my analysis of Iraq – since this essay examines how US interests *informed* ethnic relations in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, rather than examining the interests themselves – I will not attempt to comprehensively account for these interests. However, I would contend that the Jewish-American lobbies – the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in particular – play a significant role as to why US self-interests have served to further aggravate Israeli-Palestinian ethnic divisions. Namely, the wealthy AIPAC have utilised their extensive clout within Congress (Usa, 2009: 25) to wield considerable (if not near absolute), influence over Presidential approaches in establishing an Israeli-Palestine peace resolution. For even Presidents whose stance seemed less pro-Israel have been wary of 'exert(ing) strong pressure on Israeli governments in the face of congressional opposition' (Waxman, 2013: 363). Subsequently, the AIPAC have 'forestall(ed) pressure, threats or sanctions that American administrations… might otherwise have applied on Israeli governments' (Waxman, 2013: 363).

Consequently, successive US presidents have yielded to AIPAC pressure and reneged upon start of term pledges to Palestinians – e.g. Bush's failure to uphold promises of an autonomous Palestinian state by 2009 (Allen & Kessler 2004), and Obama's failed vow to halt Israeli settlement expansion (Smith, 2013: 263), both issues at the heart of Palestinian grievances. For whilst Obama justified conceding the Israeli settlement issue in 'show(ing) the flexibility…

and sense of compromise… necessary to achieve our goals' (Obama cited by Labott, 2009), concerns were raised that greater 'flexibility' and 'compromise' was requested of Palestinians than of Israelis (Labott, 2009). Accordingly, I argue that US capitulation under pro-Israel lobby pressure has increased Palestinian scepticism and distrust towards a US-led peace resolution – believing Israeli interests will ultimately take precedence. Thus a US role within an Israel-Palestine peace process simultaneously serves as an Israeli prerequisite – on the basis of the US being 'the only broker Israelis will trust' (Adwan, 2009: 146) – and as an impediment to Palestinian faith in the impartiality of the process (Cronin, 2009: 200). US self-interests within their mediatory role have established a perpetual state of irresolution which reinforces rather than redresses ethnic divisions, wherein 'The tight U.S.-Israeli alliance – perceived especially by Palestinians… (serves) as a deterrent of lasting peace' (Ismali, 2006: 151).

Furthermore, US diplomatic failure in enacting a fair and just peace process (Khalidi, 2013: xviii), has fuelled Israeli and Palestinian attempts to achieve their political aims by less diplomatic means; sustaining, 'a cycle of violence… consist(ing) of periodic Palestinian attacks, Israeli retaliation in the form of bombardments… and then more attacks of Israeli civilians' (Chazan, 1991: 11). Therein, much like in Iraq, US self-interests within the Israel-Palestine intervention have instigated a pattern of security-dilemma related violence – further entrenching ethnic divisions rather than resolving them.

Nevertheless, I argue that what has proved to be the most detrimental effect of US intervention in the Israel-Palestine conflict is not simply increasing the salience of ethnic identities but in radicalising them. The increasingly hard-line approach to ethnic identity adopted by Israelis/Palestinians sustains ethnic violence and heightens the sense of ethnic division, rendering peace increasingly unlikely. This can be seen, to a large extent, as a direct product of the manner by which US self-interests in the post-9/11 era have informed their approach to Palestinians. For in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent 'War on Terror', the US has adopted an increasingly strict position on 'terrorism' and – from Palestinian perspectives at least – on Islam as well (Khalidi, 2013: xii).

Accordingly, Palestinian protest against Israeli subjugation has increasingly been cast in 'terrorist' rhetoric, whereby, within the Israel-Palestine context, 'terrorism has come to apply exclusively to the actions of (Palestinan) militants… (whilst) the actions of militaries of Israel… cannot be described as 'terrorism'; irrespective of how many Palestinians may have died at their hands' (Khalidi, 2013: ix) – perpetuating allegations of the US as being anti-Islam. Moreover, the US' ardent endorsement of the 'War on Terror', served some Israeli leaders as a felicitous opportunity to elicit a more aggressive US policy against Palestinians by 'scrambl(ing) to situate the Palestinian resistance within the (terrorism) paradigm established by the Bush administration' (Baxter & Akbarzadeh, 2008: 182). The outcome was further aggravation of Palestinian resentment towards Israelis, exacerbating ethnic contentions/divisions. Moreover, it resulted in the propagation of an increasingly isolated sentiment amongst Palestinians, trapped between Israel, which seemed determined to 'wipe out (Palestinian) existence' (Arafat cited by Budd 2009: 209), and the US, 'a country that ha(d) no sympathy for Muslim suffering' (Husain, 2012: 110).

This sense of ethnic isolation by Palestinians has been heightened by the US' unwillingness to engage with the Hamas government in Palestine, 'designat(ing) them a terrorist organization' (Gerges, 2010). However, in attempting to limit the role of what it perceives as a terrorist organisation (despite having been democratically elected by the Palestinians), the effect has been political alienation of Palestinians within the peace process. Consequently, the 'War on Terror' has served to push Palestinians towards (rather than away from), 'terrorist organisations'; with Gunning contending, 'Paradoxically, the War on Terror has… increased support for Hamas' (Gunning, 2007: 147). In light of this political alienation, 'terrorist organisations' increasingly serve as one of the only means available for Palestinians to publicise their grievances: 'Palestinian frustration with this state of affairs… (has led to) their pursuit of violence towards statehood' (Ismali, 2006: 151). Thus, the US' inability to separate its anti-terrorism self-interests from its intervention in Israel-Palestine has ethnically radicalised a generation of Palestinians, with Gerges noting the increased numbers of Palestinians who have joined extremist factions in the post-9/11 era (Gerges, 2010). The effect has been the exacerbation of Israeli-Palestinian ethnic divisions, given that vulnerability to Islamist attack – as a result of their isolated non-Muslim status within the Middle East – is perhaps *the* preeminent Israeli concern (Waxman, 2003: 34). These increased divisions are fuelling the Israeli security dilemma and thus setting the tone for future ethnic violence.

Whilst this essay has, until now, expressed a largely critical view of the relationship between international intervention, self-interests and ethnic relations, it does not contend that this unequivocally equates to exacerbated ethnic divisions. Indeed, whilst the presence of US self-interests during intervention in Iraq and the Israel-Palestine conflict served to further entrench ethnic divisions, they lent a decidedly conciliatory dynamic to US diplomatic intervention in Northern Ireland's ethnic conflict, 'The Troubles'. Here, US self-interests were paramount to the success of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) (GFA); 'fundamentally alter(ing) the equation and provid(ing) the catalyst for a historic (peace) agreement' (Hazleton, 2000: 103).

The source of this interventionary success in mitigating ethnic tensions in Northern Ireland lies, much like US interventionary failures, in US self-interests. For as critics have noted, Irish-Americans constitute 19% of the total US population (Bahar et. al, 2009: 687) – affording the Irish-American lobby considerable political leverage, which they exerted on the Clinton administration to 'secure an end to (the) conflict' (Hayes, 2007: 103). Consequently, it has been conducive to US interests to act in accordance with Irish-American preferences. Therefore, Clinton became instrumental in engendering the peace process (Crocker, 2005: xiv); in which his decision to invite IRA leader Gerry Adams for peace talks in the US proved the impetus towards achieving the Good Friday Agreement – precipitating an IRA ceasefire which reduced ethnic tensions and allowed further peace negotiations.

Furthermore, I contend that Clinton's invitation recognised Adam's status as a legitimate politician, redressing his previous exclusion from peace negotiations due to terrorist association, which was an exclusionary policy which critics have noted as paradoxically fuelling the IRA sectarian violence (and consequently, ethnic antagonisms) it aimed to thwart (Clarke et. al, 2013: 233). This set a precedent, prompting other political leaders to similarly engage with Adams – initiating meaningful peace talks which eventually culminated in the Good Friday Agreement (Owen, 2007: 37). Though some have dismissed the Agreement's consociationalism as 'institutionalising sectarianism at every level of government' (McCartney, cited by Aughey, 2006: 98), it has nonetheless instigated the greatest curb on sectarian violence in thirty years (Shirlow et. al, 2013: 239). Thus, the principal outcome of US intervention has been to 'reduce the volatility and conflict potential of ethnicity in Northern Ireland' (Higson, 2008: 10), alleviating rather than reinforcing ethnic divisions.

In conclusion, I contend that the relationship between a state and its self-interests is inextricable. Whilst this inextricable relationship does not necessarily equate to exacerbated ethnic tensions, the guiding principle of any international intervention should be to alleviate conflict and achieve a peaceful resolution. However, in contradiction of this fundamental principle, two of the three cases studied in this essay have emerged from international intervention in a more precarious state of ethnic division (and thus, conflict potential) than prior to intervention – suggesting that the process is frequently, though not unequivocally, imperfect in its engagement with ethnic identities and relations. Accordingly, in order to secure intervener interests during 'international intervention', ethnic peace is often the required sacrifice.

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Written by: Caoimhe Udom

Written at: University of York
Written for: Rob Atiken
Date written: 12/2013